THE LIFE OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

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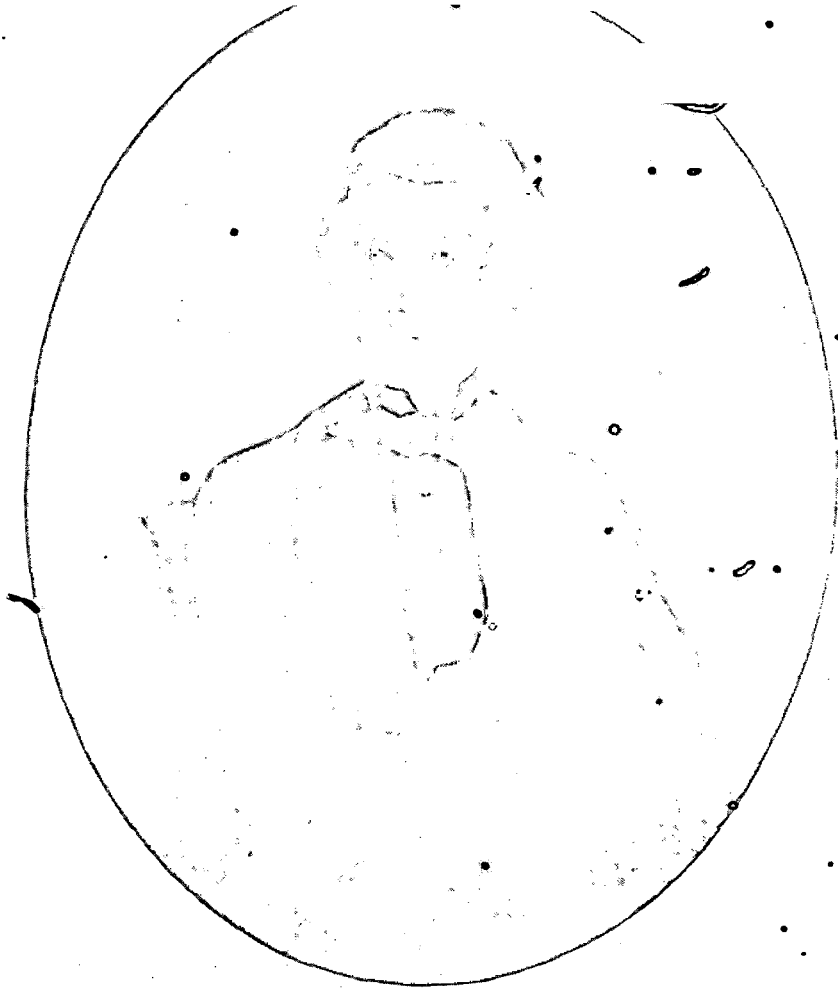

PENCIL DRAWING OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN IN 1854

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

BY

J. L. GARVIN

VOLUME ONE

1836 - 1885

CHAMBERLAIN AND DEMOCRACY

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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TO

THE CITY OF LONDON

AND

THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

"Mr. Garvin has devoted the leisure
thoughts of ten years to his task. He
has evidently been keenly alive to his
responsibilities as the personal histo-
rian of a remarkable man whose
records have been entrusted to his hands.
Although an ardent admirer of "Joe"
Chamberlain and a warrior in his
cause, Mr. Garvin has risen above
party feeling and has
laid before us in all good faith
and good will a monumental
account of the life and times
of his hero. It is evident that
he has produced a standard
work which every student of
the later Victorian period must
wish not only to read but to
place upon his bookshelves."

Winston Churchill in Great
Contemporaries - Joseph Chamberlain
pp. 61-62.

"The larger causes of misunderstanding between Gladstone and Chamberlain were Gladstone's want of interest in Social Reform — and their incompatibility of temperament". G. M. Trevelyan in review of J. L. Hammond's Gladstone and the Irish Nation" (Longmans, 1938), E.H.R. April 1939, p. 346).

PREFACE

THIS task, sometimes interrupted by exceptional difficulties, has been continued during the last ten years at intervals wholly devoted to it. The boxes and dispatch-cases placed at my disposal by Sir Austen Chamberlain contained a vast mass of material requiring a long time to sift. This had to be largely supplemented by my own enquiry and research. My obligations to others are too many for mention here, but thankfully appreciated. Throughout these pages my sources are indicated in detail.

Prone to detached views of the old party system, I have been, no doubt, guided by the belief that statesmen may be equally earnest in holding opposite views; and that circumstance involves them all, from time to time, in great situations which they neither intended nor foresaw. Otherwise no self-conscious theory of biography has been desirable or possible in the present connection. Chamberlain was an extraordinary man of action. His record was remarkable before he entered public life. Afterwards, nearly every phase of his career, whether as democrat or Imperialist, was the subject of intense controversy and dispute. He profoundly influenced the fortunes of all parties and introduced the modern age of British politics. The duty of biography in such a case is to narrate the action and explain the motives—to show what he was and what he did.

J. L. G.

September 1932

Death of Sir Austen Chamberlain, March 16, 1937, in his London residence at 6 P. M.

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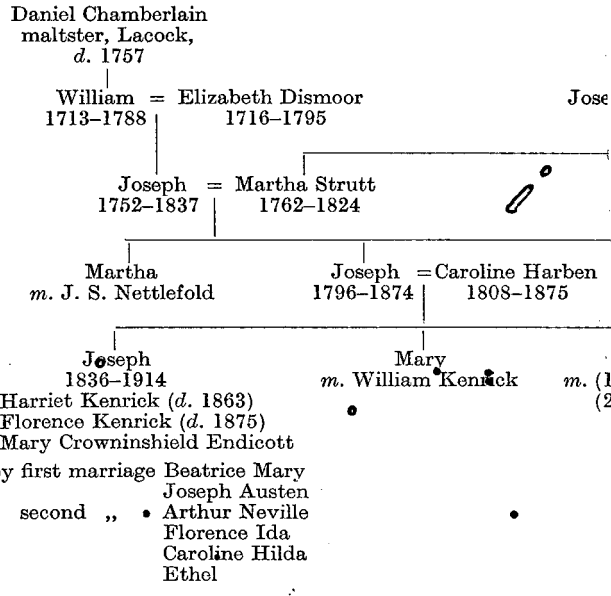
BOOK I

1836–1863

Rev. W. Spicer (of Stone)



CHAPTER I

HEREDITY

A Middle-Class Family, 1556–1836—"No Ordinary Stock"—Spicer burnt at the Stake, 1556—Richard Serjeant, ejected in 1662—The Chamberlains of Lacock—Daniel, Maltster—From Wiltshire to London—Two Centuries of Connection with the Cordwainers' Company—William and Three Josephs—The Harbens of Sussex—Two Different Strains—Will and Temperament.

I

In this narrative, for exceptional reasons, heredity must be the first word and will have much to do with the last. Middle-class pedigrees, seldom traced, may be of as deep root and tough fibre as family trees well known to the heralds. Nearly a hundred years ago—some ten months before Princess Victoria came to the throne—Joseph Chamberlain sprang from no common stock. The Peels and Gladstones of that day had risen to social rank by wealth, marriage, or both. The Chamberlains were justly proud of good origin with a difference. Claiming clear descent through many generations, and from some ancestors who left their mark on Nonconformist records, these people in 1836 still belonged wholly to the middle class proper, then called the backbone of commercial England.

Though this child of theirs was destined to rise to more fame and power in the world than any Englishman born and bred in the same class before him, his family had no thought of political ambitions nor great aspirations of any kind. Yet were they somebodies in their way. Country folk up to Queen Anne's time, for over a century they had carried on their business in the same street and the same house in the heart of the City. Quite lately,

BOOK I. 1836–63.

as it happened, after many ponderings and doubts, they had ceased to live their domestic lives over the workrooms and the counting-house. When shutting-up in the evenings was well seen to, the father crossed the Thames towards home on the pleasant heights of Camberwell—a change cheerful and refreshing to a family so "long in city pent" like their forbears from one generation to another.

Thus when the nurse pronounced the new infant a boy—and the most familiar and humorous doubt that attends human affairs was resolved—this small Joseph was not born "over the shop", as a few years earlier he would have been. Modern drama likes to introduce its themes against an ordinary background reserving the suggestion of crises, but hinting antecedent interest. Similarly opens in this case a career destined to fill so large a place in political history and to stir agitations so many and so wide.

The facts of ancestry happily exclude one old-fashioned foible of biographers. They were prone to discover some remote aristocratic origin for all distinguished men. Without evidence, and against presumption, they derived Edmund Burke from the old de Burghs. Robert Browning's ancestors also came from Wiltshire to the City. He—like Ruskin too—went for a while to school at Camberwell; but some extreme admirers insisted on providing him with a Norman descent from the baronial de Bruni. Even the late Lord Morley liked to think, without proof, that Richard Cobden was a lineal descendant "of Sir Adam and Sir Ralph of former ages". No lures of this sort tempt a biographer of Joseph Chamberlain. Still further from the truth afterwards were alarmed Tories and angry democrats, when, in their turn, they were used to declare that he was either of no origin at all, or of no education in any liberal sense of the word. If there is no trace of any aristocratic connection in his known ancestry, far back as it goes, his strongly stamped stock of the middle class proper claimed an authentic pedigree of their own, and it was full of character and contrast.[1]

[1] The pages in this chapter are founded for the most part upon Sir Austen Chamberlain's *Notes on the Families of Chamberlain and Harben.* (Privately printed, 1915.)

II

CHAP. I.

Those origins went back three centuries through his grandmother, Martha Strutt—belonging to the well-known family of inventors in the early decades of the Industrial Revolution. Her ancestor, John Spicer, was burnt at the stake near Salisbury in 1556, when he cried out in the spirit of Latimer, at Oxford, the year before: "This is the joyfullest day that ever I saw". Exhorted to be firm, he added: "Doubt not of me, my soul is quiet", as may be read in Foxe.[1] Of suffering for conscience' sake it was not the only memory that helped to give Chamberlain his metal and its edge. This martyr seems to have left to the Church a posterity of clergy. One of them, William Spicer, born in Elizabeth's time, was vicar of Stone, near Kidderminster. His daughter Hannah, in second nuptials, was married (probably under the Commonwealth and the Roundhead ascendancy) to another well-known progenitor of the Chamberlains, a man of mark indeed—Richard Serjeant, the nonconforming clergyman of Kidderminster, neighbour and friend of Richard Baxter. He was associated with that great light of the gentler Puritanism in fervent labours to evangelise the little town formerly a byword "for its ignorance and depravity". Witness enough when the author of the *Saint's Everlasting Rest* attests Richard Serjeant's "manifold worth, remarkable self-devotion and singular sanctity", though his delivery was not taking in the pulpit.

The virtues Baxter praised were not to save his friend at Kidderminster from the wrath of Cavaliers and Churchmen bent on avenging their own bitter persecution under the Puritan ascendancy. The Act of Uniformity was passed to crush dissent. On "Black Bartholomew's Day", 1662, as everyone knows, a fifth numerically of the whole body of the clergy, but in quality representing a much larger proportion of piety and learning, were expelled from their livings. Like Baxter, unable to profess his "unfeigned consent and assent to everything in the Prayer-book", Serjeant was driven from his cure. These Free Church Fathers became, as it were, exiles at home,

[1] John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (ed. Townsend, 1837–41), vol. viii. pp. 102-104, 725-726.

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whose eventual influence, weak as then they seemed, would yet rival in England the religious effect of the Pilgrim Fathers upon America. More fortunate than most, Serjeant was able to retire to a small estate at Hagley, and there was buried in its churchyard. Nearly a century afterwards, his great-great-granddaughter married a Chamberlain. The statesman was her grandson.

III

This episode of heredity coloured the imagination of a descendant at the sixth remove. The mild, but steadfast, preacher of the seventeenth century had his effect on a final struggle between Church and Chapel in the nineteenth. We cannot at all understand the beginnings of Chamberlain's earlier public career, much less his remarkable life before he entered politics, unless we remember that he was a dissenter through and through. In one of the stirring speeches of his Radical days he said: "I boast a descent of which I am as proud as any baron may be of the title which he owes to the smiles of a King or to the favour of a King's mistress, for I can claim descent from one of the two thousand ejected ministers, who in the time of the Stuarts left home and work and profit rather than accept the State-made creed which it was sought to force upon them, and, for that reason, if no other, I share your hopes and your aspirations".[1]

He had not then arrived by experience at a more equal view of the religious and political parties—their rival wrongs protested in their day of adversity, their alternating reprisals inflicted in their day of power. Calamy's[2] record in honour of the expelled Two Thousand was answered by that astonishing work Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy*.[3] Those to whom it is unknown may think conventionally in the usual textbook terms of the restoration of the Monarchy, but cannot understand how much deeper in significance for the whole future

[1] Speech at Denbigh, October 20, 1884.

[2] Edmund Calamy, *Account of the Ministers . . . who were Ejected or Silenced after the Restoration in 1660 . . .*, 1713, better known in the 1803 edition as *The Nonconformists' Memorial.*

[3] John Walker, *An Attempt towards recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England . . . who were Sequester'd, Harrass'd . . . in the late Times of the Grand Rebellion . . .*, 1714.

life and character of England was the restoration of the Church with its own burning demand not only for authority, but for restitution. Walker's book is best described as a fiery folio—full of passion and research; breathing conviction and devotion as well as rage and satire; revelling in italics, capitals, reliefs in black-letter and all other varieties of typographical emphasis. This ardent divine is the *Hudibras* of typography. Half the Two Thousand or more, exclaims Walker, made forced restitution to rightful owners in 1662 after enjoying ill-gotten revenues for fourteen or eighteen years, some of them for near twenty years. If the Cavaliers ejected Two Thousand, had not the Puritans during the rebellion and usurpation "sequestered and cast out some Ten Thousand clergy under cover of charges of illiteracy and scandalous living only sometimes well-founded and often used to add insult to the persecution of exemplary men"?

Later in these pages, when we come to the last great political struggles of Nonconformity in England, it will be found no digression to recall Walker as well as Calamy, and Church feeling as well as Puritan conviction when Chamberlain's favourite ancestor was cast out. The descendant had to learn in time, much against his will, that neither of these contending impressions could alter the religious and political dualism of England through the long sequel down to the middle of his own career over two hundred years after.

The Act of Uniformity was, in truth, an irrevocable act of schism. Originating the political antagonisms between Church and Chapel, it gave birth to obdurate estrangement and mutual bitterness; to much in the soul of the strife between Tory and Whig. Working on the party system down to a time still within living memory, the tradition of resistance to Church ascendancy since the Cavalier triumph gave the defiant bent to Joseph Chamberlain's earlier career as a leader of dissent when dissent was the soul of Radicalism and reform. From his young years this sense of being sixth in descent from the sufferers in the Great Ejection of 1662 set a mark on his mind, and predetermined more of his instinct, training and action than he ever quite knew.

Yet these associations of a middle-class household in the City

BOOK I. 1836–63.

a hundred years ago were subsidiary fibres, though tenacious. We come now to main roots of the tree.

IV

By contrast with many other statesmen of his time and ours, Chamberlain's blood was wholly English, nor, for all we know, had he one drop of any other.[1] His surname is not infrequently found in most parts of the country, though variously spelt. Deriving from several sorts of mediaeval occupations, it was a name given to the officer who received the rents and revenues of corporations or other public authorities; to the steward or factor of a noble's estate; to the man in charge of bedrooms in old inns.

That the stock we are concerned with came from Wiltshire was not for nothing. Excelling in antiquities, the county of Avebury and Stonehenge has bred many Englishmen celebrated in very different walks of life—amongst them Clarendon and Hobbes; Ludlow, sternest Ironside, and hot Tory Sacheverell; Joseph Addison and Sir Christopher Wren. When these last two were alive the forbears of John Bright followed farming and wool-craft at Lyneham in the same county. Robert Browning's folk, as we noted, had come from Wiltshire to the City and Camberwell. A little place in the county is still called Compton Chamberlayne, not far from Stonehenge.

Rather less than ten miles south-west from Lyneham on the one hand, where John Bright's stock was reared, and about the same distance from Bath on the other, the Chamberlains of our concern were native in the seventeenth century to Lacock.[2] It has often been called, and not heedlessly, the most beautiful of old villages in southern England. The place lies in the mild valley of the Bristol Avon, where it winds out through near hills and flows in over the Gloucestershire border. This side of the broad shire is westward country of large meadows, full streams and soft escarpments. Visitors to-day, however widely travelled, seeing Lacock for the first time, are delighted to find what they call a "wonderful little place"; so much of it unchanged since

[1] Just as Gladstone used to say that his own blood was as entirely Scottish.

[2] There is a charming account of Lacock in Edward Hutton's *Highways and Byways in Wiltshire*.

the Tudors. Outwardly—though human life is the same behind façades—it seems all peace and gables. House after house is fourteenth or fifteenth century, whether timbered or stone. On the Green the village cross is a venerable relic. The tithe barn stands. The church preserves some noble traits. And by the river Lacock Abbey still rises; preservation and addition since the dissolution of the monasteries having made it one of the treasures amongst the houses of England. CHAP. I.

Amidst these surroundings there dwelt during the reign of Queen Anne one Daniel Chamberlain, the first of the name whom we recognise in his habit as he lived. He was a maltster. About that time, by odd coincidence, Gladstone's great-great-grandfather plied the same calling as far away north as Biggar, not dreaming of being remembered as the ancestor of a prodigy or of remembrance at all. Again, some of Richard Cobden's forefathers were maltsters at Midhurst.[1] In Lacock village one of the old stone houses is still shown as Daniel Chamberlain's malthouse, and this tradition may be true. It is a square-windowed and gabled house, buttressed by a massive old chimney-stack down one wall. Where this Daniel died is not certain. He it may have been who began the adventures of this family by removing from Lacock to London. In March 1757, shortly before England at war, and especially all the City, demanded Pitt and found him the man, there was buried at St. Lawrence Jewry some person of the same name as our Daniel Chamberlain, whose posterity became intimate with that church and that churchyard.

The solid founder of the family in the City was Daniel's son William. Born in 1713, towards the end of Queen Anne's years, he took Whittington's way to London before he was twenty, and flourished through three reigns almost up to the French Revolution. Amongst countless minor Whittingtons adventuring from the country to the City, the journey had been made before him by his father's brother, a confectioner by occupation. To this uncle was William first apprenticed. Indentures were soon cancelled—whether true or not the tradition that he broke the sweet-bottles when trying to balance a broom on his nose.

[1] These coincidences of ancestry are doubtless very simply explained. Small maltsters were numerous in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

BOOK I. 1836–63.

William Chamberlain either struck out a new and prosperous line or had it chalked out for him. On May 2, 1733—when the City, like the country, raged against Walpole's Excise Bill—the young man from Wiltshire was apprenticed once more. But this time he was bound to one John Hose, a master shoemaker and member of the Cordwainers' Company.

This is the turning-point in the Chamberlain heredity. It fixed the type of the family in the City. Shoe-making from father to son was to be carried on in the same premises for one hundred and thirty years. Honorary membership of the Cordwainers' Company has prolonged the connection for two centuries up to this day.

V

No family connection with the Cordwainers through all their centuries has equalled that of the Chamberlains. It went so much to their making that we must glance for a moment at the traditions of this craft amongst the trades of London. In the early Middle Ages, when the Moorish regime was at meridian in Spain, Cordova was no less celebrated for the skill of its jewellers and smiths than for a goatskin leather so admired as to carry all over Europe the name of the place whence first it came. By the well-known peculiarity of Spanish pronunciation, "Cordovan" or "Cordoban" leather sounded to English ears like "Cordowan". A merchant in any of the finer kinds of leather came to be called a "cordowaner". That word, easily passing from merchants and makers of the material to workers in it, was taken from Old French into English.

From at least the middle of the thirteenth century,[1] shortly after the capital of Moorish Spain had been recaptured for Castile, the London leather-workers already had their own quarters. The "Cordewanera", in Cheapside, remained the hub of their trade. Their Company, prominent as early as Edward I., was embroiled in the endless quarrels of Guilds and Crafts. Often accused of mixing inferior with superior leathers, they were as often at feud with the baser branch of their calling. Cordwainers made new shoes: "cobleres" clouted old ones. The squabble was

[1] In the second half of the thirteenth century some Chaucers of Cordwainer Street lived in the shoemakers' quarters. The poet, as his name rather suggests, may have derived from them.

a stock jest of mediaeval humour. "Every endeavour was made to keep the two trades distinct. The cordwainers were forbidden to mend shoes, and the cobblers to make them. The latter were even punished for having new leather in their possession." These rivals were merged into one strong Company a few years before Agincourt, and after that battle might well exalt their patron St. Crispin. CHAP. I.

Then, as before and later, London trades were shifting their quarters as the City grew. The hosiers, overflowing from Hosiery Lane into Cordwayner Street, drove the shoemakers literally from their seats, as the hosiers themselves were dislodged in their turn. These swarmings and settlings of the London crafts are described in one of old Stowe's busy passages. But the cordwainers, though they might change their alleys, always kept near Cheapside. Hard by it Cordwainers' Hall stood in Great Distaff Lane, and when this ancient thoroughfare merged into modern Cannon Street, the site remained the same, though in 1788 the present Hall was built on the old foundations. Long-past events had thus determined that the thick and the quick of the City was the part of it where some generations of Chamberlains were born and bred in the eighteenth century.

When the statesman of their name came to unveil a stained-glass window in Cordwainers' Hall in 1896, he was reminded in an address of welcome that "Six generations of your ancestors filled the office of Master of this Company . . . the mutual good-will which existed between your ancestors and the other members of this ancient Gild is evidenced by the legacies of plate given by them on two occasions, which remain among our most valued possessions". The Colonial Secretary answered: "It is very proper I should be here because one of my earliest recollections as a boy is dining with my father in your Hall, on which occasion, I believe, I made my first public speech".[1] This may well have been in 1846, when his father was Master and he was ten years old. Probably he said little more than "Thank you", but his first public words were an occasion had the Hall divined.

[1] May 13, 1896.

VI

BOOK I. 1836–63.

The apprentice William—Daniel's son of Lacock—admitted in 1739 to full membership after serving his time, rose to be Master thirty years later, and lived to become Father of the Company in 1787.

Of this William Chamberlain we have some familiar glimpses in family papers and even in minor literature. In a quiet way he throve and prospered. Wealth and conveniences were increasing. Glass lamps were becoming general in the streets at night. When he was bound apprentice the new Bank of England was building. He would have thought it a fairy tale had anyone prophesied to him that one of his descendants, a high Minister of State, would one day be received at Guildhall like Chatham, while two others would subsequently appear as Chancellors of the Exchequer at the Mansion House—founded just before William was out of his indentures, when the centre of the City began to look much as we know.

He must have set up for himself separately in business about the time when the country was roused by the '45. He acquired the lease of the premises in Milk Street, No. 36—a lease repeatedly renewed—for a twenty-one years' term. Milk Street, anciently "so-called of Milke sold there", says Stowe, still runs, as for a thousand years past, northward from Cheapside. In that same house the family was to dwell and work for four generations. Soon William was a respected citizen. We find him as "Mr. Churchwarden Chamberlain" active in the vestry affairs of St. Lawrence Jewry, the well-known church near Guildhall. The Chamberlains succeeded each other as churchwardens in this parish no less regularly than as Cordwainers in the Company.

Already they were not Churchmen, but Unitarians—practising, like so many other dissenting tradesmen, what was then known as "occasional conformity". This evasion of the Test and Corporation Acts meant taking the sacrament from time to time as a form to qualify for civic office. The device caused trouble amongst Tories, whether pious or monopolist. But "occasional conformity" had become an administrative need. Dissenting tradesmen were rated equally with the orthodox for preserving and restoring the church and for the care of the

churchyard. The vestry, as in the case of St. Lawrence Jewry, was concerned with matters like tradesmen's rents and leases. Necessary for dissenters in the lay affairs of the vestry was representation corresponding to their rating. "Occasional conformity", in spite of the bigoted provisions of a decaying law, was in the interest of both orthodox and heterodox.

One little sidelight is like a touch from Smollett or Fielding. Gallant captains in His Majesty's forces sometimes ordered their shoes nobly at the good shop near Cheapside, but forgot to pay; and William Chamberlain writes in February 1769 tersely requesting Captain Jennings at Bermuda to pay "for the shoes you had when in England in October 1765"![1]

But the best glimpse of this progenitor comes unexpectedly in the life of Robert Bloomfield, luckless author of *The Farmer's Boy*. Too small and weak to be of much use on the farm, he came out of Suffolk to the garret where his brother George worked as a journeyman shoemaker in Bell Alley. It was the custom for hands in this trade to take their work home to garrets with turn-up beds. Robert was the little boy-of-all-work to the poor artisans, five of them, who stitched and slept in the same attic. The reading of "yesterday's newspaper" they had been "used to take by turns; but after Robert came he mostly read for us"—at first stumbling over many words he could not understand —but they equipped him with a dictionary, so that he was soon able to repeat with fluency "the long and beautiful speeches" of Mr. Burke and Mr. Fox.

Brother George Bloomfield describes an attempt at what would now be called trades union action:

> I think it was in the year 1784 that the question came to be decided between the journeymen shoemakers; whether those who had learned without serving an apprenticeship could follow the trade.
>
> The man by whom Robert and I were employed, Mr. Chamberlayne of Cheapside, took an active part against the lawful journeymen; and even went so far as to pay off every man that worked for him that had joined their Clubs. This so exasperated the men that their acting Committee soon looked for *unlawful men* (as they called them) among Chamberlayne's workmen.

[1] *Notes on the Families of Chamberlain and Harben.*

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They found out little Robert and threatened to prosecute Chamberlayne for employing him, and to prosecute his brother, Mr. G. Bloomfield, for teaching him. Chamberlayne requested of the brother to go on and bring it to a trial; for that he would defend it; and that neither George nor Robert should be hurt.[1]

Robert fled until the storm blew over, afterwards returning to work as a regular apprentice. We hear nothing further of him in connection with "Chamberlayne of Cheapside". Years later *The Farmer's Boy* was sumptuously published, and sentimental readers melted in temporary admiration. But it was the thin gruel and sugar of verse, and Charles Lamb writes of this author: "I have just opened him, but he makes me sick". Poor Robert's fate was to be sorry enough, and he is now almost as much forgotten as his contemporary and imitator, that other shoemaker-poet and London apprentice, Joseph Blacket, who made Byron as sick as Bloomfield made Lamb.

Shortly after these troubles, well known in the history of trade unionism, William Chamberlain made his will and died and was carried to Bunhill Fields—crowded burying-ground of dissenters where Bunyan and Defoe were laid. Living over his warehouse until nearly the end of his days, he had then retired to the more open air of Wells Row, Islington. When he died in 1788, he was the Father of the Company, and new Cordwainers' Hall was just finished. Vigorous, competent person, he founded a sound business, and those who came after him were disciplined successors.

Afterwards, various collateral Chamberlains were Cordwainers and churchwardens, "greatly revered and highly respected by their fellows". They bequeathed to the Company gifts of silver plate, still preserved; an example followed by the present Sir Austen Chamberlain, when shortly after his father's death he added a silver ewer "in memory of our name".

VII

The line continued through William's second son, a Joseph. He was the first of three successive Josephs. When his father died,

[1] *The Farmer's Boy*, 1800, quarto, with cuts by Bewick and preface by Capel Lofft, who quotes George Bloomfield's account of his brother.

shortly before the French Revolution, this ancestor was aged thirty-six. A silhouette shows him as a smart person with a frill, and in profile very like his grandson the statesman. CHAP. I.

The capital invested in the business had risen in his time from a small amount to £11,800, a sum not inconsiderable for tradesmen at that time.[1]

This Joseph is best known to us by his marriages. They are notable in this study of heredity. He took to wife in turn two sisters, the daughters of Joseph Strutt. As former pages have shown, these good women were descended from John Spicer the Martyr of 1556 and from Serjeant, one of the original Nonconformists of 1662. The second wedding, with Martha Strutt—she was to be the statesman's grandmother—took place in Edinburgh in 1792. At this time, though marriage with a deceased wife's sister was forbidden by the Church of England, it did not become strictly illegal until many years afterwards, and was to be legalised again. Conspicuous for mechanical and inventive talent were the Strutts in the opening era of the Industrial Revolution. When the first Joseph Chamberlain married the second sister, Martha, her uncle was that Jedediah Strutt—improver of the stocking-frame and partner of Arkwright—whose grandson became Lord Belper.

Of the first Joseph Chamberlain little more need be said. Rising through all the distinctions of the Cordwainers' Company, he was especially thanked in 1825 for his services to the trade in connection with parliamentary legislation; and died at the venerable age of eighty-five in the first year of Queen Victoria's reign. He had lived all through the Seven Years' War, the American War, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic War. The face of this first Joseph Chamberlain shows energy; and he survived just long enough to see the babyhood of his grandson, the subject of this book.

With his son, the second Joseph, born in 1796, our narrative is much more concerned in the next chapter. Joseph *père*—so for clearness to mark him out now from his predecessors—entered the business as a matter of course. This was just before Waterloo, when he was aged nineteen. He passed through the Company and the vestry of St. Lawrence Jewry, like unto

[1] *Notes on the Families of Chamberlain and Harben*, p. 19.

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his fathers before him. Of a more austere and thoughtful cast than his ancestors, he was far from being less resolute and capable. He married later than they—perhaps because he was a junior partner for an unusually long period in the difficult and fluctuating conditions of trade following for long the Great War of his time. When he did make a match at last he brought in very unexpected blood. His wife, the statesman's mother, belonged to a far more lively, impulsive and adventurous strain.

VIII

In 1835 Joseph *père*, then aged thirty-eight, wedded Caroline Harben. Her father had been first a brewer in Mile End and latterly a wholesale cheesemonger in Whitechapel. His antecedents were above these commonplaces. The Harbens believed themselves to be sprung from a very ancient stock in Somerset and to have come into Sussex in the seventeenth century.

Oddly enough, we begin with a maltster of Southsea on this side as we began on the other side with a maltster of Lacock. These two were contemporaries under Queen Anne and the first Georges. The next Harben is a clockmaker at Lewes, but evidently a clockmaker who knows something beyond mechanism. All Sussex talked of him when he made a picaresque stroke of speculation. It throws light on a whole period of seafaring and related activities in the sea-board counties. Towards the end of the Austrian War of Succession an enemy vessel, the *Nympha Americana*, was taken by a British privateer. The Spanish ship had a precious cargo—she was freighted with quicksilver as well as goods in bale. During a winter storm in December 1747 the prize was blown ashore on the Sussex coast between Birling Gap and Cuckmere. The quicksilver sank in the sands, dry at low tide. All Sussex for miles about swarmed to the wreck. The scenes were like the wildest tale of Cornwall. "Never was known such a multitude of people at a wreck before." Many joined in draining a broached cask of strong brandy and lay drunk until thirty of them perished on the beach. Others carried off on their horses and their shoulders all they could seize. The soldiers failed to deter them, though shooting one man dead.

Thomas Harben, of Lewes, like his neighbours rode to the

THE FIRST JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, 1788

CAROLINE HARBEN
b. 1806, *d.* 1875

THE SECOND JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN
b. 1796, *d.* 1874

wreck, but did more. He purchased the salvaging rights. It was a sure bid. In the week after Christmas more than thirty wagon-loads of quicksilver, each valued at near £800, were recovered from the sands or from water farther out. The happy Harben built out of his profits a country seat called Corsica Hall, near Seaford, not many miles from the spot where his boldness had wrested fortune from a disaster long remembered in those parts.

No wonder that his son, inspired by the father's luck on one occasion, became an habitual and sanguine speculator, though in the long run it did not do. A rousing, jolly, good-looking Englishman of full habit was this son. He began well by marrying Elizabeth Playstead, daughter of a comfortable yeoman of Jevington—a fine woman with an agreeable fortune. These two were the statesman's great-grandparents on the maternal side. Banker, maltster, ironmonger, when iron was still a staple in old Sussex, Thomas Harben, of Lewes and Corsica Hall, entertained, mixed with county society, and launched into politics on the Whig side—the first amongst our subject's forbears of whom this sort of activity is recorded. He acted as an electoral adviser to the old wirepulling Duke of Newcastle, and afterwards to the far more attractive Duke of Richmond, "the handsomest man in England", whose person and generous opinions enabled him from Goodwood to sway the county with boundless popularity for years, until his views and habits altered. Very much a man of political as of financial affairs, this prominent great-grandfather of Joseph Chamberlain acquired much local influence. Both giving and taking patronage, he was advanced by the Duke of Richmond's support to the magisterial bench, against the loud indignation of Tory squires. They loaded him with abuse, and arraigned him for electioneering bribery; but he got off with flying colours.

A little afterwards came his downfall. He had over-speculated in landed estate, and was involved as a partner in several banks, at Lewes, Boughton, Horsham, when in 1793 they stopped payment. The banks subsequently paid all their obligations in full, but Thomas Harben could not do as much for his private creditors or for the recovery of his own fortune. He died

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in 1803, and the following summary of him by a moralising writer is convincing:

> In the early part of his life considered a man of strictly religious character; but rising afterwards to affluence and a more elevated station in society, his habits and pursuits underwent that change which is too commonly attendant on worldly prosperity, though in consequence of his generous disposition, his dignified person, and pleasing affability of manner he was still looked up to and beloved by many.

He had thirteen children. Two sons went ways far divergent. With the eldest we are not concerned; he was amongst the minor rakes of the Prince Regent's train, married the daughter of the member for Seaford, did little recorded good to the world or himself, and had to sell Corsica Hall. He had a good sister Susan, who never married, but became the matron of the Clergy Daughters' School at Kirkby Lonsdale, whither Charlotte Brontë was sent as a girl. It may be as fanciful as unflattering to suppose, as has been suggested, that this Susan was the Mrs. Harden figured in those forbidding pictures of school-days in the early chapters of *Jane Eyre*. Mrs. Harden, as housekeeper, is described as "made up of equal parts of whalebone and iron". To her own relatives "dear old Aunt Sue" was remembered for sweetness, not rigour. But her strong-jawed portrait suggests that after all she might have been a Gorgon when on duty.

With the second son of the hearty bankrupt and busy Whig of Lewes we take up again the straight thread of descent. This Henry Harben followed prudent courses, and in more than one sense was blessed with increase. First brewer at Mile End, then cheesemonger at Whitechapel, he married a Mary Woodgate, grand-daughter of the Rev. Robert Austen, sometime master of the Grammar School at Lewes. Henry Harben is described in an old diary as a "fine tall fresh-coloured man", with a frill to his shirt. By his marriage with Mary Woodgate—both of Sussex blood for generations—he had no fewer than eighteen children. In this numerous and cheerful family Caroline was the ninth child. With other sunny sisters, she grew up in brightness of spirit and looks.

IX

In 1834 she married the second Joseph Chamberlain. The statesman was their eldest child. We have now seen what various English strains, severe and impulsive, blended to frame and compound his rare mingling of ardent temperament and forcible will. CHAP. I.

The Chamberlains had been on the whole a serious, steady stock, faithful in the common round, diligent in business and in such civic duties as came within their scope, endowed valuably as a family with a sort of cumulative persistence. Cordwainers and churchwardens all, genial enough at the Company's feasts, they combined very strict Unitarian opinions—of that, more presently—with "occasional conformity" in the legitimate way already explained. They married in their class; as a rule they had large families; they lost many of their children when young; they saw others grow up to strength and to rather more than average success. Between rich and poor these were of the English middle class incarnate. They lived long; went up and down constantly between the Bank and St. Paul's; dwelt in No. 36 Milk Street over the shop and warehouse until nigh the end of their days; and were buried regularly at Bunhill Fields when their time came.

The Harbens brought in at last a more temperamental vein. The result was the personality of Joseph Chamberlain, one of the strong links in the historic chain of British leadership and statesmanship. We need not further extend the theme of heredity like Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, or like Samuel Butler in *The Way of All Flesh*; but no modern thinker can underestimate this genealogy. We have given it its chapter, and told for once the history of a long middle-class derivation—perhaps as well worth writing as those ample accounts of noble connection, once customary when introducing the biographies of men far less powerful in life and significant afterwards than Joseph Chamberlain.

CHAPTER II

A CHILDHOOD

(1836–1845)

His Parents' Marriage—Pepys' Church and Dissenters' Disabilities—Birth—Camberwell and the Grove—Heredity and Environment—Last Year of King William—Signs and Humours of the Time—"Liberals" and "Conservatives"—Railways and *Pickwick*—Early Reminiscences of Joseph Chamberlain—Family and First School—"The Child is Father of the Man".

I

BOOK I. 1836–45.

THE parents were married in 1834 at St. Olave's, Hart Street, "towards The Tower", then and now a fifteenth-century church, as standing, but first founded perhaps by the Danes under Canute. As it was close to the Navy House at the Restoration, and Pepys lived near by in Seething Lane, to him it was "our church" mentioned in many passages of his *Diary*; and there he and his wife are buried. Thither go the Master and Brethren of Trinity House to attend service on Trinity Monday.

At the wedding, the bride was twelve years younger than her husband. The bridegroom always remembered the harsh tones of the clergyman ordering him to "Kneel, sir, kneel": He was unfamiliar with the service at a time when dissenters, still forced to marry in the Church of England, had to repeat formulas distressing to their convictions and especially offensive to Unitarians.

The married pair, unlike former generations who commenced matrimony in Milk Street, set up house in what then was one of the fresher outskirts of London. New facilities were making it easier to dwell apart from business. Southwark Bridge, for instance, shortened the way to the southern slopes. Cabs had

been introduced only a decade before: omnibuses were still more recent. Suburban villas were springing up amongst fields and orchards. Camberwell was pleasant and airy, and within ready reach of Cheapside. It had been a very open place, with market-gardens, tall trees, an old church, and a village green once noted for fairs. From the higher ground St. Paul's was distinct, nearly four miles away. On very clear days the course of the Thames could be seen shining from Lambeth to Deptford; and beyond that the prospect ranged to the opposite Hampstead heights and sometimes even to Harrow. Residents were multiplying. The coaches had run from the City to Camberwell twice a day, but omnibuses at reduced fares were beginning to cut out the coaches.

In these more attractive circumstances the third and great Joseph Chamberlain was born on July 8, 1836, at what was then called No. 3 Camberwell Grove.[1] On bright summer days the neighbourhood, though more faded and enclosed now, recalls its old freshness, so many are the leaves. The houses are late Georgian, semi-detached, built in couples with flat fronts and light balconies. The windows go up by threes to each storey; there is a railed plot in front: a larger garden behind; and from each side of the paired houses projects a lower entrance porch. All very seemly and commodious, comparing well with the more showy modes of modern villadom.

So late as 1920 the present writer had a happy conversation with Chamberlain's cousin, Mrs. Russell Martineau, then a very old lady indeed but still alert and captivating.[2] She was then the only surviving person who remembered his earliest childhood. Visiting Camberwell Grove again, she "was astonished to see it still a leafy oasis little changed from what it was eighty years ago". Unaltered details within the house were what she, like a woman, best recollected. When the Secretary for the Colonies revisited his birthplace in 1888 what he recalled eagerly—this as characteristic as likeable—was the garden behind the house. After fifty years he sought and

[1] Since known as 118 The Grove: it looks now from the outside duller because older.

[2] This first cousin, Mrs. Russell Martineau, *née* Bailey, was a daughter of one of the Harben sisters—"Aunt Charlotte" in these pages — and married a son of the great James Martineau.

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found again a cherry tree whose branches offered him a favourite seat when he was a little boy and Queen Victoria and all the world were young. Of a room indoors he remarked to his son Austen, who was with him, "This is the place, I suppose, in which I first opened my eyes".

II

The July 8, 1836, when Chamberlain was born was a Friday. Greville at Portland Place would have confessed complete social ignorance of Camberwell, but he tells us about this date that there had been "divine weather", and adds: "All London is intent upon morning amusements which are extended into the night . . . dinners, tents, illuminations and dancing; all very gay for those who can find amusement in it, which I have ceased to do".

On the day of Chamberlain's birth, *The Times* and Greville are full of the Irish Question, and while they agree in thinking it a monstrous nuisance, they see through glasses very differently tinted. The "Irish Question" continued was to have an astonishing effect upon the life of the new baby at Camberwell, little as his parents dreamed it. Another warning that every baby is an incalculable apparition. There is nothing uncommon in *The Times* that Friday morning nor the next day. It denounces the Whig Ministers—"such incapables as now fidget on the Treasury Bench from one week's end to another". Next to Ireland, it is full of Spain. There, a British Legion under de Lacey Evans —Radical colonel like a figure out of George Meredith—was fighting for the cause of Queen Isabella against the Carlists; an adventure condemned by high Tories like the Duke of Wellington, who, when they asked him what would come out of it, said, "Two volumes octavo". But in the House of Lords the Bishop of Exeter's little-heeded voice raised the crying abuses of child-labour in factories perpetuating white slavery though we had swept away black. The social question was to be heard of through Chamberlain's time.

Altogether in politics it was a singular season of spent forces and new signs. The first Reform Parliament was in its fourth session. After Reform, the Municipal Corporations Act and the

abolition of slavery had been carried. As usual, a great epoch of moral energy came to its anti-climax; heroic legislation led to popular lassitude and Ministerial dissensions. The resumed stolidity of the country was wearing down the momentum of Liberal ideas. The fears of Eldon seemed to have been as much exaggerated as the hopes of Francis Place. Through half a century yet, there would be plenty of work left for Radicals like Chamberlain in his earlier career.

Yet some signal measures of this year were not to be gainsaid. From such galling disabilities as Chamberlain's parents had recently suffered, the Marriages Act of 1836 freed dissenters; they might now be wedded in any place of worship or none; by another Act civil registration of births, deaths and marriages was established; London University received its charter giving non-sectarian opportunities to dissenters still debarred from the old Universities. In the same session Spring Rice, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, lowered the stamp duty on newspapers from fourpence to a penny and cheapened their production in other ways; while vigorous Tories fought hard, and nearly with success, for dear newspapers and for cheaper soap as less dangerous to the masses.

Other humours of the year arose in discussing the plans for those new Houses of Parliament wherewith our later narrative will be much engaged. It was moved, for instance, that a Ladies' Gallery should be provided. Lord Lincoln's speech against this immodest proposal was the pearl of the session. "He thought there was something indecent in introducing high-bred, virtuous-minded females within the walls of Parliament to listen to the multifarious debates which there took place . . . he had shuddered at the idea of well-regulated and highly polished females being hearers of discussions which took place, and which were inevitable." Even the Speaker, being called on to enlighten the House, expressed "a distinct and positive conviction" against the proposal; and it was lost.

Before the end of this very July of 1836 Cobden published his bold pamphlet on *Russia*—heralding the appearance of a new personal power in politics; challenging the traditional basis of national ideas in respect of foreign policy, armaments and patriotism. Bright had returned from his tour in the East and

BOOK I. 1836–45.

was soon to meet Cobden. These were signs indeed of things coming. And at this very time an active inauguration of the new municipal life was to prove a fact of as much consequence for Chamberlain as for anyone living.

Above all, for these pages, 1836 is recognised as the year when, for the first time after the confusion of groups and sections following the Reform Bill, rival instincts and opinions were forming themselves once more into two marshalled parties, the "Liberals" and the "Conservatives". These new words, so strange and unwelcome at first to ordinary people, were fairly taking hold. When two great parties were being reborn in the shape they were on the whole to keep—despite one disruption of Conservatism and another of Liberalism—up to the World War of 1914–18, the child born at Camberwell was destined to animate each party in turn and to be accused of breaking them both; though his conviction stood, "It was not I", and his evidence is cogent.

III

We must not forget influences other than politics. Railways, steam navigation and the electric telegraph—experimentally established in this year of 1836 though not yet publicly used—were about to change all the world. The railway from London to Birmingham, for instance, was in the making—Chamberlain was to travel by it to some purpose—and steamships with favourable weather might cross the Atlantic in three weeks. That passage too would mean something exceptional to him.

But there was something else, and for the new baby at Camberwell it was presently to colour and quicken life for years. Dickens and the colloquial habit of parody he created were lively influences on Chamberlain in his youth and early manhood. Just some few weeks after he was born, Sam Weller saw the light and *Pickwick* with the fifth number leaped into popularity hardly paralleled. There had been nothing like it since Spain laughed over Cervantes and strangers fell into each other's arms for joy. Everybody read *Pickwick* at home, in the street, on the omnibuses; everybody talked about it. Tradesmen gave the names of its characters to all manner of wares, from "Pickwick" chintzes and cigars to "Weller" breeches. It was a

riot of fun for months, and then, as it went on, touched the heart of pity. We may say that it opened a democratic age in modern literature. Through English life generally *Pickwick* and its successors spread the comic spirit; they brought into the language itself a new idiom of fun, and this persisted for a long while until mechanical imitation made it insufferable. Later, like many others amongst his own contemporaries, Chamberlain went over to Thackeray altogether.

These were the characteristics of the time when our subject was born towards the close of William the Fourth's reign. To the account of his heredity we have added some sketch of the public circumstances, because events and tendencies of the period when we are ushered in have a continuing influence on our lives, though many never realise this fully and none can ever know it enough.

IV

In childhood our Joseph Chamberlain was a nimble and cherished little person, slim and hardy, with the dark hair and grey-blue eyes which, as physical traits, are not at all so exclusively Celtic as is often supposed. Nothing if not intelligent, but without a hint of precocity, he was a normal boy in all his ways, sometimes full of liveliness and mischief, sometimes very still and wondering, reflecting by turns the temperament of his grave father and his sunny-natured mother. Like all her side of the family she had humour, and the first authentic reminiscence of her son, then at the age of three, is her epitaph on a thimble. "This thimble was given to Caroline Harben on her fourteenth birthday by her grandmother, Mrs. Woodgate, and had she continued Caroline Harben, might still have been in her service. But her little son Joey (more ruthless than Time) stamped upon its worn frame and finished what the old Destroyer might have spared much longer (January 17, 1840)." That battered little silver thimble, carefully laid away in cotton-wool, was cherished by the statesman to the end of his days.

There was nothing exceptional about him in his early years; but this too has its interest. The boy may be father of the man but does not always show it. The anecdotes in this case are like the little memories of any household then and now. A nursery

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sketch is drawn by Mrs. Russell Martineau, his constant playmate, who was born only six months after him and survived him by just as many years. Shortly before her death she talked delightfully of childish things belonging to nearly eighty years before:

My sisters and I were inseparable from Joe in our youngest days. I remember him as a most beloved cousin—so faithful when you wanted him, he never failed.

He was high-spirited, and took the lead in everything. He was naughty because he liked to be naughty. When his cousins played with him he usually got them all into scrapes, until they sometimes said they would not play with him any more.

Once when he was put to bed for punishment he said to his mother: "You keep telling me that we must forgive seventy times seven and you won't forgive me even once".

When I visited Camberwell Grove again on a summer's day last year [1919], I was astonished to see it still a leafy oasis little changed from what it was eighty years ago.

I went into the house and saw leading off the dining-room the recess once so familiar and known as the china closet where a green service left a vivid impression. Joe's mother was always having babies and had to rest in the afternoon. Then the children were allowed to play quietly in the china closet. He loved to go there and to tell us ghost stories, gruesome stories. He once invented so many horrors that we were terrified and screamed. His mother called him out of the closet to be scolded and told him not to let his imagination carry him so far again.[1]

Another picture comes back so distinctly, one knows not why. I can see him in it as a very little boy in a red velvet frock with a black belt, white socks and black shoes. The children were at table, sitting all round on high chairs, holding their spoons with expectation. The fine round suet pudding was brought in. At this Joey forgot all propriety in his admiration of the pudding. Rising up on the cross-piece of his chair like standing in stirrups he cried out: "Oh, Mamma, may I have the lid?"

[1] He remained always interested in this way; not in the least spiritualistic, but not closing his mind against the possibility of apparitions. Nearly half a century after, amongst a country-house party at Wilton, he "talked about ghosts"... and at one time "had got hold of a case where the ghost had been seen by more than one person at the same time" (A. G. C. Liddell, C.B., *Notes from the Life of an Ordinary Mortal*, p. 265).

(the favourite top part). His cousins looked down while he was severely rebuked by his mother. But this sad lapse was exceptional.

When he was about six he must have been told why there was a flutter all around him. They might well be excited. One of his little boy cousins had been taken to Windsor Castle as a specimen infant from whose healthy arm vaccination might be transferred to the new-born Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward the Seventh.

Uncles and aunts and surviving ancestors made the related families a large clan of closely knitted households. To a troop of cousins and new brothers and sisters coming rapidly, Joseph was a hero and a leader. Contrasted with these were elders who seemed to the children a thousand years old. His great-grandmother, Mary Austen, was still alive though dating from the reign of George the Second. She had been born so long long ago that she was a young woman when Chatham and Wilkes and *Junius* were names of the day; when Dr. Johnson was in full vigour, Burke in his prime, and Fox emerging; before the younger Pitt or Nelson and Wellington were known. She was not far from fifty when the French Revolution broke out. Thus in the family a single life linked Joseph Chamberlain's day to Chatham's. A miniature shows her charming when young, and she knew the Book of Psalms by heart. They called her "Little Granny". Taken now and then to Little Granny's room at Springfield Grove, Camberwell, Joe was lifted on to the bed to speak to her. She died in 1843 at the age of ninety-one. She remembered far far more than she could tell a child not yet quite ready for school, but he remembered her. Her daughter, his "grandmother Harben", died the year after, another impressive elder with an awe-inspiring white cap and a compensating black bag. This silk bag held her knitting, yet macaroons came out of it. She cut them up with a little silver pocket-knife for distribution to her grandchildren.

These interludes were of small significance by comparison with the constant influence of his parents. Their different characters will come out better in later pages. This eldest boy had the high spirits of the Harbens and the tight discipline of the Chamberlains.

V

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His mother must have taught him to read, but Joseph, be it noted, was not sent to school until the age of eight. Then, with his hand in his mother's, he was taken a little way down Camberwell Grove to an establishment kept by Miss Charlotte Pace and Harriet, her sister.[1] He was there for only one year, but Miss Charlotte recalled a good deal. She recollected the mother: "A very fine face, quiet and still; a handsome, clever woman". Her pupils she practised in distinct speaking. Eight guineas a year were the fees, with extras for Latin, French and drill. Amongst the textbooks Joseph best remembered *Little Arthur's History of England*—a title suggesting some diversion to the wits in a great political crisis sixty years later. One day after a Bible lesson about the "Priests of Baal", the pupils had the idea of acting it in the playground according to a school-book illustration. Joseph, doubtless the acting manager, was discovered with the rest crouching and chanting before a lump of clay daubed up on the wall for an idol.

There was a Quaker influence in the seminary: the Pace sisters had a Quaker aunt who lived in the house and took a friendly interest in the boys. Thereupon our ardent Joseph, aged eight or nine, but already initiating movements, founded a Peace Society. Even this would some day be represented by absurd opponents as a foreshadowing of future inconsistency. But according to his school-mistress he only became President of the little pacifists by fighting for it—"he didn't like being behind anybody and when he did fight he was in earnest about it". This trait remains with him at every phase. His own account in mature years said that the crisis was financial: they had a fund of fivepence-halfpenny; whereto he subscribed much the largest share by means of a whole fourpenny bit from his uncle. "The quarrel turned on what was to be done with the fund. Eventually after long consideration it went to a crossing-sweeper near the school and that was the end of the Peace Society." But there is no ground for the other legend that he won a game of playing at soldiers by gluing his men to the floor. That story has been

[1] Each attained a great age. Miss Harriet married, lived to be nearly ninety; and after the statesman she had helped to teach as a child was stricken down at the age of seventy, she enquired about him.

told of Parnell and of many others. It may have been true of all of them, for boys who never became famous have been known to do it not for cunning but for fun.

Miss Charlotte, it seems, did not see much of the little man's mercurial mood at home as his cousins saw it. She found that "he didn't care much for games; he was not so much solitary as *solid*, industrious and intelligent, but rather too anxious about his lessons, conscientious and very solemn as a rule".[1] There is no contradiction. When he worked he put the whole of himself into it, and when he played he played, but it had to be in his own way. He never cared much for the promiscuous scuffles of boys, but rejoiced in individual activity. He could be much in earnest or very merry, but did not mix the parts. Diligent at his lessons he was as a child; and concentrated diligence he gave afterwards to whatever he undertook. More than fifty years later he went to see Miss Pace; sent her flowers and fruit from time to time afterwards; and sometimes wrote to her kindly in his own hand when he was overspent with work as Colonial Secretary.[2] His will-power became grim in the end and his habitual smile ironical; dryness of heart he never knew.

[1] N. Murrell Marris, *Joseph Chamberlain, the Man and the Statesman* (1900). This book contained some original information, gained from the late Miss Beatrice Chamberlain, whose death was a severe loss for the purposes of her father's biography.

[2] The Camberwell Central Library contains the cash-book kept by the Pace sisters. It also in its way is a contribution to the social history of the English middle class, and enters the following educational fees for three terms:

"1845. March 27. Cash per Chamberlain . £3 9 6
June 21. Cash per Mrs. Chamberlain 3 5 6
Sept. 20. Mrs. Chamberlain 3 3 0"

These details were published in the old *Pall Mall Gazette* (then edited by the present writer), which describes the cash-book (Dec. 19, 1912) as "a yellow-edged book of coarse, thick white paper with green covers and one clasp remaining of the original two".

CHAPTER III

GROWING UP—FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES —EDUCATION—WORK

(1845–1854)

His Mother—Highbury Place—His First School-master—Escapades and Fancies—University College School—A Famous "Head"—Prizes not Games—End of School-days—Office and Bench in Milk Street—His Father—A Liberal Family and its Newspapers—Unitarians and the Religious Antecedents and Life of the Family—A Digression essential to Understanding—Old Carter Lane Chapel—The Tradition of Personal Service—"Young Mr. Joseph" as Teacher and Social Worker—Grave and Gay—*Pickwick* and Private Theatricals—Unexpected Marching Orders at Eighteen—Farewell to London.

I

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THE Chamberlains left Camberwell in 1846 because the then youngest infant, "little Frank", had died, and the house made his mother sad at heart. It is time to speak more of her. Like all the Harben sisters, she was a woman of gentle disposition, full of human sympathies and intelligent interests, delighting in gardens and the open country. Bearing many babies without becoming faded or querulous, she was both susceptible and tranquil, amidst the ordinary joys and busy cares of a large household managed on very moderate means.[1] Of nine children eight grew up—five sons and three daughters. None of them could remember having heard her voice irritably raised. Her sedate, admiring husband protested that she had the temper of an angel; and as for her looks, he tells how he waited an hour and a half in the City to see the young Queen Victoria pass when

[1] The family papers suggest that, in the year before their elder son was born, his father's income was about £800, and that it was usually much less through some following years of depression in general commerce.

she was new to the throne, "But she wasn't a patch on my queen". CHAP. III. ÆT. 9–18.

Of her personal appearance and some other traits one of her daughters wrote:

> She was of middle height with a good forehead, and very blue eyes, and a sweet mouth, with an anxious droop at the corners. She had a particularly soft gentle voice. She also was very sensitive to a good voice and pure pronunciation. In spite of the example of our brothers she discouraged the use of slang by us girls, and I have never used any till corrupted in later life by the young generation.

On removing from south to north London the family settled at 25 Highbury Place, and there remained for nearly twenty years. Here the small Joseph came to the knowledge of himself and his faculties. Most of us know how awakening to a child is this experience of leaving the first familiar house and coming to fresh scenes. Just beyond Islington, the new surroundings fringed the open country with meadows and market-gardens around. Highbury Place was a fine row of fairly large Regency houses in a private road, with wide attractive views from both fronts, and good gardens behind. It was a lovable home; long afterwards Chamberlain remembered it acutely when he came to his saddest hours. One of his minor colleagues in the Liberal Government of 1880–85 was A. M. Porter, the Solicitor-General for Ireland (soon Irish Master of the Rolls), who used to play with him in the garden at Highbury Place. When renewing acquaintance in the House of Commons Chamberlain remarked, "The last time we met was, I think, when we blew up a snail with gunpowder!"

Another school had to be found for him, and the choice was uncommonly fortunate. He was sent to 36 Canonbury Square, an establishment conducted by the Rev. Arthur Johnson of the Church of England.[1] Here he remained from ten to fourteen. Though we have fewer details about it, this second and longer stage in his education meant far more than Miss Pace's seminary. Of his new headmaster, Chamberlain always retained a strong impression. "He was one of the handsomest men I have

[1] Curious that Benjamin Disraeli at the age of fifteen attended a Unitarian school while Joseph Chamberlain, though a Unitarian, never received any part of his education in a school of that community.

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ever seen, an excellent teacher and one to whom I owe much; he was a man of remarkable power and influence." Here the pupil was thoroughly grounded and only removed at Mr. Johnson's own suggestion, when he said that the pupil knew as much of mathematics as his master.

Fanny Martineau's reminiscences of this time are again, just like other chronicles of cheerful middle-class families, linked by many cousinships. The cousins had jolly holidays, better remembered than all the rest of the year. Sometimes they went into the country, but mostly to the sea. They romped amongst the boats and boatmen of Deal and along the shingle. Sometimes it was Margate. When Mrs. Chamberlain "discovered such a pleasant little place called Eastbourne" they went there, the houses being yet few. Brighton tempted them most to escapades.

When they had lodgings in the old-fashioned cobbled street, Cannon Place, he and the girls were told one afternoon that they might go and play on the beach. The moment they were out of the front door, Joe said he had invented a much better sport. "Let us go round the lodging-houses and ring the bell and ask for somebody!" Shocked as usual, and persuaded as usual, the little cousins wisely stipulated that the name enquired for should not be a very common name. Thinking of their other cousins, they decided to ask for "Nettlefold". Whereupon they went knocking and ringing, Joe showing a great command of feature. On some doorsteps they met a sour reception from harassed landladies, but presently one was so kind that they were conscience-smitten and repented. She was so concerned that such dear children should be disappointed in the supposed search for their uncle. They had no heart to go on with the game.[1]

A contrasting view, just after the family had settled at Highbury, shows the boy, aged nine, dramatising himself as called to the Unitarian pulpit:

He invited his sister and myself to come and hear him preach. The pulpit was on the high broad back of a large old-fashioned chair covered in white dimity in one of the Highbury Place spare rooms. We, as a general congregation, were each perched on one of the arms of the chair. I remember only our rather awed admiration of his performance, but alas the text has escaped me.

[1] Conversations of Mrs. Russell Martineau with the present writer.

The serious side of his character became more evident as his youth advanced:

> Without losing a bit of his high spirits with children of his own years he was a favourite with his elders. By then with them he was quite different; he wanted to know, and learn; he listened seriously to them and he asked intelligent questions.

II

When he came to the third and chief stage of his formal education he was adapted and equipped to make the best of it. In 1850, aged fourteen, he was entered at University College School. This was a signal event in his training. To nonconformist parents every reason recommended the liberal institution in Gower Street, where it stayed for nearly sixty years more. Founded over a couple of decades before—in 1830, by Lord Brougham and James Mill amongst others—its repute already stood high. It excluded corporal punishment—a thing singularly hated by Chamberlain's father, who transmitted the abhorrence to his son. Unsectarian in its teaching, it was the leading public school for dissenters. Unitarians especially valued it. Many members of the Chamberlain and related families—Kenricks, Martineaus, Nettlefolds, Harbens—were sent to Gower Street in turn.

The headmaster, Thomas Hewitt Key, was an outstanding man. As scholar and teacher he was sometimes called a "giant" of his profession in those days, and again, "one of the grandest oral teachers of his time". Eminent among Latinists, and accomplished in mathematics, he had also studied medicine. Though he introduced an improved method of classical teaching at Gower Street, his school was one of the first in England to include natural science in the ordinary curriculum. As a lecturer he magnetised his boys. Though he had abolished the terrors of the birch, though he punned, though he tempted mirth by a "large, brilliant pocket-handkerchief", he ruled by the awe of authority. His glance kept discipline. When he entered to find an unusual uproar his least gesture or lowest accent hushed it. For a long time he had been professor of pure mathematics at the newly founded University of Charlottesville in Virginia, and

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to this has been traced Chamberlain's very first interest in "the expansion of England". In other ways Key must have influenced the juvenile politics of his boys. This headmaster had been a keen supporter of the Reform Bill as of the repeal of the Corn Laws and the paper-duties, and later he took an active part in forming the Volunteers. A proper man to frame a nonconformist Palmerston. We shall see how faithfully his new pupil of 1850 shared all these feelings—for national defence no less than for national reform. The Unitarians in their way were also a peculiar people like the Quakers, but in their conceptions of patriotism very different. Altogether, Key's mark on Chamberlain was indelible.

Under the great "head" was an able staff. Just after the Boer War, the Colonial Secretary returned to his old school to unveil its war memorial:

"It is fifty years almost to a day since I last entered this building, and then I came to receive at the hands of the then Lord Mayor of London certain prizes which with their inscription, and the old school motto,[1] still rest on my library shelves, not the least valued or least interesting memorials of my boyhood".

He went on to conjure up other memories. Particularly set on mathematics and French, at Gower Street, young Chamberlain was exceptionally well taught in both. He draws the portrait of one professor:

"My dear old friend Professor Cook enforcing his mathematical instructions with the oft-repeated assurance that never in the long course of his life had he met with boys so bad as we were, and that to attempt to get into our heads the mysteries of algebra was like firing a cannon-ball into a mountain of mud. Yet this terrible comparison did not prevent him from exhibiting on many occasions the greatest pride and delight in the proficiency of his scholars."

And then he makes a more humoursome figure live again: "Professor Merlet, that quaint and genial Frenchman, endeavouring to instil into our understandings the beauties of Molière, and in the excitement of his recitals acting the

[1] "*Paulatim!*"—applied with ceaseless perseverance by himself to many matters in his earlier life, daring though he became later.

parts he read as if he had just come from the boards of the Française".[1]

This pupil was clever and tenacious; more ambitious than he showed; depending more on method than talent; assertive when he intervened at all; but mostly a person rather apart. He would not enter much into games, and seemed to keep himself to himself as was said. We may well imagine that he was not quite generally popular. He did not mix freely; seemed to hold aloof; when he did join in he wanted his own way; just as Miss Pace remarked of him at his earliest school, "he always wanted to take the lead in anything that was going on". Some fast friends he made amongst his school-fellows. They all remembered him for one trait—he was "alert". In Gower Street, at that time and for long after, there was but scant provision for games. There were fives courts on the gravelled playground, but cricket was only allowed with hard tennis-balls and football was forbidden. Allowing for these drawbacks, it seems certain that young Chamberlain would have been the same in any circumstances. His lack of enthusiasm for physical sport must be attributed mainly to his mental intentness. Undoubtedly he was bent more on knowledge than on relaxation. His fun, and he had plenty of it, he liked to indulge out of school. For him, his studies, like business and politics later, were not a grind but a better game. At his French, his mathematics and his Latin he worked with determined zest; in leisure hours general reading absorbed him and made sport seem insipid by comparison. He was already his own man in all these things. He did what he meant to do. Outwardly he seemed no way remarkable; inwardly it was another matter.

Needless to say that at University College School this spirit brought rewards. At the end of his first year, 1850–51, he received the first prize for mathematics and the same for French — to the satisfaction of Professors Cook and Merlet —as well as a prize for Latin (Cicero and Virgil). The prize for Latin exercises went elsewhere, but he is mentioned with praise for one of them. At the close of his next and last year at Gower Street, when in the Sixth, he was first once more in mathematics; the first prize in French he had to divide with a

[1] Speech at University College School, November 5, 1902.

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son of Julius Benedict the musician, after "a rare struggle", as a school-fellow remembered; further, he was bracketed first in mechanics and hydrostatics; and again won honourable mention in Latin. The standard required for his success in this sort of competition was high; for under Key the school sent out able men in all directions.

III

This, at the age of sixteen, was the end of his college education —but by no means of his studies. In 1852 his father decided that his academic career must terminate; that he must leave Gower Street for Milk Street and enter the family business. Adapting Gibbon we may assuredly say that he sighed as a student but obeyed as a son. On balance he gained, thanks to himself. What he lost by leaving University College School so early and by not going to Oxford or Cambridge afterwards he well knew in later life.

John Morley records of him:

> When in later days he paid his first visit with me to Jowett at Oxford and I had taken him round the garden walks, antique gates, and "massy piles of old munificence", he said to me in fervid accent, "Ah, how I wish that I could have had a training in this place". Yet he came to be more widely read in books worth reading than most men in public life, and there was no limit to his interest in art, modern history, imaginative letters, with all that they import in politics.[1]

And one who had a surer key to the understanding of him than even Morley could possess, wrote to his present biographer:

> Till he went off to Birmingham at the age of eighteen he was the centre of the coterie of admiring cousins, and when the *break* came some of us were very disconsolate, but it was not till he was thrown entirely upon himself so young, to bear the burthen of great responsibilities, that he began to develop his exceptional abilities, finding time to increase his knowledge in every direction, and making far more use of his powers than might have been the case had he gone through Public School and College life.[2]

Contrary to a notion prevailing at one time amongst most of

[1] John Viscount Morley, *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 148.
[2] Mrs. Russell Martineau, in 1920.

his opponents and some of his followers, he was more broadly and effectually educated—as Mr. Augustine Birrell has remarked—than most political leaders of his time, just as he was far away better read than his speeches exhibited. Though of a dramatic turn, he was not and could not be of a literary habit. His lines were cast otherwise. Life with him meant action. All his mental resources he converted into equipment for action. He made himself fluent in French, and during his later life as a statesman devoured French novels like Bismarck.

The scientific interests awakened in Gower Street he pursued further at the Polytechnic lectures. He learned something about chemistry and electricity. The excruciating devices of Pepper's Ghost gratified a turn we have seen in him since childhood. The school prizeman in hydrostatics was of course drawn to the diving-bell and sometimes went down in it. The Hyde Park Exhibition he often visited, far from guessing that one of the mechanical novelties there was to play a ruling part in his fortunes. Just when his schooldays in Gower Street were ending he saw, and never forgot, the massive long-marching pageant of the Duke of Wellington's funeral—like nothing seen again for half a century until Queen Victoria's funeral—and the lying in state at St. Paul's. The Iron Duke's traditions of war were fated to mean more during the rest of Chamberlain's life, and just after it, than the recent festival of peace in the Palace of Glass. Despite Cobden and Bright, even advanced Liberals and democrats in the mass throughout Europe and America in the middle of the nineteenth century, though they were for peace if possible, were anything but apostles of unconditional peace. Their first idea was freedom.

IV

His devoted mother wished her eldest son to go on to University College, for by now it began to open the highest education to Nonconformists, despite their exclusion from Oxford and Cambridge. The father firmly refused, though he loved his wife and his eldest child. A man of principles, he did not believe in favouring priority of birth. What he could not hope to do for his five other sons he would not do for the first.

Once only had this devout Unitarian offered any of them a

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privilege, and then on conditions revealing his inmost concern—religion. If any one of his boys would prepare for the Unitarian ministry he would settle upon that candidate £200 a year, a tolerable sum for those days and for a household like his. He had hoped that his wish would be realised by the eldest, who as a child seemed to have some bent to it when he turned the big arm-chair into a nursery pulpit. But when he grew up, Joseph, like his brethren, never felt the call.

And so the boy went at once into the business—in the same street and the same house where three generations of cord-wainers had applied themselves before him.

By now the premises, 36 Milk Street, had been continuously occupied for over a century. The business prospered steadily. After a period of depression the profits were rising once more. An old abstract of the yearly accounts, from 1775 onwards, shows that in 1842, for instance, the capital was £10,000; the profits, after allowing five per cent on capital, were only £537, divided between two partners. In that year our present Chamberlain senior, Joseph *père*, became sole partner. The profits then rose and in 1846 were as high as £1284, though the capital had been reduced to £7500.[1] By now, however, the careful father must have had money invested in other ways.

The business had no shop-window; there was a trim office. Like a good deal of London—especially from the new Houses of Parliament to old Temple Bar and then by Fleet Street from St. Paul's to the Bank and the Mansion House and so on to the docks—the Milk Street house already must have been very familiar to the boy. It is a marked date in life for both when father and son begin to work together in the manner of their forbears. With so close an association the influence of the father must now have become predominant; and as his initiative determined the future, it is time to look more closely at that father's character and ways.

At this time he was a man of about fifty-six. But henceforth the pair were called "old Mr. Joseph" and "young Mr. Joseph." In appearances they seemed curiously alike. "One who took goods to the firm frequently saw the tall old gentleman with a slight book-keeper's stoop go in and out of his sanctum and Joseph

[1] Sir Austen Chamberlain's *Notes*.

do the same—the exact counterpart of the sire minus the slight stoop". The father, we have noticed, was above all a grave man, long-featured; sedate and reserved in manner; punctual and precise in habit; and very just. But more than this, his every lineament expressed thoughtful, persistent resolution. In his quiet way he was a strong person and respected. Slower of blood than his son, whenever his mind was made up nothing could move him. With a horror of debt, he was sparing. Few were his interests, but enduring.

Deepest in him was his Unitarian faith, and of that more presently. Well might it be said of him as was jested later of other Unitarians, "If they believe in only one God, they pay twenty shillings in the pound". In health he was never very robust, but by taking care lived long. Mrs. Martineau sketches him both outwardly and spiritually. Here is a glimpse of City life in early Victorian days:

> Old Mr. Joe, not very strong in health, was a delicate eater. Lunching always at the same place near his business he paid extra for his special cut of beef, but although so grave a man he relied chiefly on port wine which his doctors at that time [like Pitt's] thought to be good for his constitution.

The next comment is more searching:

> He was very remarkable, the mainstay of all the families: they all went to him for advice. The children loved him always except on Sunday mornings when he put them through a little catechism after service. His religion to him was the life within the life. When anyone was first introduced he would sometimes say at once, "Yes, sir, Joseph Chamberlain and a Unitarian". If they swallowed that it was all right.

Severe was "young Joseph's" training; the exact discipline of daily life which he now acquired served him well. He was not only initiated into the technique of the craft but learned in the office to excel in business administration. First he put on an apron and received at the bench his practical lessons in shoemaking. Of that art, almost as pertinent to human comfort as dentistry, he knew every detail, just as afterwards he knew every size and use of screws. Great educationalists, especially in Germany, held then that every man, and even princes, should

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be taught some one handicraft. Though all this was so utterly different from the traditional classical education of our leading statesmen up to that day, everything had combined to give young Chamberlain a prompt, capable faculty ready to master any specific task—a modern mind with many aptitudes.

It was a rigorous course at Milk Street. Strict attention to business was the law. Good Friday and Christmas Day were the only week-days in the year when the warehouse closed. Even on them, an old servant at Milk Street brought up the letters to Camberwell. "The clerks and workmen were a very civil and obliging set, attached to their employer". Shoe-makers then were as notoriously Radical as tailors. Nor must we forget that at the bench "young Mr. Joseph" mingled with Chartists, who always looked back to that movement as the ardent enthusiasm and vision of their lives. They held that the Reform Act had done little for the mass of the people; that they had been cheated in 1832 by the aristocrats and the middle class together. They hated Whigs more than Tories and clung to the hope of a democratic franchise. Chamberlain began to acquire his acute insight into the political mind of the working classes and his sympathetic gift of managing them.

V

For other reasons, and almost as a matter of course, the politics of this family were those of advanced Liberalism.

They had welcomed Free Trade and the other commercial measures of Peel's great ministry. "Young Mr. Joseph" recollected how they shared national regret on Peel's death. They must have hailed later, in 1853, Gladstone's first applauded Budget with its repeal or lowering of duties by hundreds, and its promise, above all, of the gradual reduction and ultimate abolition of the income-tax! As dissenters, determined to press on from enlarged liberty to complete equality in the State, they were energetic supporters of every effort for removing religious privileges and disabilities.

The reduction of the newspaper stamp duty in 1836, the year of young Joseph's birth, had given broad impetus to Liberal journalism. For many years the Chamberlains had read the *Morning Chronicle* under the powerful editorship

of John Black,[1] whom Mill rated so high. But his energies declined; and not long after he retired, the new Liberal organ, the *Daily News*, became the favourite newspaper of the Chamberlain family. How plain a stamp Key's Liberalism had set on University College School has been seen. But in foreign politics, let it be well observed, the Chamberlains were not supporters of Cobden and Bright, but were Palmerstonian like the majority of the advanced middle classes. The European revolutions of 1848 had awakened enthusiasm amongst many of them. On these, Kossuth's oratory and Mazzini's writing left a lifelong impression. They sympathised with the foreign refugees, swarming in London. "Liberty" against "Tyranny" was their simple and fervid ideal. When the dispute with Russia moved towards armed conflict in 1853 and 1854, while young Joseph was working in Milk Street, the *Daily News* supported the war, and so did its readers, the Chamberlains. Many of the most advanced Liberals and ex-Chartists of that time could not forgive the Emperor Nicholas for trampling out the Hungarian insurrection a few years before, and they thought the Tsardom a menace to all European liberty.

VI

And from this we pass naturally to the moral background and to the intensely religious atmosphere of Chamberlain's life then and long afterwards. The Liberal politics followed inevitably from the Unitarian creed. In religion they were a minority apart, the extreme Left of the dissenters—as conscious of their division from the mass of other Nonconformists as these were of their

[1] John Black, though forgotten even by journalists, was a famous editor in his long day—a self-made Scotsman who acquired very considerable attainments. His private life was often unhappy, but his independence as a journalist above temptation. He edited the *Morning Chronicle* for twenty-five years, from about 1818 to 1843. John Stuart Mill said, "I have always considered Black as the first journalist who carried criticism and the spirit of reform into the details of English institutions. Those who are not old enough to remember those times can hardly believe what the state of public discussion then was" (cited, *Dict. Nat. Biog.*). He gathered talents around him, and Charles Dickens began his career as a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. Dickens hardly would have set up as an editor against Black, but the latter was retired against his will in 1843, and the *Daily News*, founded at the beginning of 1846, presently became predominant on the Liberal side, though not under Dickens, who, as editor of a daily newspaper, failed for once.

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separation from the Church. To speak somewhat more of this is vital to the subject. Chamberlain's inward life until nearly forty was directed by his religious upbringing.

We need not go back to "the battle of the diphthongs" between Homoousians and Homoiousians—the tremendous subtleties concerning divinity and humanity disputed by Arius and Athanasius. Amongst innumerable accounts the grandeur of Gibbon's treatment is familiar. Nor need we dwell much on the new movements almost immediately after the Reformation, when anti-Trinitarian doctrines seemed flagrant blasphemy to Lutherans and Calvinists alike.

In England, from the Reformation to the Civil Wars, Arianism and Socinianism had their isolated martyrs, sharing at the hands of other Protestants the same fate of burning alive suffered by the brilliant Servetus at Geneva. The gifted and persecuted John Biddle is often called the father of English Unitarianism. Against the Trinity he preached openly under Cromwell; and preached not merely by denial, as was too often supposed then and after, but fervently in favour of what he believed to be a higher creed of reconciliation and love between God and man. Adherents increased both in London and the West—where the Chamberlains may very well have been early amongst them—and it was soon cried with alarm, "The devil is at the door; there is not a city or town, scarce a village in England wherein some of this poison is not poured forth".

After the ruin of organised Presbyterianism by the Act of Uniformity; with the expulsion of the two thousand ministers like Joseph Chamberlain's ancestor Richard Serjeant; and under further severities—the banned Puritans only searched and questioned the more all things belonging to tradition and authority. Unitarians were excluded from the Act of Toleration. Their total suppression was demanded by other Nonconformists. But instead many of the old Presbyterian chapels passed over gradually to Unitarianism, and it was much recruited from former Independent congregations. It was as strong in Bristol and the neighbouring West, whence the Chamberlains sprang, as in London whither they went—perhaps for the enjoyment of more religious and social opportunities than were possible in the villages for people of their persuasion. Until 1813 the law, though

nominal rather than enforced, still called it blasphemy to speak against the Trinity.

Like Deism, in the eighteenth century, Unitarianism steadily increased. It claimed the adhesion or approval of many famous names—persons as various as Dr. Priestley, Richard Price, the Duke of Grafton, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt; and, as everyone knows, Coleridge ardently aspired at first to preach in the Unitarian pulpit and not otherwise.

There was a stir in London when Dr. Lindsey, after resigning his ministry in the Church of England, became pastor in 1774 of the Essex Street Chapel. In the decades from that date to the point now reached, modern Unitarianism as a distinctive religious community was founded and extended.

Somewhat of it, as held intensely and eagerly practised by Chamberlain's father, we are bound to understand. It was changing from dependence on rigid scriptural interpretation to a broader rationalism in belief and to warmly humanitarian ideals. The orthodox doctrine of the Atonement was almost necessarily abandoned with that of the Trinity. Hence the Unitarian hope. Adam's race did not fall with Adam. There was no radical corruption of human nature. Christ, though not deity, enriched supremely divine enlightenment in the soul of man; or as old words put it, "What we had by Christ was that he taught us the way to Heaven". The Holy Spirit was communicated to him at his baptism. Universal redemption was the truth of his message. Eternal punishment was rejected. By degrees were abandoned belief in miracles and in verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.

Other postulates followed—men are as immortal as they deserve—much as Browning puts it, that "the soul doubtless is immortal—where a soul can be discerned". The Kingdom of God is within you: there within is divine revelation to be sought. The Fatherhood of God implies the brotherhood of man. Right conduct is positive and demands personal good works. That only is the true *imitatio Christi*. In some sort where no more is permissible, these glances into the soul of a community then generally regarded as more heretical than the Jews may suggest what the household faith meant to Chamberlain's father and the growing boy; and how, not without a touch of moral challenge,

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they felt themselves set apart. The boy was bred with an instinct for assailing things usually accepted. That was to be his life.

VII

There were, of course, Unitarian congregations in London as elsewhere long before Essex Street Chapel was opened and Unitarianism then declared its separateness.

The Chamberlains almost from the first settlement in London had attended at the older chapel in Little Carter Lane, Doctors' Commons. There, between St. Paul's and the river, an inn, the "Saracen's Head", was bought and pulled down. On its site was erected the new edifice of brick. The foundation-stone was laid in the very year, 1733, when William from Lacock was bound apprentice to the Cordwainers.

There the Chamberlains worshipped and served for over a century and a quarter. The congregation traced its descent to a "small but loving and attentive auditory", gathered together by Matthew Sylvester, one of the ejected divines. One witness records more than a hundred years ago: "The Carter Lane people are few but united . . . one family in particular, the Chamberlains, have shewn me as much kindness as ever I received in my life. The congregation is composed for the most part of the higher sort of tradesmen, plain, honest and sincere." [1] Not the House of Commons was more familiar to our Joseph later than was to him in his youth the interior of this chapel.

It was described in 1808 by a writer [2] on dissenting churches in London. "This chapel is of square form and contains three galleries; the inside is furnished with remarkable neatness, and in point of workmanship is scarcely equalled by any dissenting place of worship in London. The sombre appearance it exhibits appears suited in all ways to the solemnity of divine worship." But the sombre interior was not so dark as the

[1] Sir Austen's *Notes*. The writer of this letter was the Hon. W. Porter, C.M.G., afterwards Attorney-General at the Cape. He writes earlier of the first Joseph Chamberlain, the statesman's grandfather: "The old gentleman is very friendly and I am sometimes disposed to think him sensible, but he gives pudding before meat at dinner which staggers me a good deal" (April 28, 1827). His brother, the Rev. John Scott Porter, was pastor of Carter Lane Chapel for several years.

[2] Walter Wilson, *History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches in London*, 1808.

swarming slums around. Henry Solly, once its well-known minister, sighed—

> No one who had not dived into the squalid and gloomy dens in the numerous courts and alleys and narrow streets on the South side of St. Paul's Cathedral, where the industrious poor were then crowded together, can form any conception of the state of things in that district, far worse, I believe, as regarded the wretched, filthy condition of the tenements and the number of families living in single rooms, than any other locality of the same area in London. The physical disease and the moral degradation engendered by this horrible over-crowding was such as no one would dare to describe.[1]

Leading members of the congregation removed more and more to the suburbs and outskirts. In many cases their sons and daughters became less available for Sunday school teaching and charitable work in the neighbourhood. To some it was "a most distasteful suggestion that they should come or remain in its disagreeable depths in order to have social intercourse, or to promote rational recreation among the denizens of Holiday Yard and Huggin Lane".[2]

If others shrank, not so the Chamberlains. They held to the principle of personal service.

The minister during the most impressionable part of young Joseph's life was a man of high attainments and amiable character, Dr. Joseph Hutton, the father of Richard Holt Hutton of the *Spectator*.

In this dismal environment, but with all the glow of that spiritual and social spirit, young Chamberlain, between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, became a Sunday school teacher. At that period no attempt was made by any other Anglican or dissenting communion to carry religious ministrations amongst the wharfingers, the riverside workers, the "roughs". The Unitarians who took up that mission added to Carter Lane Chapel a place called Cobbs Hall. There young Joseph, with the older teachers, held the Sunday school class for the slum children. But these labours of the arch-heresy in the shadow of St. Paul's roused

[1] Henry Solly, *These Eighty Years*, vol. ii. p. 85. For the history of the old Carter Lane Chapel see also Caroline Titford, *History of Unity Church, Islington*, 1912.

[2] Solly, *These Eighty Years*, vol. ii. p. 115.

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displeasure and alarm amongst some of the Anglican clergy of the neighbourhood. Once two curates stood at the entrance of Cobbs Hall and warned the children against going in lest they should be led to perdition.

It must be recollected again and always in this study of the early making of a character, that Unitarians still felt themselves a community emphatically differentiated from all Trinitarians whether Anglican, Catholic or Nonconformist. Their position was isolated. It represented, to adapt Burke's phrase, the "dissidence of dissent". This singularity of situation they accepted and asserted in a way that bred much sturdiness of temper and energy of mind. Especially, they felt that at bottom they had little more in common with other Nonconformists than with the Established Church. We cannot well overrate the influence of this passage of experience at Carter Lane—the preaching and teaching, the personal service in slum work—upon the life of Joseph Chamberlain. We may find here the germ of his assertive independence; of his anti-official or anti-orthodox initiative throughout his political career; of his executive force as a leader of social reform, civic and national, as afterwards of other causes or purposes always widening.[1]

VIII

Yet we must not imagine him as inheriting his father's settled gravity. Of that cast he never was.

There was a lighter and a gayer strain in him, and he gave it its fling. On this side he was not a Harben for nothing. Duty was duty, and he did it whether at Milk Street or Carter Lane Chapel. But pleasure in turn was pleasure without alloy. He read every good novel he could lay his hands on. When he revelled in Dickens he was lost to the world. The family bought *Pickwick* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *David Copperfield* as these came out in parts. Joe adored *Pickwick*; we are given an instance. At his Uncle Bailey's there was on the dining-table a silver basket always full of biscuits. He is oddly remembered, absorbed

[1] In 1862, some years after he went to Birmingham, the "Carter Lane people" removed to Unity Church, Islington, where memorial windows are devoted to his grandparents and a tablet to his father.

in *Pickwick*, leaning with one arm on the table while with the other he kept reaching out for the biscuits, quite unconscious that he was giving as much amusement to his cousins as Sam Weller gave to him.[1]

Then and afterwards for many years—excepting one long interval of sorrow—he never missed a dance if he could help it.

More and more during these last two years in London he found his chief delight in private theatricals, entering into them in turn as though he existed for nothing else. Charles James Fox, when a young member of Parliament, was not more fond of them nor took more pains to excel as an amateur actor. Nor was young Burke fonder of going to the play both in Dublin and London.

"Joe" got up these diversions, managed everything, played the chief parts, and was the life and soul of it all. His dramatic instinct lasted his lifetime, and it was to be not the least part of his equipment in public affairs.

The passion seems to have taken him when he was about ten years old. A little later he wrote a tragedy in the rhymed couplets of pantomime. The spurned lover stabs himself with his own sword; the relenting lady, seizing the weapon, dies too. This was recited for the attached cousins, and they thought it very dreadful, like his ghost-stories.

From this vein he turned to comedy and farce. He wrote a play, *Who's Who?* Unfortunately it, too, has perished like the play that young Burke wrote in Dublin; but when performed at Uncle Bailey's warehouse in High Holborn, the usual theatre on these occasions, the assembled families applauded it as a shining production. There are two lovers whose parents are obdurate; the wooer makes entrance under many disguises. Joseph junior carried with *éclat* all the assumed parts—the Frenchman, the German professor, and so on.

"The families" were held together by the Harben sisters. They made it a rule to meet every month at six o'clock tea, bringing

[1] Soon, when he goes to Birmingham, he will find it exceptionally full of the national Dickens cult and its colloquialisms. The working men there, by a shilling subscription, had presented the novelist with a salver and a ring in token of their love. He repaid the town in 1853 by visits, speeches, readings; and helped accordingly to found the Birmingham and Midland Institute. We forget to-day that Dickens, like no other writer before or since, was a national institution.

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their work with them, the husbands dropping in later for whist, followed by supper at nine. The high season for private theatricals was after Christmas or New Year.[1]

On Christmas Day there was always so large a party for dinner at Highbury Place that the table was pulled out to its full length, "old Mr. Joseph", for all his gravity, helping in person to extend it and put in the leaves, whereafter it stretched amply from the dining-room into the drawing-room, between folding-doors thrown open.

The father was very fond of chess and often played it with Joe; the set of ivory pieces was handed down.

Old Mrs. Martineau insisted to the present writer—as the daughter-in-law of James Martineau, the greatest Unitarian of the nineteenth century, she was well entitled—that this family society was "something very far from the ordinary idea of 'shop-keeping' people", and that they were an exceptionally intelligent circle. A living proof of this she was herself when the last survivor.

One last glimpse of "young Mr. Joseph" in his latter days in London must be added. His success even in private theatricals he achieved like all his successes by infinite capacity for taking

[1] A programme survives of a double-bill presented at Uncle Bailey's warehouse, Holborn, a few months before young Joseph, still only seventeen, was sent by his father from London to Birmingham. It is his handiwork:

THEATRE ROYAL, HIGH HOLBORN

This evening, Tuesday, January 31st, 1854

Will Be Presented The Drama Of

"PERFECTION"

Sir Lawrence Paragon	Mr. Benjamin Harben
Charles Paragon	Mr. Stanton Preston
Sam	Mr. Joseph Chamberlain
Kate O'Brien	Miss Charlotte Bailey
Susan	Miss Frances Bailey

To Be Followed By

"DONE ON BOTH SIDES"

Mr. Whiffles	Mr. Charles Bailey
Mr. John Brownjohn	Mr. Joseph Chamberlain
Mr. Pygmalion Phibbs	Mr. Stanton Preston
Mrs. Whiffles	Miss Emily Bailey
Lydia	Miss Frances Bailey

Doors open at 8 *o'clock: performance to commence at half-past*

VIVAT REGINA

(Yet there are those who believe earnestly that the young mid-century Victorians had no fun.)

pains. On his way in the morning from Highbury to Cheapside he conned his parts, sometimes so engrossed that he would repeat his lines aloud with gestures and flourishes, to the entertainment of his companions on the top of an omnibus or of passers-by in the street. But at the moment he entered the office in Milk Street he was the other man—the business-like pattern of present-mindedness.

In these mingled elements of family life, of education and religion, of school and social service, of omnivorous reading and private theatricals, of craftmanship and trade, we see the origins of his settled affections and vivacity; with self-discipline, self-command, complete attention to the matter in hand. As there was always more in him than he disclosed—or knew, for he was not introspective—each phase in his political career from its very outset was a surprise to everyone and to none more than himself. But as yet, though clever and competent and good, as all allowed, he seemed more normal than notable. Neither he nor others dreamed of fame.

He never forgot that he was a Londoner, derived from a long line of London citizens. Now, a sudden occasion broke that tradition. He was thrown into adventure at the age of eighteen; and abruptly was sent away from all he had cared for. He had never imagined this change, but the command he had to take as a soldier takes marching orders. The Crimean War was raging when he was despatched by his father to Birmingham to bear a novel responsibility that to all others but his father might well have seemed beyond the years of "young Mr. Joseph". His cousins were disconsolate. To them he had been the most inspiriting of companions. As Fanny Martineau said: "So faithful; when you wanted him he never failed".

CHAPTER IV

THE MAKING

(1854–1863)

BIRMINGHAM—"A Great Adventure"—Revolution in Screw-making—The Boy becomes a Man before his Majority—A Pioneer in Large-scale Industry and Welfare Work—"Luck is careful Attention to Detail"—The Debating Society and the Volunteer Movement—Young Radical yet Palmerstonian—Standing up at 22 to John Bright—Social Service—His Religion and his Workmen—A Tireless Devotion—His Note-books—The Method and Range of his Reading—"Not Literature for its own Sake but Purpose"—Unceasing Initiative and Mastery of Method.

I

BOOK I. 1854–63.

THE youth called to play at once the part of a man was well equipped for efficiency in any definite affair he might undertake. Circumstances gave him scope in a manner very characteristic of middle-class enterprise at that period.

Curious to say, America, interfering with his fortunes for the first time and not for the last, was the prime cause of his removing from London and appearing in Birmingham. In the middle of the nineteenth century the greater inventions were stimulating ingenuity in smaller. More and more, even in little things, machinery working like life, as the older artisans used to say, replaced hands and fingers. Main principles in applied science received countless applications in detail; ceaselessly devices bred devices; subsidiary to the skilled monsters brought into being were an innumerable progeny of mechanical elves. On both sides of the Atlantic new patents were taken out in swarms with all the attendant hopes and disappointments, rewards and tragedies. Mixed often with the absurdities of Laputa they were; as often suggestions derived from one man's failure

made the fortune of another; and many of the successes had the most unexpected reactions. We may question whether a myriad contrivances almost anonymous were not as important in creating the modern system of industry and its automatic processes as the main advances associated with a few renowned names.

In 1851 a Mr. Sloane of the United States brought over patents for yet another invention. The Great Exhibition included his automatic machine for making little articles as familiar, say, as buttons, but not yet quite so handy in the use—ordinary screws. Then they were called carpenter's screws, or more often—though made of metal—"wood-screws", because used as fastenings in woodwork. As for the origin of the grooved nail we call a screw, it seems to go back beyond knowledge.

This new apparatus was of uncommon interest, half disquieting, half attractive, to one family amongst the clan of Unitarian families linked with the Chamberlains. John Sutton Nettlefold had married Martha Chamberlain, sister of Joseph senior. This Nettlefold commenced ironmonger in Holborn; then, about 1835, established a small old-fashioned screw factory in a water-mill somewhere on the banks of the Thames. For the better supply of materials and labour, he found it desirable to change to the Midlands. The business seems to have betaken itself to Birmingham somewhere about 1842. Even then, as aforetime, screws were still made chiefly by hand, though in part also by crude processes of machinery; and they were made in an unsatisfactory form, blunt-ended. A hole had first to be bored for them with a gimlet before the driver could make them bite into the wood.

II

This practice might be revolutionised by what "the families" saw when they visited the Hyde Park Exhibition.

The American patent had two features of novelty. The first improvement, by introducing pointed ends, made every screw its own gimlet. The second step was a surprising advance on existing means—such as they were—for turning out screws by steam-driven machinery. You now fed the wire into the new self-acting mechanism and that did the rest, cutting the wire smartly, bit by bit, heading each piece at a stroke, worming, pointing. Each

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gimlet-screw could be put into the wood at once by a hammer-tap or even by a firm thumb. Too evidently this transatlantic invention might revolutionise the whole trade in which the Nettlefolds were engaged. It threatened their present foundations. It might ruin them if anybody else got hold of it.

All this was bound to cause John Sutton Nettlefold some excited and anxious thinking as he walked, or rode on the top of the bus, between Hyde Park and Holborn. These machines were complicated, costly to buy, expensive to operate. But, again, one person could look after several machines at once and turn out the improved little article in larger quantities. Technically, the thing was wonderful; commercially, he feared it might fail; yet also there might be a fortune in it, to his own undoing if he did not venture. Risk in hazarding the large capital required if he bought the patent. But if he did not, perhaps much worse risk to his capital already invested in the old-fashioned methods. A psychological drama in its way; a typical question in that mid-century for English manufacturers of moderate means.

Decision was far from hasty; doubts and negotiations were protracted for more than two years. At last, in 1854, Nettlefold plunged and secured all British rights to the American invention. But what then? Larger mills adapted to the new steam-driven machinery would have to be built and equipped. For him it was an undertaking of magnitude. The capital required to purchase and work the invention was £30,000. The sum seems a bagatelle to-day, when industry and finance think in millions, but at that time it looked like a serious hazard to people who were comfortable but not rich.

Nettlefold by himself could not command so much capital. He urged his brother-in-law, Joseph Chamberlain, senior, to take a share in the venture. That deliberate but not timid man ponders a proposition so much out of his accustomed way. To look into possibilities on the spot he visits Birmingham. Then he resolves. He will do it. As we have seen, when once he had made up his mind he never looked back—"pleasant and quiet in manner", said the old beadle of the Cordwainers, "but not to be moved from what he had said by anybody". At once he felt that if he went into this Birmingham venture he must have

someone in Birmingham to look after his money. He could not pull up his own roots. Then what to do?

He made up his mind again; and said with finality, "*We will send Joe*". It was a bombshell to Joe—aged eighteen.

A master-stroke of judgment on the father's part, it persuades us that already exceptional promise in business must have been shown by the son. Positive and confident as he was by habit, "young Mr. Joseph", bidden at eighteen to take a leap into the unknown, carrying a weight of responsibility on his shoulders, was full of momentary tremors, we may be quite sure. We may be as sure that he did not exhibit them. He is called upon as a boy to become instantly a man. He does. Courage he has, and capacity to a degree he cannot guess for long yet. But at least from the outset we shall find him sparing no exertion to justify his father's confidence and make it the turning-point of the family fortunes and his own.

III

In the late autumn of 1854—the precise date is not recorded—he left London by train. Railways, we must recollect, were then as new as aeroplanes are now.

There is no stimulus to a young man like a definite personal adventure amidst entirely strange surroundings. The feeling is somewhat like going out for the first time on active service. We may conjecture that on the train journey, probably the longest he had taken, his notions were reasonable, not exalted. What mattered with him always were not his dreams, but an instinct and a faculty of action apt to carry him by degrees beyond his dreams. We may as safely conjecture that his thoughts and those of his fellow-passengers mingled with emotions then stirring the blood of the whole nation. The siege of Sebastopol resounded. Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman, had been heroically fought. With his nature and at eighteen he must have throbbed to the war-news.

When he reached Birmingham it was beyond him to conceive that its name would become inseparable from his own; and his first daylight impressions of the Midlands must have been cheerless after London.

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The place was then a large and grimy town, packed, squalid and sprawling. Yet this dense, formless creation of the machine age was a power-house of moral and material energies. Turbulent was its political history; notorious for the violence of its riots on some occasions; celebrated for its ordered determination in other crises, as at the time of the Reform Bill. In the heart of England, its common people had the name of being insular of the insular, full of prejudice, doggedness and fervour; turning out guns and nibs, providing both the sword and the pen in quantities, without asking which was mightier. The temper of the townsfolk was a blend of democratic sentiment and combative patriotism. At the time, like most radically-minded folk both at home and abroad, they saw no inconsistency in that conjunction. One difference of Birmingham from Manchester, for instance, was already recognised and emphasised by Cobden some years later, in a well-known letter to Bright. The Midland town, instead of being engrossed by the production of one great staple, numbered many hundreds of small trades—or between two and three thousand sub-trades—engaged in the most various crafts, and chiefly, of course, in all kinds of metal-working. Cobden wrote:

> The social and political state of that town is far more healthy than that of Manchester; and it arises from the fact that the industry of the hardware district is carried on by small manufacturers, employing a few men and boys each, sometimes only an apprentice or two; whilst the great capitalists in Manchester form an aristocracy. . . . There is a freer intercourse between all classes than in the Lancashire town where a great and impassable gulf separates the workmen from the employer.[1]

At this moment of our narrative, with the Crimean struggle at its height, Birmingham pounded and flamed with munition work and war feeling.

IV

Young Chamberlain took rooms in Frederick Street, Edgbaston, the better residential part of the town. It was about half a mile to business, and he walked both ways daily. When brought to the office of the firm in Broad Street and introduced to the

[1] John Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. ii. p. 199. (The original edition, 1881.)

clerks, "he had to stand his foot-ale the same as anyone else coming new". Beginning at the bottom, to learn thoroughly the commercial part of the business as distinguished from the technical, he sat like the other clerks at a desk on a high stool, writing letters or drawing invoices or posting up the ledger. His associates took to him, for, instead of holding aloof as from the games at Gower Street, he was as companionable as keen, full of humour—always a good man to work with. He became popular now as he had not been at University College School.

It was not long before he was through his novitiate. Probation was hardly needed at all. His first-rate aptitude for business was not to be doubted, and soon he "went upstairs". As a principal, he then sat in the room already occupied by a cousin, almost as young as himself, in whom he found a notable colleague. For Nettlefold senior, like Joseph the elder, was fortunate in a son. Young Joseph Nettlefold was very able as a mechanical engineer and factory organiser. He managed the works; Chamberlain managed the commercial side and "sales organisation" as it would now be called. One made the screws; the other made the trade. It was a telling partnership and proved what very young men can do, well chosen and given their chance. In the eventually resistless commercial success of the firm during the next twenty years our "Mr. Joseph" was prime mover.

V

That success, however complete at last, was not easily won. Ability and fibre alike were tested and strengthened by some years of harassing difficulty.

The patent rights to revolutionise the screw trade were for the United Kingdom only. Others held the rights in America, others again in France, others in Germany and in Russia. Establishment-costs, as expected, had been heavy, and so were running-costs. It was necessary not only to conquer the home trade but to extend into the foreign market.

With all his innate gifts in this line the young man spared no trouble. At his office in Broad Street punctually at nine o'clock in the morning, he stayed there till six in the evening, and longer on occasion.

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How he tackled the French market and gained it, in spite of rival patent rights, is a standing lesson. He adapted himself to the language, usages, even the smaller idiosyncrasies of that nation. The excellent knowledge of French acquired at University College School he not only improved by constant reading, but at one time he had a Frenchman to talk to him every morning at breakfast. The firm had been using English weights and measures for all its transactions. For French dealers, young Chamberlain quoted in terms of their own decimal system. Another little detail attracted his vigilance. The French liked to have their screws done up in neat packets of one size and wrapped in blue paper. Well, they should have their uniform packets and their blue paper if it pleased them. And it did. A large trade across the Channel was created.

The same in other directions. For some time he was his own commercial traveller. He went to Ireland and opened up new connections there with so much effect that the orders soon came regularly without the visits. Later it was said of him that whenever he went on a foreign holiday he was certain incidentally to come home from Switzerland or Germany with a pocket-book full of orders.

In a few years, while this rising organiser was still in his early twenties, the firm turned the corner. Soon we shall see it going forward by leaps and bounds. As the cashier said, "Money was made very rapidly after Mr. Joseph came". He had the secret of closest attention to the details of the day while projecting bolder enterprise.

These results could not be welcome to all rivals in the trade. When young Chamberlain first came to Birmingham—as he said himself a dozen years later—manufacturers and members of their families often worked side by side with their men and in their own houses or petty premises adjoining. When rising firms began to use steam-power to the full in large factories, the old hand-making people could not survive. Small manufacturers of the old blunt-ended screws went down right and left in the competition; the owners becoming overseers, or even foremen, under the new conditions. But the work-people gained by larger and lighter buildings, better sanitary conditions, more regular employment, shorter hours and higher wages, as well as by the

firm's "welfare work", far ahead of general example. We have sketched a typical episode in the rise of Victorian manufacture; but Chamberlain will appear presently as in every way a pioneer of modern large-scale industry—of consolidation and rationalisation.

VI

In his leisure we find him taking up a new interest as significant for the political future of his career as his training in administration.

In his very first weeks after coming to Birmingham, when he could hardly have known as yet what to do with his evenings, he heard of the Edgbaston Debating Society. Belonging to the "residential district" where he had taken up his quarters, it enjoyed exceptional repute as one of the "amateur parliaments" then the vogue, and its proceedings must have been newly stimulated by the war in the Crimea.

The stripling from London joined more for entertainment than for politics. He had never heard a debate in the House of Commons. It was to be long before he showed any inclination whatever for public life; we have already noted that he had no precocity. His first social introductions were to Unitarians—an influential body in the town—and amongst these he made his acquaintance.

Some of them belonged to the Debating Society and led him to put up for it. At that time it numbered about seventy-five members—a very few years afterwards there were about two hundred—belonging to the professional and business classes, as much bent upon enjoyment as instruction. For they met at the "Hen and Chickens", where Joseph felt none of the magnificent premonitions once known to a Benjamin leaning over the gallery at Westminster. But in the Society he made many friends for life, and his proposer, the honorary secretary, C. E. Mathews, a man of fine accomplishments and equal charm, became one of the best and most affectionate friends he ever made.

Chamberlain was elected on November 29, 1854. Years and years afterwards he loved to tell a little anecdote of his debut. Another candidate for election at the same time had remarked to him: "I mean to make use of that Society; I mean to speak

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every evening!" This was Brougham's counsel—and Brougham was still extant—to 'prentice politicians: "Practice, practice"; without ruth, on any audience, at every opportunity. Chamberlain said: " 'I have no such idea: I think I shall be a silent member, and shall never open my mouth'. That gentleman never spoke. I spoke the first night, and I believe I spoke on a good many occasions afterwards! It shows that even in those early days I was an inconsistent person."

We know from others that he was in fact a regular attendant and a frequent speaker. His first debate was on the solemn motion, "That the Character and Conduct of Oliver Cromwell do not entitle him to the Admiration of Posterity". On this venerable theme it need hardly be said that the descendant of Richard Serjeant and of so many dissenting generations warmly championed the Protector.

But he did not arrive at good speaking by natural facility or by anything but his unfailing systematic determination to learn. His substance was always clever but over-elaborate, even in humour, at this stage. He got his speeches by heart, and they reeked of the lamp. It is odd above all to know that his delivery was voted bad—as was Edmund Burke's at Trinity—and suffered at different times from opposite faults. Sometimes it was too formal and dragging, at other times too fast—"a rapid rush of words with sentences tumbling over each other". Too many French quotations were amongst his festoons. Perhaps most unpractised men of talent and sense when they begin with set speeches vacillate between the two opposite vices of frigid slowness and incontinent speed. It is recorded that once his memory of his manuscript failed him; so that he came to a full stop, could not resume, and sat down.

It took him years to acquire, and more years to perfect, the succinct and lucid qualities of his mature style. Improving much as sessions succeeded, he ultimately attained in the Society to freer efforts "studded with apparent impromptus", and became reputed amongst them for self-possession, sparkle and audacity. But his best performances in mimic debate gave no hint of the level of power and art he was to attain in real public life at a yet distant day.

VII

For nearly three years, indeed, after his debut we have no noticeable trace of him at all in the Debating Society. Then, however, he came out strongly on a signal occasion.

In 1857 John Bright, washed out of Manchester by the Palmerstonian wave, was salvaged by Birmingham on conditions. To secure that seat he had to agree that the Indian Mutiny must be suppressed; but no one doubted his sincerity, and otherwise the ideals of the great pacifist remained as unchanged as exalted. Elected while absent, ill-health delayed for more than a year his appearance in the town. At the end of October 1858 he delivered the first of his many majestic addresses to his Midland constituents. His peroration was one of his noble passages. "The moral law was not written for individuals alone but for nations; a penalty would fall upon them if they rejected that moral law." He did not see the deadly difficulty—that nations were to differ to extremity about what was the moral law and what its just application. They all appealed to it after as before. In these, and in following speeches in other parts of the country—overlooking, alas, the formidable realities and coming conflicts of the world on both sides of the Atlantic—Bright denounced without discrimination the "balance of power". That doctrine, though sometimes pedantically misapplied, had sprung originally not from artificial theory but from practical necessities. It was a principle of combination for mutual defence amongst States menaced by an armed ascendancy like that of France under Louis XIV. or Napoleon. Bright preached non-intervention, and with exalted conviction depicted the nothingness of empire by comparison with the well-being of the people. This needless antithesis was too much for many advanced Birmingham Liberals ready to go all the way with Bright for democratic reform—nay, much farther—but still staunch to Palmerston in foreign policy.

When the orator newly elected for Birmingham gave his first great address there young Chamberlain was in the Town Hall —"I heard all Bright's Birmingham speeches", he once said. "I had the sincerest admiration for his efforts on behalf of all legislative reforms. But I did not from the first agree with

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his foreign policy, which was practically a 'peace at any price' policy."

The Debating Society took up the question and gave two nights to it. Someone moved: "That this Society strongly condemns the principles enunciated in the speeches recently made by Mr. Bright in Birmingham, and also the spirit in which those speeches were delivered".[1]

Chamberlain spoke on the second night at a crowded gathering held not at the "Hen and Chickens" but in the theatre of the Old Philosophical Institution, Cannon Street; and he supported the vote of censure on a mighty but not infallible orator. His speech was described by a local print as "lively and clever". The young man of twenty-two, traversing Mr. Bright's arguments and impugning his assumptions, asserted that aristocracy was by no means responsible for all wars; that every great war since 1688 had been demanded by the people; that the world was still an unsafe place; and that it was always necessary to be prepared for defence.[2] The motion of censure on the pacifist orator was lost by only one vote.

This early episode, in its way, is an index-finger. As we have seen in the last chapter, the Chamberlains had been for the Russian war like their morning oracle at that time, the Liberal *Daily News*, and felt very differently from Bright on India and the Mutiny. There is no kind of doubt that "young Mr. Joseph" never shared the ideas of Cobden and Bright on foreign and Imperial policy. We shall find other testimony as we go on. To explain this is necessary to an elementary understanding of Chamberlain and his career. Great Nonconformist divine as he was, Dr. Dale himself could be a very belligerent Liberal. He differed totally from Bright both on the Crimean War and India; and a few years later proclaimed: "While we maintain a large army and a splendid fleet to protect our own shores I trust that we shall never shrink from using both on behalf of justice and freedom". And he went on in his fervour against Tsarist Russia: "Unless . . . Armstrong guns and iron-plated ships are at the back of diplomacy, diplomacy I fear is not likely to be very successful".[3]

[1] Records of the Birmingham and Edgbaston Debating Society.
[2] Marris, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 48.
[3] Speech on the Polish Insurrection, 1863. *Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham*, by his son, A. W. W. Dale, p. 253.

About this time young Chamberlain met the Quaker lion face to face when John Bright was the chief guest at a dinner-party given by George Dixon. After dinner, Bright led the conversation and talked in the sense of his speeches. He especially maintained that Gibraltar—Cobden thought it "a memorial of shame"—should be given back to Spain. The elders at the table listened in reverence whether they agreed or not. Not so the stripling. Across the table two-and-twenty intervened, controverted the great man, stood up to him stoutly. So far from resenting it as an impertinence, Bright was magnanimous. When the other guests had departed he told his host that he was glad to find young Liberals who could think for themselves. About a couple of years afterwards this same young Liberal is so far from being an unconditional apostle of peace that—quite in Dr. Dale's mood concerning Poland—he asserts it to be England's duty to resist by arms, if necessary, the annexation of Savoy by France.

VIII

Chamberlain from this year, 1858 onwards, filled in turn all the offices of the Society. The old minutes in his small exact handwriting are still preserved.

When secretary in 1859 he already wore an eyeglass, fixed opponents with it, and began to look somewhat like his later self. At an annual dinner his banter was relished when he proposed the toast of the "artopsariacoluthic members"—followers of the loaves and fishes—intermittent beings who appeared with all the semblance of life at the annual suppers when viands and beverages went free, but at ordinary meetings were no more seen. This raillery after dinner at the Lyttelton Arms, Hagley, on the joyous occasion of the annual summer excursion—he is still only twenty-three—was his best hit so far. It was noticed and admired in a local journal, *Aris' Gazette*; and this, notable to say, seems to be the first extended reference in print to Joseph Chamberlain.[1] By now, and truly, audacity was thought to be his salient trait.

A very different incident claims remark. The country had taken up the Volunteer movement. Chamberlain as the Society's

[1] Marris, p. 49.

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secretary wrote to the Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire proposing that the Edgbaston debaters be allowed to form a company. The offer was declined. The secretary, unabashed, rebuked the Lord Lieutenant. That dignitary was firmly informed that he had thrown away his opportunity to enlist the services of a very fine body of patriots. Then came something still more like him, whenever he was bent on action. The Society formed its own non-official Rifle Corps; and Chamberlain's minutes for 1860–1861 record the sequel with facetious pride: "Your Committee understand that the meetings of the Rifle Corps on Wednesday have seriously affected the attendance at your Society's Debates, and that generally the martial ardour which has pervaded your Society has been extremely prejudicial to the preservation of that calm spirit of philosophical enquiry which is the mainstay of your Society's existence . . . (*signed*, Joseph Chamberlain, 13 September 1861)".

His old headmaster of University College School, Thomas Hewitt Key, took a vigorous part in the movement for raising a Volunteer Army. There must have been some natural and creditable connection between the headmaster's activity and an "old boy's" zeal in the same cause. But John Bright disliked the Volunteers, and his correspondence at this time assumes that Cobden shared his views.

Nothing more is required to show why Chamberlain never was of the school of Cobden and Bright in foreign and Imperial affairs. That peace is the greatest of British interests—and, above that, the greatest of human interests—is accepted faith for economic reasons, and for human and spiritual reasons far higher. But the world at that time was about to enter in fact upon a cycle of wars, antagonisms, aspirations, alliances, armaments, culminating at last in a universal catastrophe unimaginable by Victorian optimism. Even yet "non-intervention" as a principle does not ensure respect for neutrality; nor neglect of defences peace. Could England cease to be powerful—or become more vulnerable in the world's eyes—and remain safe? That was the question then. Time would answer. *Laissez-faire* was not Chamberlain's instinct nor his conviction either in domestic, Imperial or international affairs. A more advanced and modern democrat in so many ways than Cobden, Bright or Gladstone,

he was at the same time a nationalist Englishman to the backbone. It was to mean much.

He was president of the Society in 1863, but soon afterwards, when he married, ceased to be a constant attender.

Thirty-three years later, when Colonial Secretary, he was president again; and addressed the members in a speech of singular charm and felicity, the best of all his familiar discourses. As a commentary upon the nature of good speaking it was the confession of a great artist, musing in maturity on the secrets of his personal skill; and to that we shall have reason to return. To some surviving members his words made youth live again. He recalled "Some of the pleasantest hours of my life, the origin of many valued friendships"; and went on: "We—at least the elder ones at the top of the board—will never again attain to the certainties of these earlier years. Then we declared war without the slightest regard to the Concert of Europe. We could do so in safety for we made peace on our own terms. We dismissed Ministers without consulting the House of Commons. We passed measures which unaccountably, up to the present time even, have not received the assent of the legislature; and were prepared at a moment's notice to pronounce on the merits of any individual, however eminent, and to discuss the truth of any doctrine, however abstruse. Was there—can there have been—at this time about us any of the presumption of youth? I know not. But I do honestly believe that, at any rate, we had some of its virtues and some of its charm. The debates in my time were conducted with courtesy and toleration; they were distinguished by freshness and generosity and a true spirit of patriotism, and they were animated by that liberalism which is not political, but which is founded upon a genuine abhorrence and indignation at wrong, and perhaps by a certain inexperience as to the difficulties in redressing it." [1] And he added the comic stroke: "We were rather a Radical body then. . . . The prevalent Liberalism of our time occasionally landed us in difficulties, since we could not always find a sufficiency of speakers to defend more moderate opinions. . . . When we were unable to agree as to the disposal of a surplus of £7 odd, which the treasurer unexpectedly dis-

[1] Speech at Birmingham for the jubilee of the Debating Society, 1896.

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closed to us . . . we unanimously approved the suggestion . . . that we should buy a Tory with it."

With good reason, we have contemplated at some length these early exercises in an amateur arena. They gave him as a speaker the first thing—"Practice, practice, practice," as Brougham said, until you no longer feel, as many men very gifted in conversational or literary expression have owned they felt on their first halting efforts in public, "like a salmon on a gravel-walk". More potent lessons about conception, order, elimination, delivery, he had to learn in other ways. It was a far cry yet to the House of Commons. But at least Chamberlain's happy activities in the Edgbaston Debating Society during some of the most impressionable years of his life may remind us that Gibbon's service in the Hampshire Militia helped him to describe the campaigns of Belisarius.

IX

Turn now to another and opposite aspect of him—the continued influence of his religion as conceived in terms of practical duty. This still was very much more to him than politics. Worship itself with him was not contemplative nor introspective nor concerned much as yet with the mysteries of self and eternity; but expressed itself in action.

With this blended his devotion to his work-people regardless of their creeds at a period when England's neglect of popular education was still her heaviest reproach as a money-making nation next to the dark disgrace of her coagulated, fetid slums as existing then and long after in Birmingham and many other big towns. We know how early at Carter Lane Chapel in London he had entered into the fine Unitarian tradition of personal zeal in social service. In Birmingham he kept it up with increased energy.

Unitarians believed themselves to be the oldest dissenting sect in the town. They claimed, above all, the name of Priestley. In the furious riot of 1791, on the commemoration of the fall of the Bastille, the Birmingham mob burned down the Unitarian Chapel; and sacked Priestley's house, destroying his library and all his scientific apparatus. George the Third liked the event. Arthur Young called it "an infamy . . . the disgrace of the age

and the scandal of the British name". Unitarians only became the stronger in the town. "Civil and religious liberty" was to them, more than to any other sect whatever, the breath of public life. When Chamberlain first came to Birmingham they were a compact body with wealth, brains and character out of proportion to their numbers. They still worshipped at the New Meeting, but some years later built the handsome Church of the Messiah on massive arches spanning the canal in Broad Street.

Chamberlain took his part in Sunday school teaching, and gave his thoroughness to that duty. Literature and history he taught, French and arithmetic. From this kind of work, done as he did it, he doubtless learned even more than his pupils. "He was a strict disciplinarian," said one of them, "yet attractive in manner; he did not spare our shortcomings." He had a rasping way when displeased. Some disappointing pupil confessed to ignorance of the meaning of "irony". Instantly retorted the teacher, "Well, if I said I was surprised, that would be irony". At one time four of the Chamberlain brothers taught in the same Sunday school. The eldest did not confine himself to it. He was the first president of the school's Mutual Improvement Society. In those once familiar institutions, "Penny Readings", he often took part; his recital of "Sam Weller's Love Letter" was a favourite performance. Emulating an example already set by the local Quakers, he got up on Sunday mornings at six o'clock or earlier, to hold classes before breakfast. Nor did his zeal divide the Sabbath from the week in these matters. During the week he taught in a night-school after his long and assiduous day's work in the office. From many boys whom he had helped he earned lasting gratitude, and it served him well when they were men and citizens.

Still wider gratitude he won by what he did for his workers, and their faithfulness was to bring him a yet richer reward in public life. Though his cousin had charge of the processes of manufacture at the screw-works, our "Mr. Joseph" was as familiar at Smethwick as in Broad Street. He made a practice from the first of mixing with the factory hands and talking freely to them. They felt that no employer could understand them better, and that he longed to do his utmost for them. At the

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same time he incited them, as a main thing, to do the utmost for themselves. He suggested and supported their Working Men's Institute. In another generation old members looked back with affection to its library and its glee-singers. Here again he sometimes took the French class, and more often than not was chairman of the Penny Readings on Monday nights. He got up their Debating Club. For one season he took charge of their Rifle Club. Separately from their Institute, he founded their Benefit Club for enabling his workers to make provision against sickness and misfortune—a subject never far from his mind for nearly fifty years to come.

This Club was to be managed by its members, but Chamberlain was treasurer and chief adviser in every difficulty. Regularly he attended its meetings. They sometimes lasted until midnight; then he had to walk three miles to reach home. Sometimes he must have felt fatigue; but he did it the same whether he minded or not. Dating from these days, his blazing interest—there is no lesser word for it—in the question of popular education will presently decide his life.

Things like these explain his strong hold upon human attachment. Decades afterwards one of his oldest workers testified: "The room buzzed with life always when he was there, being himself so smart and vivacious. Not bothered with nerves, he could the more help others who were. One night a young fellow sang a song, 'I can always put my hand on it'. Joseph made the place roar afterwards with some additions of his own on the idea, and the phrase became a byword for months afterwards. . . . It is certain that never before, and possibly not since, was there such mental ferment in the district of Smethwick and Birmingham Heath, as there was in the years of Joseph's directorship in the firm. . . . Alas, the truth is that after he left the firm, the Institute degenerated to a mere drinking Club and became bankrupt. . . ."

Small wonder that the firm had few disputes and no strikes. The various activities, here put together for convenience, stretched over the better part of twenty years, and were at their fullest in the early 'sixties. No less than business organisation and practice in amateur debate, these tireless efforts of personal service conceived as a religious and social obligation entered

deeply into the making of him as an energiser of political action, a master of democratic method, and a leader of men. CHAP. IV. ÆT. 18–27.

X

What manner of inwardness lay behind all these external activities?

On that searching question some light is thrown by his note-books belonging to this period, before he emerged into public life. A set of manuscript volumes, in flexible leather covers for the most part, they show him to be—as we might guess from all the other evidences—the soul of meticulous method. In his Debating Society days he arms himself from his twenty-first year onwards by compiling a collection of facetious anecdotes. They are actually numbered and indexed so that in a moment he can find what jest he wants. When these had been used enough, he pasted over them little snippings from newspapers—chiefly American witticisms and negro drolleries.

For his history class he makes a complete synopsis of events from Caesar down to the middle of George the Second's reign, and follows some ordinary textbook; but it is faithfully done: For his lessons in English literature he makes a similar abstract, concerned mainly with the greater writers; to Chaucer in particular devoting many pages. In a separate book he writes an essay on Milton, more engaged with the man than with the poetry, but closing with a series of the great quotations. There is another essay on "Popular Delusions" concerning witches and ghosts. This latter theme we have noted already as of peculiar interest to him from his childish years. Upon another occasion, when personal sorrow had fallen upon him, he is profoundly moved by discovering these corroborating lines in Wordsworth, a poet to whom he was in no way addicted:

> I look for ghosts; but none will force
> Their way to me: 'tis falsely said
> That there was ever intercourse
> Between the living and the dead;
> For, surely, then I should have sight
> Of him I wait for day and night
> With love and longings infinite.[1]

[1] "The Affliction of Margaret ——."

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This latter entry is from a quarto book of extracts in prose and verse, begun in the early 'sixties, amplified from time to time for several decades after, and used to the end as an armoury for speeches. The earlier extracts he does not get at second-hand but from the sources, noting chapter and page. We see that he reads the *Curiosities of Literature*, Hallam, Mrs. Browning, Michelet, Gibbon, Clarendon, Sydney Smith; *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Hudibras* and Dryden, Carlyle and Froude, Tennyson and George Eliot and other moderns. Further names will occur. For twenty years at least, in his earlier life, he read largely and retentively.

It cannot be said that he steeped himself with gusto in pure literature, for his was not in that sense an absorbed and saturated imagination. There was none of the atmosphere of literature about him. All this reading, like his religion itself, is, so to say, pertinent. It looks to practice; in swift perusal he keeps a quick eye for the uses of the day. In the critical quality he has discrimination but no distinction. It is not of his psychic sphere. He has had no time, and he never will have time, to acquire it in his ceaseless life of doing. The beauty, emotion, the enchantments and impassioned mysteries of poetry and the richer prose are not for him. He souses like a hawk on all that is vividly illustrative of the familiar traits, vicissitudes and foibles of human nature. Satire he prefers. When he comes to have fewer and fewer hours for books, either they furnish him with munitions of war in his political campaigns or they provide his care-free recreation.

But quite contrary to what most of his contemporaries supposed—perhaps because after his youthful excess of quotations he learned to eliminate them almost from his speeches for the sake of being consecutive and concise—Chamberlain was more effectively educated and variously informed than most statesmen of his own day or ours. Well might John Morley bear witness to the extent and variety of his reading.

Amusing to discover that when he uses a quotation publicly he ticks it off, adding date and place of use, so that he may avoid the easy danger of repeating himself; as others, he finds, are prone. The manuscript note-books show that his curious minute handwriting formed itself very early in life and never changed.

When he chose he could write what was then called copper-plate, and sometimes liked to do it. His ordinary hand was small, neat, masculine, with not a superfluous touch in any stroke, and very rarely an erasure. But it was not so easy to read as are many more irregular hands that at first sight look less clear.

In later years he made note-books for the purposes of his chief political struggles, just as he had made them for his lessons to working men at Smethwick and Birmingham Heath. In one little black book he kept—Fouqué-like—miniature *dossiers* of many members of the House of Commons and of many candidates. We cannot doubt that he was born with the rarest capacity for marshalling all the forces of his being to serve his main purpose, whatever it was. No man of equal fame ever owed more to the power of taking pains. He was especially preparative when he had anything in view that depended on his contact with others. In all things he was a pattern of method. "Old Mr. Joseph" may have implanted this discipline. "Young Mr. Joseph" persevered in further self-discipline, until exact performance of all the day's work on its day became second nature. At the height of his elastic vitality, this habit of order, clearness and celerity robbed drudgery of its dullness and almost of its name. Success never came to him at beckoning; he conquered it by concentrated aim and unswerving exertion. He owed nothing to fortune, but again and again did what he did in fortune's despite.

CHAPTER V

FAMILY AND FRIENDS—MARRIAGE AND SORROW

(1857–1863)

THE Lighter Side—Letters from London—His Twenty-first Birthday—Alpine Holidays—Physical Energy without Games—Many Recreations—Falling in Love—Marriage to Harriet Kenrick—Brief Happiness and Desolation.

I

AT this period he is as light-hearted in his hours of ease as though the strenuous side of his nature did not exist. It is far from being a life of all work and no play. "Joe" is not a dull boy. He is a young man in high feather as well as in dead earnest, very ready to enjoy himself on all occasions.

Full of affection for his family and friends, he kept close touch with home in London. For some bright glimpses we are indebted to his two Harben aunts, nimble letter-writers with a witty touch. One letter from Aunt Ellen [1] bubbles about two historic events in immediate succession—the family celebration of Joe's twenty-first birthday and the cutting of a first tooth by her grand-niece Penelope:

July 7, 1857.

I write to congratulate you on Pen's first peg. I can fancy your inward rapture and the nurse's outward delight. How well I remember lecturing Sophy Lock on violent excitements—feeling, myself, every nerve quiver. What were the Pyramids to that enormous object of interest which after all, by the bye, was more felt than seen!

. . . . . .

[1] She became Mrs. Preston, noted in the family "for her brightness and wit". "It is reported that my father as a boy used to run up to her, saying, 'Aunt Ellen, do make me laugh!'" (Sir Austen Chamberlain's *Notes on the Families* . . .)

I have bought Fergusson's *Handbook of Architecture*, 2 vols., for Joe and have sent it this evening to be ready for the morrow. I wonder how Caroline [his mother] will get on. . . . The longer I live the more convinced I am of the horrible unreal state in which our conventionalities place us—there will Caroline be, anxious about eels and entrées, when, behind all that, her mother's heart is welling up with love and thoughts too deep for words, full of hopes and aspirations for her first-born, and full too of the recollections of the day when that young man, now *nearly* fulfilling all a mother's heart could wish, lay by her side a baby. I can fancy your Uncle Joseph offering best cuts and passing the Madeira, while a more costly liquid glitters behind his dimmed glasses. . . . Here endeth the first chapter of priggism. I saw your cook to-day. Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain—so I have no doubt she is true and useful. I have a new cook on the 24th—but blessed are ye who expect nothing.[1]

A convincing anticipation of the family scene in London when the hope of the family came of age.

The next glimpse of him comes two years later in a delightful letter from Aunt Charlotte, Mrs. Bailey. In the interval he has measured himself with John Bright and Mont Blanc. He comes up from Birmingham to join the company at his parents' house on a grand occasion. They are giving a dinner of no ordinary importance to them, and holding a reception after it. For the shining light of all Unitarianism is to be there—one whom Gladstone once described as amongst the "greatest thinkers of the age". James Martineau is to be the lion of the evening—an exciting yet awesome visitor. So almost might pious Catholics expect the Pope to a family party. The excellent letter from Aunt Charlotte is too long to give in entirety, as it deserves, but some passages are like glimpses from *David Copperfield*:

March 30th, 1859,
271 HOLBORN, W.C.

. . . I arrived at Highbury about twenty minutes to six and was ushered into the drawing-room by a very quiet, pleasant-looking waiter. Caroline has had him several times. There were Joseph, Caroline and Mary all seated, looking rather stiff and uncomfortable and as if they were dreading an avalanche, but very nice; Caroline [Joseph's mother] her young pretty looks on. . . .

[1] From Aunt Ellen to Fanny Martineau.

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My going in relieved the stiffness a little, as we talked of indifferent matters and so took their thoughts off the fear of the overpowering intellect of the chief guest. Mr. Nettlefold presented himself next, and then came Joseph's [the father's] dreadful Incubus, and coming face to face with it in the broad daylight all his imaginary fears vanished. . . . The talk was cheerful and rather noisy for so small a party (young Joe had joined us) till dinner was announced. . . . Champagne and Hock in course. Mr. M. enjoys a good dinner and never refuses the wine. . . . I never saw a dinner better served. The two Josephs, Mr. Nettlefold and Mrs. Martineau were busily engaged conversing together. . . . I plunged boldly into Comte's philosophy trusting to Mr. M.'s help for swimming safely ashore. . . . At about a quarter past eight the gentlemen made their appearance and we had coffee; then the evening company began to arrive in quick succession.

That company included "old Sam Sharpe", the celebrated but speculative Egyptologist—who said of himself, "I am a heretic in everything even among Unitarians"—and Snider, known for his new gun, "delivering a little lecture to all who would listen". Aunt Charlotte gossips on:

The roofs of the houses and all high places were thickly covered with snow, and it looks like Christmas as depicted in the *Illustrated News*. It has been raining this evening so I do not expect to see any remains of it in the morning.[1]

Martineau became by marriage a near connection of the Chamberlains. His son married the daughter of the happy-hearted woman who wrote the above letter. We must always remember at this stage that there is a large group of Unitarian families—Martineaus, Nettlefolds, Kenricks, Oslers, Rylands, Russells—connected by marriage and innumerable cousinships. A former chapter remarked that they were an intelligent circle. At a later period of national politics Whigs and Tories and alienated Radicals were inept when they assumed that "the man from Birmingham" had never been acquainted with good company before he beheld the benches of the House of Commons in their after-dinner array.

[1] From Aunt Charlotte (Mrs. Bailey) to her daughter, Mrs. Russell Martineau.

II

CHAP. V.

Æt. 21–27.

The very first letter of Chamberlain's own that we have is written to his mother from Switzerland in August 1857, a few weeks after his twenty-first birthday. At that time the craze for mountaineering was as romantic amongst young men in Birmingham as elsewhere. Of scenes so familiar now to every imagination, yet always as fresh to first sight as though no one had known them before, Joe writes from near Chamonix with full enthusiasm expressed in short strokes: "Here we are on our route to the Jardin and after six days, averaging nine hours walking in each, exclusive of all halts, in first rate spirits and not the least tired. . . . 'I have lived', *i.e.* I have actually crossed three glaciers".

He goes on to say that from the top of the Col St. Théodule he has had his first great view of the Alps; and everyone knows what that means: "Far as the eye could stretch from the ground at one's feet to the horizon—one vast expanse of snow-covered mountains—some of the loftiest in Europe—snow-fields and glaciers. There is the great Matterhorn, the most extraordinary mountain in the world, rising like a pyramid, solitary and towering, over an immense snow-covered glacier—here, the grand Breithorn magnificent in form and dimensions, round-crested and enormous—part of the Monte Rosa chain, vividly white in the distance—the Lyskamm—the two mountains some 11,000 to 12,000 feet high, Castor and Pollux—the three Queens, sister peaks, literally dripping with glaciers — the mountains of Italy. . . ."

Twice after this he returns to Switzerland for his summer holidays. The next time he takes, with elated vigour, a fine round demanding hard going and endurance; he does nothing by halves. He sees the Lake of Lucerne, walks from Flüelen to Andermatt, thence over the St. Gothard into Italy; from Domo d'Ossola he turns towards Macugnaga at the foot of Monte Rosa; zigzags backwards across the frontier to the Weisshorn. After brushing acquaintance with the Gorner glacier, he swings on again from Zermatt by the Théodule Pass to Aosta. This not being enough for him, he proceeds to crowd into this holiday nearly as much more. Marching back towards Mont Blanc, he crosses from Courmayeur over the Col du Géant to Chamonix. Swinging round

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again into the heart of the Alps, he strikes over the Col de Balme down to the Rhone Valley, and then to Kandersteg and Grindelwald, finishing in brave style by climbing the Wetterhorn.

To our peril in life do we seek to repeat great joys in the same places. His third and last Alpine effort was by no means an equal success. It was in the summer of 1860, a wretched season of rain and cold. After many disappointing days he obstinately climbed the Breithorn in bad weather, feeling very unlike himself: "Presently I got rather knocked up. I was perfectly sensible and laughed with the guides; only absolutely done up. I never felt before that feeling, sometimes described by travellers in the mountains, of utter listlessness and indifference as to the future, with only the one constant yearning for rest and sleep. Of course, they would not let me sleep, but somehow or other they dragged me to the top. We saw nothing."[1]

With difficulty they got him down again from the summit of the Breithorn to the Riffelhaus. His bitten face swelled, his lips were hideously distorted; next the skin began to come off "like paper," as he remarked, and he was miserable for a week until rapid healing began. Then he started to tramp again harder than ever, in spite of infamous weather, and had some great views. We can pass over the details of this itinerary. One touch is like him. "Soon we got out of the storm and then commenced gliding down the snow like fun . . . a particularly agreeable way of locomotion—fast, humorous and yet comfortable."[2] Other thoughts on this tour became more to him than scenery. For one thing, he realised that he was in love. For another, luckily he had a pocket *Shakespeare* in his baggage. When confined to his room for a week he began to read some of the plays more thoroughly than ever before, and with surprised increase of comprehension.

At this time, and for long afterwards, he was all compact of physical hardiness and vital spirits. His indifference to team-games went with an energetic zest for personal activity in other ways.

It is a complete mistake to think that he knew nothing of what are called the manly exercises. Slim, sinewy and lithe as a young man, he was not only a tough pedestrian and clamberer but a good swimmer. Walking after dinner with his friend Arthur

[1] To his mother, August 2, 1860.

[2] To the same, August 7, 1860.

Kenrick, afterwards his brother-in-law, he suddenly swarmed up a lamp-post to light his cigar. He managed the Debating Society's Rifle Corps. For some seasons, when he was older, he went on fishing holidays. As for other recreations, he played chess with his father and others. His love of gardening became in its turn an engrossing delight. He never missed a dance if he could help it. Well into middle life, as in earlier, he revelled in amateur theatricals. In serious things he was absorbed; in enjoyment none was gayer.

Much later, when the demands of politics became exacting, he found most rest in quiet pleasures. In conversation with Sir William Tilden and others, he maintained, on principle, that men cannot make the most of their brains if they use up too much energy in physical exercise. Some great physiologists have thought the same—that the excess of the English passion for sport blunts the native edge of the English mind. But rules in this matter cannot be quite the same for any two persons.

III

At this point we reach a strange epoch in his private life. Strange because there was to be another like it; and these tender and tragic experiences altered him for ever. He fell in love. Love and marriage lifted him into felicity, and then a stroke of death cast him down into the deepest shadows and darknesses of the heart and mind. For nearly three years he knew happiness beyond his thought before; and when it ended he was desolate as the wilderness in the night. "As I came through the desert, thus it was; as I came through the desert: all was black." Well, on the whole, for mortals in this life that they are saved from foreseeing.

The responsibilities upon his shoulders had been so much those of a mature man of business, and his other activities so much those of a good citizen that, as his story moves on, we are tempted again and again to forget how very young he is. At twenty-four he has his dream. From the first in Birmingham he had found some of his closest friends amongst the two Kenrick families—well-to-do in another line of manufacture, and leading members of the Unitarian congregation. Acquaintance there ripened into intimate friendship.

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The Archibald Kenricks of Berrow Court liked the young man. More and more the young man felt he liked their daughter. They met at the same houses, at gatherings in connection with the New Meeting, at dances. At this fluttering but indefinite stage of the charming trouble he sends her four pages of Ingoldsby rhymes in copper-plate penmanship (with whimsical illustrations by another hand) reproaching her and her friend for declining to come to a ball because they thought it would not be select; whereas he swears that they have missed a coruscation of brilliancy and a refinement of elegance worthy of Mayfair:

> And I think we can show
> E'en a Charity Ball need never be low,
> For though
> It may haply intend
> The poor to befriend
> It isn't by asking the same to attend.

For Joe, as full of "Ingoldsby" as he used to be of Dickens, has a local reputation for quick ingenuity in rhyming, and he is in request at verbal games.

It is, so far, the simplest of stories. As the Kenricks afterwards said, he is "a most affectionate person", but he is as devoid of romantic expansiveness as he was of aesthetic fluency in the Alps. None the less, this attraction, not rapturous nor headlong to begin with, flowers into ardent love in a very natural way.

Absence did it. When he has been ill and wretched, the weather foul, the whole holiday a disappointment but when he reads Shakespeare "as never before", absence in the Alps makes him think more and more of a girl's face; and he knows that his heart is caught. In the few weeks after his recovery and return from Zermatt his wooing prospered. At the end of October 1860 he proposed to Harriet Kenrick and was accepted. It is satisfactory to know even of him that, though little given to nervousness, he faced with unwonted perturbation the interview with her father.[1] But all was right there too. The parents gave consent and blessing. They relinquished to him a treasured daughter, but if they had to part with her, she was in this case well-bestowed, and would still live near them.

Congratulations showered. During an engagement of about

[1] Letter to his mother, November 1, 1860.

Thrupp, Birmingham

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

HARRIET KENRICK

At the time of their marriage in 1861

nine months they felt themselves more and more of one mind. They had long rides together. The lover had taken to the saddle for this attractive purpose. Just after the engagement, he wrote to a friend, "I am at present in an ebullient state of satisfaction and may make you envious".

They were married at the New Meeting House in July 1861 when they were both twenty-five. Their chief anxiety had been that amongst the wedding presents four grand pianos threatened to appear together. For the honeymoon they went to Penzance, where they felt as though they never had seen colour before. All the hues and forms of Nature seemed enhanced in the eyes of this unjaded pair—the deep blue of the sea, and the deep orange of the lichens, and the rocks and the boulders.

The marriage was singularly happy. Harriet was a devoted, inspiriting companion; a capable manager; helpful to all about her, quick to believe the best of everyone. Her husband himself wrote at that moment when memory is most awake and unbearable: "She had the most keen and yet the most innocent capacity for all earthly enjoyment. The beauties of nature, music and art, the society of friends and acquaintances—all these she appreciated to the utmost. She was glad of worldly prosperity and of the comforts and pleasures that money can give, but she used these as not abusing them, and had so strong a sense of purity and devotion that I do not believe any earthly prosperity could have spoiled or altered her."

IV

Their first child, Beatrice, was born to make their lives still brighter, and all things seemed of glad promise.

In Broad Street, Chamberlain amongst its foremost men of business was conspicuous for successful ability. There, no one doubted that he would go far. The full achievement of his original and daring genius in industrial organisation came later and must be reserved for another chapter. But the firm already was entering upon the long strides of its prosperity, and he meant that it should carry all before it. Quitting the ancestral house and trade, after 120 years of it in Milk Street, City, the father was now about to follow his son to Birmingham and to

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start in another branch of the metal manufacture. Both parents were coming to settle near "our Joe" and to make a new home at Moor Green Hall.[1] His sister Mary was to be married to William Kenrick, his wife's brother. He had learned already to rejoice in the orchids at Berrow Court and in the azaleas at Timothy Kenrick's. To please his wife he now first took up gardening on his own account. At Christmas-times amateur theatricals were kept up with high jinks of merriment, "Mr. J. Chamberlain" figuring in every comedy and interlude. Were not all things chiming together?

Nearly two years had passed. Then Harriet began to feel a curious disquiet gently borne, but not wholly to be removed—a presentiment that she would die in childbirth. Her husband tried in vain to smooth away these thoughts. Her first confinement had passed so well, there seemed no reasonable cause for fear. Sometimes her own misgiving was allayed. On Friday, October 16, 1863, her second baby was born, and it was a boy.[2] Anxiety was over, and happiness seemed fulfilled. It did not last two days. On Sunday came a turn seriously for the worse in the mother's state. Chamberlain, unable to believe it, was told to prepare himself for yet worse. She sank rapidly. On Tuesday she said, "Well, I have had a very happy life, and I am perfectly happy whichever way it is". On Wednesday she was delirious; and, after midnight, she died.

Of little avail are any words in these hours of mortal loss. For a short while, two years and a quarter, he had known the best the world can give and, without warning, it had been taken away. His wife, with little Beatrice in her arms, had been used to see him to the door each morning when he went to business, and liked to meet him in the same way when he returned in the evening. Now, the lot of the living was the harder. He was only in his twenty-eighth year. Immediately after the burial he wrote a long letter,[3] too intimate to be quoted much, but from it this account is taken. Wrenched out of that mind so reticent in personal things—intense in feeling but little gifted in

[1] "By 1863 the Milk Street business was of little importance compared with the screw factory at Birmingham and was finally closed" (Sir Austen Chamberlain's *Notes on the Families*).

[2] Joseph Austen Chamberlain, afterwards Chancellor of the Exchequer, Leader of the House of Commons, Secretary of State for India, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

[3] November 11, 1863.

emotional utterance—the following words are enough: "There seemed to be such immense resources of happiness in store for us in the future that I know now there was only one blow which could possibly have dispersed them all and taken every interest in this life away for a time. . . . As I write all this, and think that I am never to know and feel her love or delight in her ways here again, I declare it seems almost impossible to live."

Like many he said it and, like many, he had to live, but with persons of strong nature it is not done without lasting change. He was not of those who take comfort easily. He had to learn instead the meaning of a word amongst the greatest as sternest of human words—fortitude. To their maternal grandparents at Berrow Court his little children were taken, and he went with them. Even they could not console him then nor for long after. At first he could scarcely bear their dear faces, not for less love of them but for anguish of memory. From this time there was an annealing of character and compression of temperament. This first blow went far towards the final fashioning of the man. But fate had not done with him. He was to be softened again for a time, only to be hammered once more and wrought finally into the steel of endurance.

BOOK II

1863–1876

CHAPTER VI

A POLITICAL AWAKENING

(1863–1869)

STOICISM, Duty and Growth—"Working, Waiting, Remembering"—His Late Development in Politics—1866 and the Reform Agitation—Bright and Birmingham—A New Life—Household Franchise—For what?—"Power and Ignorance"—An Education Society—The National Reproach—Chamberlain's Plan for a Universal and Compulsory System—The Foundation-Stone of his Public Career—The Birmingham League Created—His Rise in the Town, and his Agitation in the Midlands—"Waiting for the Bill".

I

PRECOCITY often disappoints, but late starters may run far. Chamberlain was anything but precocious in politics. Until he was well over thirty no one supposed that any public destiny was reserved for this young provincial, and he did not dream of it. The later tale that he had parliamentary aspirations from the first is quite mythical.

For several years after Harriet died relentless work was his anodyne. He carried his unsparing application through a long day. "Mr. Joseph", as before, was at the office on the stroke of nine and did not leave till six. During that time he would work as hard as it was possible for any man to work. This is the testimony of one of his clerks who lived to be a patriarch, and could say nearly half a century afterwards, "I never knew a man who could work harder, and faster, and for longer hours".[1] We all know how he retained this trait when he abandoned commerce altogether for public life; but this was not to be for a decade yet. Indefatigable as he was, stern as he could be, in administering his

[1] George Titterton's recollections of "The Real Chamberlain", *The Searchlight*, Birmingham, November 13, 1913.

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affairs, he did not neglect the courtesies. It was thought to be a mark of good manners in business that, in his dealings with other firms, he did in person things usually left to subordinates by principals who took less trouble. More than half his waking hours were given to Nettlefold and Chamberlain, and by the strong advance of the firm he was best known.

In the evenings he turned to his welfare work with a stoical diligence still more helpful than formerly. Especially he pursued his educational interests, not conceiving whither they were to lead him. We have sight of him in his Sunday school teaching for the Church of the Messiah. Mr. Spurgeon once said that good Sunday school teachers are "real Right Honourables".

Pupils remembered him as animated in instruction and prompt in discipline. Inseparable from his eye-glass, he kept on his tall hat and overcoat, used his umbrella as a pointer, and walked about the room while he spoke. He was feared and liked. At the night-class on Tuesday he still taught history. Botany he taught; discoursed on "Reason or instinct in birds and animals"; and commented on *Paley's Evidences* when that book was not yet defunct. All this was nourishment for his own mind; teaching botany, for instance, was one of his ways of learning it after he took up gardening, and perhaps no bad way. For a while his scholars noted that he was a saddened man. Later he set himself to amuse them. His natural resiliency began to reassert itself, but his outward air of high spirits often concealed moods of profound dejection. There was no inward cure. Intense in emotion, drilled in suppression, we know now what he went through, but hardly his nearest knew then. Perhaps none but his mother, of whom he was to write after her death, "No one ever lived of a more loving, kindly and sympathising disposition".

Of two contrasting pictures of him, one is by a friendly hand, the other by his own. "He was at that time *persona grata* in Birmingham society, where his wit, his kindness and his good humour made him a universal favourite." But at this very period we find the man himself writing intimately in another strain to a friend:

> I am not getting rich very quick nor likely to achieve any special distinction—I work at a lot of things without any very serious interest in any. Sometimes I manage to forget myself and then I am tolerably con-

tented. . . . So I go on working, waiting and remembering—in fact every present participle except hoping—and time is going on, and I am four years older than I was four years ago [since Harriet's death] and sometime or other I shall be dead and perhaps the other thing—not that this possibility sensibly affects my cheerfulness.[1]

A friend of these early years notices another characteristic—his darting shrewdness when the lids of his eyes drew closer, a habit he always kept—a warning or amusement to those who knew him well. What his contemporaries at University College School had called his "alertness", his Birmingham friends now called his "all-there-ness". The same thing. "We used to say that we should have to get up very early in the morning to take in Chamberlain." They recognised a man who left his own stamp on any matter undertaken. But he was not heard of outside his business acquaintanceships, the Unitarian congregation and his own social circle.

"He began all too slowly", says the same witness, "to interest himself in the public work of the town."[2] "All too slowly" in this connection is curious when we remember what Chamberlain became afterwards. If he did not take any active part in politics until near his thirtieth year, it was not the least because of any indifferentism in his temperament, but because his whole mind and time were engrossed by other things. At length he was induced to join the North Warwickshire Registration Association, working vainly against the veteran Toryism of Newdigate, and the milder Conservatism of Spooner and Bromley Davenport. Soon after, he was one of the rank and file when early in 1865 Birmingham formed the Liberal Association, whereof much indeed will presently be heard in these pages. But these were drowsy days in the nation's politics, and even Birmingham was Sleepy Hollow by comparison with the upheaval now at hand.

II

Chamberlain's own awakening came in 1866, when national apathy in domestic affairs was suddenly roused out of drowsiness.

[1] Written in summer 1867.

[2] From a valuable source—"An Address delivered by Mr. C. E. Mathews on the occasion of his unveiling a portrait of the Right Hon. J. Chamberlain, M.P., at the West Birmingham Liberal Unionist Club, on Tuesday, May 12th, 1891", and afterwards published.

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Seven years past had seen nothing to fight for. Palmerston's foreign policy and Gladstone's finance together had satisfied commercial middle-class people like the Chamberlain-Kenrick clan. The American Civil War overshadowed home questions. About that struggle there was at first more division in the Midlands than in Lancashire. But in young Chamberlain's sphere of life, Liberals and Nonconformists, who at first had doubted where right lay, were all for the North after Lincoln proclaimed the abolition of slavery. Now that conflict, lately won, set up vibrations of political idealism and democratic emotion throughout the world. To realise this fully one must have talked, like the present writer, to veterans who were then in their prime.

And next, "Old Pam" was dead at last. What that meant to the England of that day is hard to convey. For he remembered Pitt and Fox like yesterday; he had been a volunteer in 1803, and had he chosen might have been Chancellor of the Exchequer before Waterloo. We might seem here to exaggerate the effect of any single statesman's death, but a wise contemporary, Walter Bagehot, has left convincing testimony: "At his death all at once a new generation started into life; the Pre-'32 all at once died out".[1] Palmerston saw well that a long age was passing with him: "Gladstone will soon have it all his own way; and whenever he gets my place we shall have strange doings".[2]

The total alteration in politics came in a few months. A moderate Reform Bill was beaten. The people had not seemed to care much about it. To the politically minded amongst the working classes in Birmingham and elsewhere, the Reform Bill of 1832 was a Whig cheat in middle-class interests. Lassitude followed the failure of the Chartist vision. Hope of wider reform had revived again in the early 'fifties and sometimes after, but had little force from the outbreak of the Crimean War to Palmerston's recent death. Now, somehow, the instincts making for a new era were in the air, and the popular temper in Birmingham, quiet as it seemed, was quiet like gunpowder before ignition. Lowe's brilliant cursing and hostile prophecy; Bright's eloquence, inciting and majestic in the opposite sense—the new

[1] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (*Works and Life*, edited by Mrs. Russell Barrington, vol. v. p. 118).

[2] The Marquis of Lorne, *Palmerston*, p. 205.

wind of change blowing through the general atmosphere of the world in 1866—all stirred the working classes to a demand brooking no stay. Trivial in themselves, but emblematic of transition, were the pulling down of Hyde Park railings and the Home Secretary's tears. Through the summer and autumn of 1866 the Reform agitation was the beginning of our democracy to-day. As Bright was the leader of the struggle, so was Birmingham its centre.

III

The morning of Chamberlain's public life dawned then. It was in the August of that year of awakening. An immense demonstration at Birmingham left an ineffaceable impression. It was like the gathering of hosts for a crusade. Employers and work-people, together in it almost to a man, made an army with banners and with captains. The factories were shut; Nettlefold and Chamberlain's works with the others. All the "heads" agitated with the artisans. With the Mayor leading, a quarter of a million people marched to Brookfields, outside the city, where platforms were like islets in a sea of heads. Numbers there remembered the first Reform Bill and the Political Union; and how Attwood's intrepid sobriety restrained the Birmingham men when they talked of marching to London 100,000 strong, and meant it.

Amongst the multitudes was the subject of this biography—otherwise he might never have had one. New influences entered deeply into his being that day. In the evening he was in the excited host cramming the Town Hall to hear Bright. They were rewarded that night by his nobility, reason, scorn, emotion. As an orator proper at this time he surpassed contemporary and subsequent comparison, as Chamberlain lived to judge. He evoked 1832. "I remember that time well. My young heart then was stirred with the trumpet blast that sounded from your midst. There was no part of this kingdom where your voice was not heard. Let it sound again." Another heart, a boy's no more, but young enough and ardent in spite of its sorrows, felt to the core this new "trumpet blast". As he recalled many years later: "They were great meetings in those days, 1858–66. The men poured into the hall, black as they were from the factories . . .

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the seats then used to be removed from the body of the hall, and the people were packed together like herrings." From this moment he is in the thick of it amongst the rank and file of Birmingham until reform is carried under Disraeli. That exploit was no "leap in the dark", but a bound as nicely measured of its kind as any recorded in the audacities of political athletics.

From this episode dates Chamberlain's active antipathy to the Whigs and his hankering thought that more might be obtained from a weak Tory Government faced by a strong Liberal Opposition than from a Liberal Ministry under Whig restraint. Unless this again is well grasped, the course of his political career cannot possibly be understood. He became an uncompromising partisan, but a partisan for the most definite purposes. Party for its own sake he never put foremost. Like Chatham, whom he resembled in imperious instinct and trenchancy of decision, he never shared the earlier Burke's view, when arguing for the Rockingham system, of the relative importance of "connexion". Henceforward these threads—zeal for party as a means with promptness to challenge its defaults—run right through his life.

IV

For him, when once bitten by politics in this way, practical steps followed of course. His chapel work and social service since his youth had been unconscious but excellent training. The cause of popular education had been his private interest; it was now to become a passion with him in public affairs.

We had Household Franchise at last. What was it for? What was the vital matter for the people? Who could doubt the answer? We were about to give power to ignorance. These were Chamberlain's thoughts, and he followed them out. Many other advanced Liberals in Birmingham called it "madness" to introduce the beginnings of a democratic franchise without taking steps at once to create a national system of elementary instruction. Lowe was wrong, no doubt, when he denounced the ignorant working classes in the lump for being what legislative neglect had made them. But Lowe became unanswerable again when, as soon as he was beaten on the franchise, he cried, "Educate

your masters". It was long since Dean Alford protested that there was "no record of any people on earth" so opulent and powerful yet "so grossly, generally, ignorant as the English". Not long after Queen Victoria came to the throne Prussia was spending £600,000 annually on public education. England in the same year, as Brougham bitterly said, voted £30,000 for education—and £70,000 for building royal stables. That spirit still lingered up to the late 'sixties, as Matthew Arnold knew too well.

Events abroad had sounded a warning for England. The victory of the American Union under a man of the people was hailed everywhere as the victory of intelligent democracy. Quickly following this, the overthrow of Austria and the union of North Germany were as much the triumph of Prussia's schoolmasters as of her drill-masters. By comparison with that leaner country the state of public education as of housing conditions amidst our wealthy society was semi-barbarism.

With all his heart and soul Chamberlain believed that beside this scandal every other social question was insignificant. These ideas were floating in the general air, no doubt, but until now he had no clear sense of how to set to work. Then his cause found him rather than he found his cause.

"If we could have an Education Society on the right lines, the very stones in the street would rise and join us." These words started a movement. They were spoken in a conversation between two men. One, and he made the fervent remark, was Jesse Collings, the son of labouring people in Devon risen to the head of a thriving firm in Birmingham: the other was George Dixon, now Mayor and soon to be member for the City, a devoted citizen. Several private meetings were held at George Dixon's house. As a result, they did have their Education Society in Birmingham; and soon it was indeed as though the very stones rose to join them.

Copying an earlier Manchester model, the Society was formed on February 13, 1867. This meeting also was at Dixon's house. Dr. Temple—who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury—came over from Rugby, where he was then "Head", and Mr. Capel, Inspector of Schools, showed that in Birmingham nearly half the children, and those the poorest, received no education.

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And amongst the working-class citizens now about to be created by Household Franchise not far from half could not read a newspaper.

What of the citizens of the future? Two days after the meeting just described, Disraeli in the first weeks of the session diverted the nation by announcing that parliamentary reform was no longer a dividing line between parties nor a question of fate for Cabinets. To realise the state of Birmingham we must remember that a few months later the Murphy Riots broke out. An anti-Catholic lecturer of that name had infuriated the Irish settlement. Rising with fury, they met the military with brickbats and any other missiles they could seize. Then the Protestant mob stormed the Irish quarter and wrecked it. "I went down next day to see the place", said Chamberlain; "the roofs were gone, the fronts of the houses also; the remains of the fires were still to be seen." Small wonder that enlightened leaders of political reform dreaded giving votes to ignorance.

V

Chamberlain was an active member of the new Education Society from its beginning, giving himself to what at first he thought an enterprise of local scope. He was only one of a large committee, but at this chance to further the thing he had at heart he worked as though he were secretary.

Very soon, enquiry opened his eyes and made him a political agitator. He fairly set himself to get at the facts at home and abroad.

From this spring of 1867 dates the first full bundle of his letters. They show how his horizon is expanding. He has a big idea—not for the last time—and convinced of its truth, he is seeking right and left to amass information in support. Amongst his correspondents are experts like Dr. Temple of Rugby, and he writes to distinguished Americans—one of them William Emerson of Concord, brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson—for information about the school system in New England. His chief object is to obtain evidence and authority in favour of universal and compulsory education. This purpose, and nothing less, he is making his own in advance of his colleagues.

Indirectly he gets into touch with the mind of Matthew Arnold. From the *Athenaeum* that writer, then most distinguished in the subject, answers as an expert with an air:

MATTHEW ARNOLD TO RUSSELL MARTINEAU

June 21st 1867. . . . The American Schools do not interest me much, because, as in this country the *summum bonum* is to be a lord or a millionaire, in America the *summum bonum* is to be a millionaire and culture cannot really make much way when that is the *summum bonum*. The Prussian schools are so good because to be a servant is there as much a *summum bonum* as to be a millionaire. Fraser has never seen the continental schools. He is quite wrong when he says our inspected schools are as good as the good primary schools anywhere. They are not to compare with those of North Germany and Switzerland. But people in general say not what is true but what they wish to be true.

Ironic homily upon culture and philistinism threw no light on the gross problems of Birmingham. The more thoroughly Chamberlain investigated at home the worse his discoveries. He felt outraged by two inseparable scandals. One, physical degradation as the cause of moral evils; the other, moral degradation as, in its turn, the cause of physical evils. Born and bred in the filthy courts and alleys, or in the dingy tenements of the longer streets, nearly half the children of the working class, everywhere, ran wild; ragged, barefoot and begrimed; in a state of decivilised barbarism sadder than savagery. Nurtured in dirt, they were exposed to disease and too early acquainted with depravity as with squalor. Numbers, sent prematurely to toil before their frames were set, became stunted and malformed. From these conditions, though so largely removed since, the urban race of Great Britain has never fully recovered. In face of these things we were then the richest of commercial societies, while relatively our provision for popular education was the meanest known.

The new Society found that in Birmingham less than half the children were in irregular attendance at school, while most of the rest were street-arabs. And these things were what first roused this young widower to become in his thirty-first year a political combatant.

VI

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The Society did what voluntary means enabled. Search was made through the slum streets for children absent from the schools, such as these were. Over seven hundred shabby streets were systematically visited to find out what was happening to the swarms of children who lived in them; masses of melancholy details were acquired and classified; money was raised to pay some thousands of school fees for the children of the poorest parents. For want of parliamentary action, it was all like drawing water in a sieve. Though in the first year a sum of over £1000 was subscribed, funds then fell short. But this experience convinced Chamberlain of one thing. Without national legislation the problem was hopeless. With him conviction and action were the same. The original programme would not do. It asked modestly for rate-aided schools but not for obligatory attendance.

Against that sorry modesty, it is amusing to find the born maker of "unauthorised programmes" producing the first of them before he has been a year in public affairs. Just here let us note him well, and how, without meaning it or thinking beyond the task in hand, he fixes the foundation-stone of his political career. He does this in a document dated 1867. Covering two folio pages of blue paper in his own handwriting, it contains the detailed plan for a more advanced movement entitled by him the "National Society for the Promotion of Universal Compulsory Education". This first of the primary documents concerning him runs so:

PRINCIPLES

1. That it is as much the duty of the State to see that the children are educated as to see that they are fed.

2. That the right to education ought not to be restricted by any Religious Tests.

3. That the enjoyment of this right ought not to depend on the caprice of charity or the will of parents.

OBJECTS

1. To collect and disseminate information as to the state of Education in Great Britain.

2. To publish and defend the principles of the Society by means of Public Meetings, Lectures and the Press.

3. To urge on Government the duty of immediate legislative action.

It follows from these premisses that the action of the Society will be extended to secure:

1. Free Education, at all events in cases where parents are unable to pay.

2. Unsectarian Education in all cases where new schools are established or supported by the National Treasury.

Amongst other explanatory remarks he has phrases foreshadowing much in the future:

These new Schools should be supported by local rates largely supplemented by Government Grants. The management should be local under Government inspection.

These schools should be unsectarian. The nation cannot justly be called on to support schools which are in part devoted to the propagation of sectarian views.

Lastly the establishment of these schools should be imperative in districts insufficiently supplied. The education of the poor must not be suffered to depend on the chance circumstances of their neighbourhood to a charitable squire or clergyman.

All this meant a parting of the ways. So far the Birmingham Education Society was a collection of miscellaneous philanthropists, and its members comprised all political and religious persuasions. Generally agreed in desiring some legislation, they were far from agreed on the kind of legislation.

On the real question Chamberlain had put his insistent finger. Compulsory attendance or not? That alternative was the pith of the matter, and he had made up his mind. In this case he was right. Right or wrong, henceforth the strength of his own decision amidst the waverers was what would count. Almost from the first he had been out and out for compulsion as the only way to ensure his personal object—the elementary education of every child. Others in the mixed Society agreed with him. He and they were outvoted.

Then he decides, once for all, that the minority within the Society must appeal to a majority outside by founding a

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new organisation political in its character, national in its scope.

Pioneer of the plan, he becomes the life and soul of its operation. The National Education League, soon to be formed, will be turned by him into the most powerful engine of agitation since the Anti-Corn Law League.

VII

From this, Joseph Chamberlain's new public activities compelled attention, and he rose fast. Always he dated his public career from 1868. In view of a General Election, the Birmingham Liberal Association was reconstructed to make a fighting-machine then and for long afterwards unique in politics. Chamberlain figured at meetings. His earliest reported speech was delivered on what may well be called his "first of June". In 1868, it was the prelude to predominance for so many years on the platform and at Westminster.

The day was a Saturday, and in the evening the Edgbaston Liberal Election Committee held a public dinner at the Plough and Harrow Hotel. "Mr. J. Chamberlain occupied the Chair", and amongst those present was George Dixon, who had become one of the members for Birmingham at a by-election in the preceding year. The chairman's speech, marked by some well-turned passages of banter, was laboured as a whole. But there was one touch of almost uncanny prescience on the part of this independent mind newly brought from industry into politics. We must quote enough for curiosity:

"Whilst he had always appreciated the power of Mr. Bright's oratory, he had never thought it so great as in some of his recent speeches; in which he persuaded, implored and warned his hearers to do a tardy act of justice and to redress a grievous wrong. . . .

"But there was a new party—a young Conservative party—urged on to the conflict like the Crusaders of old by the whole force of the local clergy. . . . The difficulties with which they [the Liberals] would have to contend would arise if at all from within. . . . Measures, not men, must be their motto." [1]

[1] Quite unconsciously echoing Chatham in 1765. "Measures", however, do not carry themselves but require adequate "men"—and efficient Cabinets as well as individual leaders. The cry only recurs, it would appear

The instinct in these last words was soon fulfilled. And he soon showed all the makings of a platform speaker.

In the great General Election a few months later, when addressing crowded meetings his satire was pungent and applauded. The polls in November were accompanied for the last time by the traditional open voting. In Birmingham, nominations on the hustings were made after the old fashion before a tumultuous mob surrounding a wooden platform erected, behind the Town Hall, on a stretch of waste ground looked down upon by shabby walls. Hour by hour the state of the poll could be taken in a manner soon to vanish after the Ballot Act.

By the recent Reform Act, Birmingham, given an additional seat, was to return three members. But by the new law each citizen had only two votes. This device—there was more to be said for it by Disraeli than young Chamberlain would then admit—sought to ensure the return of one member by the large Conservative minority in spite of Bright's boast that "Birmingham is Liberal as the sea is salt". Birmingham in O'Connell's spirit drove a coach and six through the law. By perfect organisation the Liberals throughout the city were drilled in each ward to make an ingenious allocation of votes. They returned all their three candidates by huge majorities.

This was the first appearance of the "Vote as you're told" system—derided by opponents and doubted beforehand by friends. The result of the poll on November 16, 1868, is worth giving for reasons proper to this book:

(L.) DIXON, GEORGE	L. 15098
(L.) MUNTZ, P. H.	L. 14614
(L.) BRIGHT, JOHN	L. 14601
(C.) *LLOYD, SAMPSON S.* (not elected) . .	C. 8760
(C.) *EVANS, SEBASTIAN, LL.D.* (not elected) .	C. 7061

Radicals in Birmingham regarded that declaration as a dividing line between past and future; and as a decisive event of their political lives. Privilege, they thought, would go down despite all devices.

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when "men" are able to arouse a public demand for "measures". The personal factors and the legislative objects never are quite separable.

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In the country as a whole the Liberal majority was just 100. A few months before, in July, Church Rates had been repealed at last. Gladstone's assault on the Irish Establishment had roused Nonconformist hopes of English Disestablishment at no far remove. Sweeping educational measures in a Nonconformist sense were anticipated. Little understanding the depths and subtleties of Gladstone's reserves, dissent dreamed of full victory. Nothing less was dreamed by young Chamberlain of Birmingham, a concentrated spirit but a neophyte and *ingénu* so far in his ideas of Cabinet working and parliamentary action.

VIII

No sooner was the General Election won, towards the end of 1868, than the advanced group in Birmingham concentrated on their project of a National Education League.

In the early weeks of the New Year, just after Gladstone formed his first Government, meetings were held again at Mr. Dixon's house. Before the polls the education issue had been vehemently agitated. In the spring of 1869 the Irish Disestablishment Bill was passing through the House of Commons. The enthusiasm of Liberals, and especially of dissenters, was at a height. At the same time the National Education League was launched. The object was "the establishment of a system which shall secure the education of every child in the country". This the object, what of the means? As Chamberlain conceived, the means implied three plain principles. First, full school accommodation provided by local rates, supplemented by Government grants; second, all rate-aided schools to be unsectarian and free, and under public management; third, powers compelling all children of suitable age to attend school.

In this sense, the first circular[1] went far and wide. Far and wide it succeeded. In a few months, and before any public demonstration had been made, it was said that 2500 persons, including many of the best-known political thinkers and writers in England, joined the League. At the first meeting of the Provisional Committee £7000 was subscribed in the room, and this

[1] Dated, "Birmingham, February 1869". For a full account of the League's activities see Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest in England*, 1882.

sum was trebled before long. Chamberlain and his father gave £1000 each; their relatives, the Kenricks, with their partner Nettlefold, gave together over £3000 more—these subscriptions alone representing a quarter of the whole working capital of the League when it got into full swing. There was ardour in those days.

Of this Provisional Committee, George Dixon was elected chairman, and Jesse Collings honorary secretary; Chamberlain vice-chairman. But Dixon had to give chief attention to his parliamentary duties in London. Chamberlain from the first was the mainspring of the League before he became formally the head of the inner executive and acting chairman. This was his beginning of public power.

On October 12 and 13, 1869, the first annual meeting was a great assemblage. Papers were read and addresses given by men as eminent and various as Professor Fawcett, Thorold Rogers, George Jacob Holyoake, Auberon Herbert, Captain Maxse. The Town Hall overflowed for the evening meeting concluding the conference. Following a series of long speeches by well-known politicians—like Fawcett and Mundella—Chamberlain rose to move "That the Executive Committee of the National Education League be requested to prepare a Bill based upon the principles of the League for introduction into the next session of Parliament".

This was his principal appearance up to now. His audience, besides the enthusiastic mass, included many distinguished and critical hearers. Taking care to speak shortly and with judgment, he took his audience by a telling attack upon suggestions to extend the denominational system, and moved to a studied but sincere close. The speech raised him: "Directly or indirectly from 80,000 to 100,000 working men have at these meetings in Birmingham given their support to the platform of the League. . . . It is not merely a question whether this country shall continue to maintain its position among the nations . . . it is also a question of the future of your own class. . . . If denominational education is to be extended in England how can you in justice refuse denominational education in Ireland? . . . You will have the State spending money on mutually destructive objects" [opposite teachings] "and its patient people will be called upon

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in one breath to swallow the poison and the antidote and to pay the bill for both. . . .

"Our choice is between the education of the people and the interests of the Church. Education to be national must be unsectarian. . . . I prefer to believe with John Stuart Mill that the time is shortly coming when the working class will no longer be content to accept a religion of other people's prescribing. And if this matter of education is taken up by the working class as we hope and believe it will be, and if it is made part of their political programme, then our success is certain, and we may yet live to see the glorious time when, prizing knowledge as her noblest wealth and best production, this Imperial realm, while she exacts allegiance, will admit the obligation on her part to teach those who are born to serve her." [1]

Mr. *Punch* applauded the League:

> Showy face for mean matter till now,
> 'Twas Birmingham's business to plan;
> Her new work's to make substance of show
> In our schools, and her metal is—*Man*!

IX

We must keep constantly in mind the belligerent atmosphere of Birmingham politics. The speech just quoted was not his first in the Town Hall, where he was to make so many during the rest of that century and into the next. A few months before he figured in a stormy gathering. The Liberal Association called a town's meeting for June 15, 1869, to support Irish Disestablishment against the Peers. In an old-fashioned manner, impossible in our day, Mr. Mayor essayed the extraordinary task of presiding over Liberals and Conservatives alike, arrayed against each other on the dais and the floor. Chamberlain had been chosen to second the resolution pledging the town to uphold the Bill. His début on that Town Hall platform, and on that unruly occasion, was a test of nerve. He had to make way against a rising surge of disorder, but, received with lusty cheering by the Liberal part of the crowd, kept his head and got through. The tenour of this his first, not last, attack on the

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, October 13, 1869. *Report of the First General Meeting of Members of the National Education League*, Birmingham, 1869.

Hereditary Chamber was interrupted by Liberal shouts and Tory execration. The majority in the Commons of one hundred and fourteen, he argued, represented the wishes of 6,000,000 people. The sixty peers threatening to constitute a hostile majority in the Lords represented three things:

"They represent—some of them—the oppression of feudal lords in times gone by, when people were expected to be grateful for being ruled by an aristocracy. And in the second place they, or some of them, represent the wealth acquired by the possession of land in the vicinity of great towns—like Birmingham or Manchester—which has enriched its proprietors without care or labour on their part. And lastly they represent—and very imperfectly too in many cases—the intelligence and acquirements of ancestors long since dead who unfortunately had been unable to transmit to their descendants the talents by which they had risen." (Loud laughter and cheers.)

"It was of such men as these that the greatest member of the House of Lords who ever sat in that body, Lord Bacon, related that it was customary to say in his time that they were like potatoes—the best part was underground." (Cheers, laughter, and "Give it them!") . . .

"I venture to hope that the effect of this and of similar demonstrations will be that the House of Lords will be advised in time, and will take counsel of the most intelligent and most able of the Tory peers, and avert, for this time at least, the spectacle of a conflict between the Peers and the people."

This sort of invitation to peace at Westminster was little likely to avert the sulphurous omens of conflict that night in the Town Hall.

In the chair, the Mayor for the year happened to be not a very capable personage; and could not quell the tumult. The Conservative speakers, rising in their turn, were refused a fair hearing. Striving in vain for an hour and a half, their gesturing shapes were visible but their justly indignant voices were lost in the din. At last the outraged Conservatives, in the spirit of "Up and at 'em", charged the platform and drove the Mayor from the chair. In all his challenging public career Chamberlain seldom knew a rougher scene than this at the beginning

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of it, but his own side voted him a tremendous success. "Give it them!"

After that he concentrated wholly on Education and the League. In his utterances towards the close of the year, while the Cabinet was framing its Education Bill, he asserted and entirely believed that "the vast numerical majority of the people of this country are in favour of national, compulsory, free and unsectarian education".[1]

He warned the Government against compromise contrary to the principles of the League. He declared that "tinkering legislation is not expected from a Cabinet of which Mr. Bright is a member". But who, after all, was this young Mr. Chamberlain? Bright had not the least notion of what was in him; Gladstone probably had not heard of him yet—not just yet.

At the end of November, the coming leader of dissent and revolt made his first notable appearance away from Birmingham, and delivered a lashing speech at Leicester. To continued cheering he sat down. Official politicians might scout the first rumours of a new national disturber, but events soon signalised the outsider.

"This agitation when it commenced about two months ago", he said, "was like a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, and it is growing and spreading over the whole land." Out of that cloud was to break in a few weeks a storm none yet expected.

Before the end of this eventful autumn for him—prelude to a far more eventful spring—another thing had happened, though at the moment seeming of small account. No one guessed the part he was yet to play in the municipal life of Birmingham, but he had been persuaded to become Mr. Councillor Chamberlain. He was at business in his office when a deputation called upon him, headed by Councillor William Harris, himself no ordinary man, though yet to be known as father—so far as idea, not creation, went—of the great "Caucus". They asked Chamberlain to put up for St. Paul's Ward, and he was elected in November 1869. How little they knew what they were doing! The big factory, as it now had become, of Nettlefold and Chamberlain lay not far away. From the first, his municipal constituents

[1] Speech to the Liberal Association, Bradford, 1869.

included a number of his own working people already prepared to stand by him through thick and thin. St. Paul's Ward in due time would become part and parcel of the parliamentary division of West Birmingham.[1]

[1] From the recollections, intimate on Birmingham matters, communicated to the present writer by the late C. A. Vince.

CHAPTER VII

A CRISIS AND A CHALLENGER—CHAMBERLAIN FINDS HIMSELF

(1870)

THE Bill revealed—"A Staggering Disappointment"—Chamberlain in Action—Gladstone's Government and the Nonconformists—Causes of the Split—A Great Deputation to Downing Street—Gladstone and Chamberlain Face to Face—The Bill passed by Conservative Support—Chamberlain carries on the Struggle—The Life and Soul of Resistance—"He began where other Men left off".

I

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No Ezekiel's wind can make dry bones live in some valleys. Nothing seems more dead and gone to-day than the education-battle of the early 'seventies in the Victorian age, though its results revolutionised and transformed all the social and political conditions of the country. In this chapter and the next we are engaged not so much with legislative history, though partly it must come in, as with a revelation of character in action. Nothing quite like this emergence of a new man in national politics had been known.

When the session of 1870 opened, in a year about to change the fate of Europe, the Nonconformists were full of sanguine expectation. Especially the Birmingham school were on tip-toe. No doubt there had been some ominous rumours about Mr. Forster—the real Minister for Education, though not yet in the Cabinet.

For twenty years that forcible, obstinate, warm-hearted man—often taken for a typical Yorkshireman, though not so by birth—had deplored the barbarous illiteracy of the English working classes and advocated remedy by State action. An ex-Quaker,

ejected from that communion because of his marriage with Dr. Arnold's daughter—"for doing the best thing I ever did in my life"[1]—his religious sympathies were broad. Formerly regarded as the coming leader of dissent, it was now whispered that Forster was not sound on disestablishment; and felt tenderness towards the Church of England, without inclination to join it. These charges did not disturb the unsophisticated confidence of Nonconformists generally in the coming Education Bill. After generations, the dawn of religious equality—and perhaps a little more—as they supposed, was at hand. They awaited it with emotion.

For their confidence they had other reasons. They trusted in John Bright; they trusted in the intolerable revelations of national ignorance chiefly brought to light by their own efforts in the last two years; and they trusted in their own power.

They had found that out of 4,300,000 children within the school age, 2,000,000 were not at any school; another 1,000,000 went haphazard to such uninspected and inefficient schools as any quack or tyro might keep; while only about 1,300,000 attended schools—mostly belonging to the Church of England—maintained by subscriptions, fees, grants, and subject to inspection. Of all children between three years of age and twelve, it was computed that 50 per cent were at school, 10 per cent at work and 40 per cent ran wild. We were so far behind every other civilised country that, in the eyes of Nonconformists like Chamberlain and his friends, the national reproach cried to heaven. In face of the facts they implicitly believed that no Cabinet including John Bright would bring in a measure rejecting their ideas of constructive policy. And they assumed that a Liberal Government largely owing its existence to their support would not dare to repulse them.

In particular, the National Education Leaguers thought their enlightened logic irresistible. In the months before the parliamentary session of 1870, when Forster's Bill was impending, new branches of the League had been formed at Manchester, Bradford, Bristol, Leicester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Leeds, Huddersfield, Exeter, Bath, Warrington, Devonport, Carlisle, Wednes-

[1] T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of William Edward Forster* (2 vols, 1888), vol. i. p. 286.

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bury, Merthyr Tydvil. Adhesion all over the country was enlarged every day. There were well over a hundred branches altogether, and twice as many public meetings had been held. In the large towns Trade Unions, and other working men's societies, joined the League, and in their limited way swelled the subscriptions. The guarantee fund amounted to £60,000—something in those days. To this national total, the Chamberlains *père et fils*, the Kenricks and Nettlefold contributed by themselves nearly a tenth of the whole. Of pamphlets and leaflets a quarter of a million copies had been poured out. The rapidity of the League's progress and the energy of its work had never been surpassed in the record of public organisations.[1]

Chamberlain was the driving-wheel—acting chairman of the League, head of the Executive Committee. True that on the Executive there was no complete agreement with his own trenchant educational formula—"universal, compulsory, unsectarian and free". But if Dale, like Fawcett and Mundella, thought the word "free" premature, the League was solidly identified with the other three principles. Up to the very morning of the event at Westminster, what Nonconformity, at the height of its power in English politics, expected with all its soul from the Gladstone Cabinet was national education on unsectarian and compulsory lines bringing in every child of school age.

II

Almost stunning was their disappointment; and deep the dismay of many, but not of one. Forster revealed his Bill in the second week of the session, February 17, 1870. His speech as a speech triumphed in mastery of matter, in lucidity of exposition and force of earnestness. Five in number were his main proposals: (1) Division of the country into school districts; (2) Deficiencies of school accommodation ascertained, the denominations received a year's grace to fill up gaps; (3) Thereafter, where accommodation still might be inadequate, School Boards to be formed with power to set up rate-aided schools; (4) Such School Boards "might" take power to compel

[1] Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest in England*, pp. 203-206.

attendance [this vulnerable idea was soon ridiculed as permissive compulsion]; (5) The Boards might provide as they pleased for religious instruction, subject to a conscience clause entitling scholars at request to exemption from any or all religious instruction.

Thus, of the Nonconformist Charter, as we may call it, not one point only but all four points were flatly rejected by the Liberal Government. The national system was not to be universal and compulsory; nor unsectarian any more than free. In fact, there was not to be any unified national system. In this vast new field the cause of the Establishment was not only safeguarded but reinforced by "dualism" weighted in favour of "the Church". Or so it seemed to most dissenters at that moment.

In Chamberlain's sight and his League's, and no less in the sight of the Free Churches as a whole and of their leading divines —whose ideal of disestablishment in Great Britain as in Ireland was inseparable from their hope of common schools—the Church of England was now to be doubly established and doubly endowed by the Liberal Ministers whom with a boundless enthusiasm, unchecked till now, they had helped to carry into office. The Nonconformist heart knew its own bitterness.

Denominational schools might be multiplied—and they were —before any Board School could be built. Nay, wherever a Conservative majority enabled, the local authorities might teach Church doctrine amongst the thousands of villages with but a single school. That old rankling grievance was not allayed but inflamed. In the villages the "conscience clause" would be a penalty clause for humble dissenters bold enough to claim its protection. Most would not dare. "Permissive compulsion" was denounced as "permissive ignorance".

III

So began the fateful quarrel, at first more or less tempered, but soon deadly, between the Nonconformists and the Liberal Government. It is best described not in the impressive terms usually applied to political revolts and uprisings, but in colloquial terms as a tremendous "row" of a domestic character. Under Joseph Chamberlain's unsubduable and endlessly ingenious

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leadership the "row" raged for four years. It was second to none in effect amongst all the causes converging at last to bring down Gladstone's great administration of 1868–74.

How did this sudden and bitter struggle come about, with consequences reaching far beyond the immediate cause of dispute?

The Nonconformists had not comprehended Mr. Gladstone nor he them. They had not begun to understand the singular Ministerial and Departmental circumstances accounting for the genesis of the Bill; and explaining persistent blindness afterwards to the case for some sound concessions. The Prime Minister had not been thinking of the Nonconformists. For months he had been plunged, submerged and lost in the depths of the Irish land question, and the defect of his great gift of concentration prevented him from being equally good on two great questions at one time. Not only so. On education and related questions he was profoundly a Churchman.[1] He did not for a moment dream of touching the Anglican Establishment, though he had hewn down the Irish. As little did he dream of weakening the position of Church schools, much less of closing the future against them. Shortly said, on this issue, the Prime Minister's mind was the negation of Nonconformity. No man had less appetite for unsectarian Board Schools.

Gladstone's Conservative mood was devoutly shared by Lord de Grey (afterwards Marquis of Ripon), President of the Council and exponent of the Education Bill in the Cabinet, who desired, as he wrote to the Queen, "the smallest possible interference with existing schools".[2] Still outside the Cabinet, Forster, Vice-President of the Council, was the real Minister for Education. Sympathising with the work of the Established Church, he was guided by Victorian and Tennysonian watchwords of political judgment. They had their value. He wished to build on available foundations, not to destroy them; to preserve "anything in the existing system which was good";[3] and he was a man so saturated by his own honesty and the sense of it, that

[1] One more interested in education than engaged by party, Matthew Arnold, remarks, when writing to his mother on June 16, 1870: "Gladstone, who is always shifting, is this year in a much more Anglican mood, as I judge by a curious letter he wrote me a week ago" (*Letters of Matthew Arnold*, vol. ii. p. 34).

[2] Lucien Wolf, *Life of Lord Ripon*, vol. i. p. 233.

[3] Wemyss Reid, *Life of Forster*, vol. i. p. 461.

opposition, especially from those who had been his friends, made him brusque, irascible and obdurate.

There was something else. Curious to say, the most powerful of all the influences moulding the "dualism" of the Bill was exerted behind the scenes. Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth has been called "a giant amongst public servants". Though he had resigned office years before, his unequalled mastery of the whole question was shown in pamphlets and correspondence. He was a dominant influence on the Department he had founded. In all main respects the new educational system proposed in 1870 was his creation.[1]

The Nonconformists had relied above all on John Bright. He could not help them. Inferior in administrative energy, as supreme in pure eloquence, that orator never was so important in office as out of it. While his faculties were undimmed he, like Gladstone, had been absorbed in the Irish land question. For some time a distressing debility had been creeping on his powers, and from now for some years his mind was under a cloud. Nonconformity, quite contrary to what it supposed, was virtually unrepresented in the Liberal Cabinet of 1870.[2]

In these circumstances the Education Bill, great though faulty, was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

IV

For the moment, when explaining his measure on February 17, Forster carried the benches completely by cogency, simplicity, honest warmth and sweet reasonableness, an ideal combination of qualities for a first-class speech in a human House of Commons. Until the next day, when the cold print of the speech was under the eyes of Chamberlain and the other Nonconformist

[1] Frank Smith, *The Life and Work of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth*, chs. viii. and ix. Matthew Arnold said that he deserved a statue to commemorate him as chief architect of a national system of education. Forster, in introducing the measure, described Sir James as "the man to whom probably more than any other we owe national education in England". The *Dictionary of National Biography* calls him simply "founder of the English system of popular education". The claim seems incontestable.

[2] John Bright's health broke down in January 1870, before the Education Bill was introduced in Parliament. Incapacitated throughout the year, he at last resigned the Board of Trade in December; and did not reappear in the House of Commons until April 1872.

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leaders, they did not at all seize what it meant. Hardly could they believe their eyes.

The moving and driving spirit of the National Education League felt in a flash that, as against the divided sects of Nonconformity, the influence of the English Church would be fortified and extended; that in effect, as has been said, it would be doubly established and endowed. Of this dual system no single dissenting body could take equal advantage.

As a matter of political history, we must understand these actual feelings and convictions, however coolly we may now judge them. That the clergy and the Tories had never ventured to hope for such concessions as were now made[1]—this was the view of dissenters of all shades. They were full of "mingled surprise, anger and dismay",[2] but united as they had not been for a generation. For this, then, had they supported with all their strength Gladstone and Irish Disestablishment. For this had they strained every nerve to give a Liberal Government its powerful majority.

In their hour of trial they found their man, for that man found himself. There might be defeat in the long run. There would be no capitulation.

Nothing in the history of politics and agitation in this country is quite like the struggle now undertaken by the new protagonist, not yet thirty-four. His instant irruption into this mid-field of national affairs was like the impetuous offensive of a young Condé; with this difference, that in him aggressive rapidity would soon prove to be allied with inexhaustible persistence and tactical resource. Who was he? they soon asked. Who? A crude provincial, a dissenter, a purveyor of screws. He had never been in Parliament, had never stood for Parliament. Shortly before he had become a Town Councillor—thought rather a low function until he raised its repute even in Pall Mall. Certainly Gladstone, until now, had never heard of him. The Cabinet, framing its Bill, never surmised the possibility of such a person. How could it? Yet within a few months this daring intruder becomes a force in national politics; and to such effect that all Governments and parties henceforth will have to reckon with him until he is dead and after.

[1] Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest in England*, p. 210.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 220.

V

The Government found that it could not, as Forster hoped, "canter over" the religious difficulty. On the very day after the introduction of the Bill, Chamberlain began without loss of a moment.[1] He never hesitated. All his qualities as a man of action, and the defects of his qualities, now came out—swift and punctual in dispatch; prompt in decision; fibrous in tenacity; over-sanguine; full of venture; but full of resource; too blistering in attack and retort; but never fumbling nor shrinking. He is for fighting to the last.

Immediately, the Executive Committee of the League meets under his chairmanship, and he breathes aggressiveness. The hundred branches and more of the League are "circularised" in a few days, and the fighting response is nearly unanimous. Members of Parliament are to be made to know the views of their Nonconformist constituents.

There must be a deputation to Downing Street. For this purpose he writes to George Dixon, M.P., senior member for Birmingham (in the sense of topping the poll in 1868), and one of the chief founders of the movement. The League communicates directly for the first time with Gladstone. Within one week the campaign is in swing.

TO GEORGE DIXON, M.P.

Feb. 26, 1870.—I think we have anticipated all your suggestions. We have written to Mr. Gladstone asking for an appointment before the Second Reading or as near to it as may be convenient to him. We have sent out an inflammatory circular to all the branches urging large delegations—also public meetings and petitions.

We have set on foot a requisition for a Town's meeting and the Nonconformists are going to have a special meeting of their own. . . .

March 3, 1870.—We have already notice of 170 members to attend the deputation on Wednesday to Downing Street, and no doubt shall muster double the number. . . . We have asked branches in boroughs to send up as many Mayors as possible.

[1] On this day a full advertisement of subscribers to the National Education League covered a page of *The Times*—at that time an uncommon stroke of publicity requiring Chamberlain's consent and suggesting his initiative.

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The meeting of Nonconformists yesterday was large, influential and determined.

If Forster forces his Bill through the House there will be a tremendous revival of the agitation for the disestablishment of the English Church. . . .

If you see Mr. Forster you may safely tell him that he has succeeded in raising the whole of the Dissenters against him, and if he thinks little of our power we will teach him his mistake.

Letters go out to-night to every dissenting minister (Independent, Baptist, Unitarian and Wesleyan) in the country, and you may rest assured that "all the fat is in the fire".

Simultaneously with the letter just quoted a Central Nonconformist Committee, with headquarters in Birmingham, was created to fight the Bill. Presently, as the work of this Committee extended, Dr. Dale and Dr. Crosskey together called at the small draper's shop kept by Schnadhorst, already known as an apt politician but hitherto an expert amateur. Now he was engaged as a professional for part of his time. Soon his whole time was required—no quite inconsiderable event in the chronicles of political organisation.[1] This Committee's petition was soon signed by over two-thirds of all the Nonconformist ministers in England and Wales.

On invading Whitehall in unprecedented force Chamberlain's mind was intent, but beforehand he had full days. The invasion was to be on Wednesday. On Monday, March 7, he made the speech of the night at the Town's Meeting in Birmingham called in response to a thousand good signatures given in a few hours. He had grown rapidly in little more than a fortnight. Born tactician he was, as is allowed, but already with far-reaching strategical foresight as well, he does not confine himself to the Nonconformist case but sounds another point of war—the first significant challenge of the coming social Radicalism:

"One thing is certain, that if education becomes general we shall no longer find Dorsetshire labourers contented—I will not say contented but compelled—to work for nine shillings a week—and a taste of meat when something happens to a sheep on a farm. . . .

"Mr. Forster when he introduced his measure said he had

[1] Armstrong, *Henry William Crosskey*, 1895, p. 267.

solved the religious difficulty. I fear he has only shirked it. . . .

"If it [the Bill] be carried without amendment, I venture to say it will be the signal of a conflict such as the country has rarely seen, the issue of which may be prolonged but cannot be doubtful. . . . Something not less important than the disestablishment and disendowment of the English Church." (Loud and prolonged applause.)[1]

He is mistaken in the closing prophecy—though for years yet the same conviction will be cherished by dissent, by Radicals in the main, and by much of the detached intelligence of the country. But he is rousing a spirit that will attain other ends. Next day, Tuesday, he incited the Municipal Council to be "true to the great principles which have made this town what it is—a stronghold of religious liberty and a fortress against clerical assumption and bigotry throughout the country".[2]

VI

Then he travelled to London. On the next day again (Wednesday, March 9), as a conspicuous member of the great deputation of protest organised by the League, Joseph Chamberlain for the first time met Mr. Gladstone face to face.

We must try to fix a scene amongst the most interesting in this biography. Mr. Gladstone is just over sixty: the challenger from Birmingham not yet thirty-four. Out of conjecture at this moment is the sequel between them, stretching through another quarter of a century. These two men are diverse and opposite—in appearance, in mind, in temperament, in utterance, in social and religious attachments—in everything but in their different kinds of courage, of will and of fighting-craft, where we might say they had somewhat in common. Gladstone's own commercial origins lay only a little further back than Chamberlain's, though he had an eighteenth-century reverence for aristocracy and never was forward to recognise talent without the regular stamp, social or academic.

A more considerable deputation has never entered Downing

[1] Town Hall, Birmingham, March 7, 1870.

[2] At the Town Council, March 8, 1870.

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Street than this one, filing, towards three o'clock in the afternoon, through the front door of Number 10. There are 46 members of Parliament and about 400 members of the League representing nearly a hundred branches. On either side of Mr. Gladstone stand Lord Ripon and Mr. Forster. Mr. Dixon, M.P., briefly introduces the visitors, and calls upon "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain . . . who will address you on the general question".[1]

The new man states the matter. He dwells on the strength of the movement and the rapidity of its growth within five months. Give them a little time longer and the Government will be in no doubt about the opinion of the country. He goes on to summarise with close acumen, amidst loud and repeated applause from his crowded colleagues, the dissenters' argument against the Bill. Gladstone listens. Chamberlain speaks with a hint of his stabbing staccato in time to come:

"They [the members of the deputation] have come from as far north as Newcastle, as far south as the Isle of Wight, as far west as Falmouth, and as far east as Ipswich. . . . We object to the year's delay. . . . We object, Sir, to the permissive recognition of great principles. . . . We object to the retention of school fees. . . . We believe that it is impolitic to ticket one class on account of their poverty. . . . But the strongest objections which we entertain are on the subject of the permissive compulsion and what I must be permitted to call the permissive sectarianism of the Bill. . . . The Dissenters object to this measure, which they conceive will hand over the education of this country to the Church of England—entirely in many parts of the Kingdom, especially in agricultural districts. . . . Any Conscience Clause will be absolutely unsatisfactory. Where it is most needed, there, Sir, it will be absolutely nugatory, because the parents will not dare to make use of it; they will be afraid of placing themselves, by signing such a document, under the ban of the squire and the parson. (Cheers.) Besides, Sir, we say that a Conscience Clause of any kind does not touch the hardships of which Dissenters complain—that the minority will in many districts be taxed to

[1] National Education League's pamphlet—"Verbatim Report of the proceedings of a deputation to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P. (First Lord of the Treasury), the Right Hon. Earl de Grey and Ripon (Lord President of the Council) and the Right Hon. W. E. Forster, M.P. (Vice-President of the Council), on Wednesday, March 9, 1870".

pay for the support of schools which are part of the machinery for perpetuating doctrines to which they have a conscientious objection."

Chamberlain concludes with the hope that the Government will "consent to remove from what we all think otherwise a noble measure those clauses which we conscientiously believe will inflict an intolerable hardship and oppression upon a large class of the community". (Loud applause.)

After a number of speeches Gladstone replied with all his skill in dissecting the minds of other men and reserving his own: ". . . Nothing can be clearer than that you take great objection to several of the provisions that are contained in the Government Bill. But at the same time I listened with great comfort and satisfaction . . . to the declaration of Mr. Chamberlain whom I may consider as in some sense, being your Chairman, the representative of you all—who did not hesitate to state that he thought in other matters, outside the limit of your objections, the Bill may fairly be regarded as a noble measure. . . ."

Presently rises a sharp colloquy between Gladstone and Chamberlain upon the League's very vulnerable alternative to the Government Bill.

The great statesman was courteous and Olympian: the new man from the provinces, intrepid and composed. "The manner in which he secured the earnest and rapt attention of Mr. Gladstone while purposely ruffling the temper of Mr. Forster was not easily to be forgotten",[1] said, many years afterwards, an eye-witness of this encounter. First impressions tell; on Forster's side they could not be friendly. The latent antagonism will come out in Cabinet affairs years after. We may safely judge that between the Prime Minister of the nation and the Chairman of the League, hitherto unknown in London, mutual perceptions were acute rather than promising. They under-estimated each other; then, as on other occasions. Looking even younger than he was—fresh, slim and hard—Chamberlain at that time had no reverence, Gladstone no premonition.

Nor must we forget that the speaker who follows Chamberlain's opening statement is young Sir Charles Dilke, M.P., twenty-

[1] C. E. Mathews (one of the deputation). Speech at the West Birmingham Liberal Unionists Club, May 2, 1891.

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seven, younger than Joseph Chamberlain. The comradeship dating from this day will count for much; and would have counted for much more had it not been frustrated by irreparable tragedy just when these two together seemed on the point of ruling the nation and the Empire.[1]

These few weeks are related in some detail, because they committed a Midland manufacturer to a political career.

VII

With obtuse superiority towards the Nonconformists the Government went their way. They might have done much to narrow the breach by consenting at least to the excellent Birmingham principle that instruction should be universal and compulsory —that, as Dr. Dale put it a few years before, "all children should be taught somewhere by somebody". Preserving dualism and without giving up the interests of sectarian schools, Gladstone, Forster and their colleagues might have guaranteed early and willingly the strict religious neutrality of board schools. No real concessions were offered. Instead, the Liberal Government fed the blaze of Nonconformist revolt.

A few days after the great deputation to Downing Street, the Second Reading debate began and took three nights.[2] George Dixon moved against leaving the treatment of religious instruction to the discretion of the local authorities. Extolling the Bill and his puritan ancestors, Forster would not budge. But a powerful speech by Mr. Winterbotham, whose signal promise was to be cut short by an early death, moved the House and shook the Government. To avoid a damaging division, Gladstone pledged himself to make some amendments. But they were not announced for more than two months; and when tabled they did nothing for peace. They were far from meeting Nonconformist claims.[3]

[1] The correspondence between the two does not begin until after this date. Dilke's impression long afterwards that the friendship began in 1869 seems to be mistaken.

[2] March 14-17, 1870.

[3] These amendments, proposed in Committee on May 26, conceded the election of school boards by ballot; extended the "Conscience Clause" to all schools receiving aid from rates or taxes; and provided that Government inspectors should not examine religious teaching in any school (Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest*, p. 223).

VIII

Chamberlain redoubled the activities of the League on behalf of its demand that the new local authorities should be prohibited from supporting sectarianism in any shape or form. Impelled by him, the Executive was a compact, expeditious affair of six or seven persons meeting at least twice a week, sometimes almost every day. Funds flowed in; meetings multiplied; publications were distributed on the scale of 100,000 copies a month. But before taking further view of his personal proceedings we must sketch as rapidly as possible—we cannot avoid it—the parliamentary drama of the Bill.

After the Second Reading in mid-March the next stage was postponed for three months. Debate was resumed in mid-June. There was hope of Liberal reconciliation. The next fortnight was fatal to the hope. Just before going into Committee the Prime Minister accepted[1] Mr. Cowper-Temple's clause excluding from all rate-built schools "every catechism and formulary distinctive of denominational creed". This severed the denominational schools altogether from rate-aid and left them solely to State grants. As a very plain consequence, State grants had to be augmented. On Gladstone's own initiative the proportion contributed by the Exchequer was raised from one-third to one-half of the total annual cost. Disraeli jeered that the Premier's endeavours, otherwise incomprehensible, would create "a new sacerdotal caste". The Government declared its determination to abide by the Bill as it now stood; and stuck by its guns. Ill-judged was the ultimatum.

For that decision meant defying Nonconformist rebellion and carrying the Bill by Conservative support.

On those terms the Bill was safe indeed, but dissenting anger rose to a pitch. The great Ministry, with the Liberal party as a whole, were henceforth fated to over three years of trouble and to final disaster. On June 24 over sixty Liberals went into the lobby against the Government. A few days later, when Jacob Bright continued the struggle, Liberalism was split to pieces. Jacob Bright was beaten by nearly two to one,[2] but only

[1] June 16, 1870.

[2] June 30, 1870. Jacob Bright's motion ran that in any schools where the Bible was read the teaching should not be in favour of or against the distinctive tenets of any religious denomination.

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because the Conservatives championed the Bill and saved the Ministry. For, on this June 30, of the Liberal rank and file less than a hundred voted with Gladstone; no less than 132 opposed him; and 133 walked out without voting.

For three closing weeks through the dog-days the tremendous "row" resounded in the House of Commons. Direct election of school boards was yielded by Ministers to Liberal feeling; but the cumulative vote, enormously favourable to minorities, was conceded to Church and Catholic feeling. On the proposal that school boards should be elected by ballot, the Conservatives in their turn were violently incensed. After an all-night sitting the gas was turned off vainly at four in the morning.[1] The House in full midsummer daylight wrangled for an hour more. On the last night of the conflict in the Commons, a celebrated and painful scene bitterly embroiled the Premier in person with the dissenters. Mr. Miall lamented that Nonconformists had been made to pass through the valley of humiliation by a Government they had created; they had been deceived and trampled on; but "Once bit twice shy!" At this Gladstone exploded:

> If my hon. friend has been bitten . . . it is only in consequence of expectations which he has himself chosen to entertain, and which were not justified by the facts. . . . I hope my hon. friend will not continue that support to the Government one moment longer than he deems it consistent with his sense of duty and right. For God's sake, sir, let him withdraw it the moment he thinks it better for the cause he has at heart that he should do so.[2]

In the country dissenters of Chamberlain's temper, and they were a host, were to take the Prime Minister at his word. The Bill passed Third Reading in the House of Commons on July 22. The Peers made no important change, and it became law on August 9.

For Chamberlain and his movement that was not a decision but a beginning.

IX

Through these five months since his first encounter with Gladstone, the new man must have wished himself in the

[1] Friday, July 15.

[2] Francis Adams, *Elementary School Contest*, p. 231.

House of Commons—an ambition deferred for over half a decade.

The direction of the League engrossed every hour he could spare from his business, just then entering upon its strongest years of expansion under his auspices. His public appearances, like his private letters, are few at this phase. It is evident that he gave himself with consuming energy to organisation at League headquarters. In April, however, at a great meeting in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, he made a speech long remembered by many who heard it. The Imperial Parliament, he remarked, was solemnly to adopt a principle of compulsion, leaving its permissive application to the squire, the parson and the beadle. He contrasted Disraeli and Forster without naming them: "As a Tory Minister brought in Liberal reform a Radical Minister has brought in Tory education".[1] That hit brought down the house.

A few months later, the spectacle of the Bill being carried in the Commons by Conservative votes he regards as the climax of betrayal. At this pinch many of the Leaguers were dejected. Not Chamberlain. He was twice as determined, after the passage of the Bill, to continue the struggle in the country and to fight on wider lines. Admiring the recent parliamentary performances of a debater now coming to the front, and afterwards known as Sir William Harcourt, Chamberlain breaks out:

TO W. V. HARCOURT, M.P.

July 2, 1870.—We are powerless in this House, and I doubt if anything short of a General Election will give us what we want. . . . As it is the Government has beaten all sections in detail and remains master of the situation for the present . . . but we shall endeavour to test the feeling of the country this autumn and at every by-election that takes place.

This is no empty threat. It is a thought-out purpose, and foreshadows through the next years the long guerilla harrying Gladstone's Government to its fall. To rub salt into Nonconformist wounds, Forster is now raised to the Cabinet—well deserving promotion for his own sake, and unfairly abused for a policy emphatically that of the Ministry as a whole. Making

[1] Manchester, April 21, 1870.

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holiday on the Yorkshire coast with his family, Chamberlain thinks aloud:

TO GEORGE DIXON, M.P.

Whitby, July 16, 1870.—I wish our side would fight like the Conservatives—the Bill would then have been doomed long ago. The Tories are never afraid of being factious and it is a great advantage to them. . . . *It* [the Bill] is not National Education at all—it is a trick to strengthen the Church of England against the Liberation Society and to pave the way for the *one* concession to Ireland which no English Parliament ought to make; and which, when made, will only prepare for that Repeal of the Union which I expect must come sooner or later.

We are preparing a circular and manifesto to our branches, and on the answer to that and on the Resolutions which may be passed at the next meeting of the Executive will depend the scope and character of our future action.

My feeling is that we must strengthen ourselves in the House of Commons at all risks. I would rather see a Tory Ministry in power than a Liberal Government truckling to Tory prejudices. . . .

I expect to return to Birmingham in a week and bring my caravan (nine souls in all) back with me. Meanwhile, I hope to form a branch here and give the Prime Minister's son some trouble at the next election.[1]

Again, from this, we see Chamberlain at this early phase in all his faults and qualities, crude and rash as yet in many thoughts and expressions; but in politics as in business a glutton for action. While the hated Bill is within a week of passing the House of Commons, where Ministers are accused of "using the Conservative alliance to ride rough-shod over their friends", he has not the least intention of giving in.

With scornful but inexperienced indignation he was encountering for the first time in politics the disappointment of ideals, that ordeal familiar to all veterans. His hopes not so long before had been bright as the morning and dear as life. His vision of one system of common schools with full facilities out of official hours for all sects to teach their faith to their adherents by voluntary efforts—that was no ignoble dream. No civic or religious unworthiness belonged to it; though made impracticable for ever,

[1] Mr. W. H. Gladstone, the Prime Minister's eldest son, was member for Whitby and retained his seat, after all, at the next General Election in 1874.

as the event proved, by the historic national habit of dualism embodied again in the first National Education Bill. Justified and great on the whole, that measure was marred by purblind rejection of his principle that primary education, however managed otherwise, should be compulsory and free.

As a Unitarian, Chamberlain called himself emphatically not a "nonconformist" but a "dissenter". Well must we understand his conception of common schools for all the children of the nation, with free entry for the religious efforts of all Churches at appointed times. This conception seemed to him—and it is his convinced imagination, right or wrong, that we have to explain—a higher cause than segregated sects in denominational schools. The Cowper-Temple minimum of religious teaching in the new board schools seemed to him, as to John Stuart Mill, a spectral unreality, a shadow play. Definite teaching by voluntary service had been the doctrine and discipline of his whole life. It was the inured tradition of his heredity.

Hence the Education Bill passed in the late summer of 1870 is obnoxious to every fibre of his being as a representative, born and bred, of the "dissidence of dissent". Though the Bill becomes an Act and a law in August by majorities in both Houses and by the royal assent—one week after the German armies break through the frontier of France in this thunderous year—he will not and cannot submit to formal Act and law. To him they represent injustice imposed by privilege.

Not habitually inflammable, he is excited and exalted by the fall of the Second Empire and the proclamation of a Republic in France only a few weeks after what he regards as the illegitimate triumph at home of the Established Church and Whigs and Tories; deriving their temporary sway from a narrow franchise. For a time he is in the mood to challenge everything established; monarchy included. But, especially, he regards Gladstone's administration as a Government of betrayal to be brought to book despite all its appearances of power.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST FIGHT AND THE FALL OF NONCONFORMITY IN ENGLISH POLITICS—CHAMBERLAIN AND THE LIBERAL DISRUPTION

(1870–1874)

CHAMBERLAIN spreads the War—A New Issue—The Battle on "Clause 25"—"The Key of the Position"—"Hampden and Ship-money" again—Birmingham beats the Government—A New Science of Majority Rule—The Guerilla of the By-elections—From Liberalism to Radicalism—Ministerial Ruin and the General Election of 1874—The Sequel for Religion and Democracy—Two Views—What might have been.

I

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WHEN the Bill became law in August there is a short pause. At home it is the holiday season. Abroad the German arms are sweeping towards Sedan and that spectacle of triumph and downfall overpowers interest in domestic politics. With no intention of being checked for long, Chamberlain looks ahead and has two purposes.

First, the League organisation must strain every nerve to succeed at the first School Board elections some three months hence. Second, he means to carry the fight into the parliamentary constituencies and to take direct action against Mr. Gladstone's Government at every suitable by-election. In the course of this latter campaign he gives himself more and more to general politics and emerges as the foremost Radical leader of his generation. Spread over several years this twofold struggle would make a spirited volume by itself, but here must be compressed into one chapter.

Meeting under his chairmanship on September 7, a month after the passing of the Bill, the League Executive resolves to maintain and extend the agitation. The new Act, turned against

itself, is to be used to the utmost "to secure as far as possible the establishment of unsectarian, compulsory and free schools". And, without deference to Ministerial Liberalism and against it if necessary, the future legislative reform of the Act is to be sought by supporting none but members of Parliament and candidates pledged to the League's programme. At Shrewsbury, where Nonconformist resentment was marked, the Government soon lost a seat,[1] and from this time the by-elections ran against them.

II

As speaker and organiser Chamberlain was the soul of the whole fight and his influence rose by leaps. He appealed for action to secure in every borough and parish Nonconformist control of the coming school boards so as to make the unsectarian system if not all-ruling at least predominant. This, in time, though not quickly, was to be achieved. Under his chairmanship the Central Nonconformist Committee[2] also determined to continue its efforts in concert with the League. He urged that Committee to widen its basis and to make itself a lasting force for promoting every Nonconformist cause in politics.[3] "They had been a little too moderate. They had formerly asked that there should be no increase of aid to denominational schools. They now asked that all grants of national money for denominational purposes should gradually be withdrawn."

He was becoming every day a more clean-cut speaker and adroit tactician. At the second Annual Meeting of the League,[4] just after the passage of the Act, one motion—and it received good support—demanded a programme of "secular" education for the future. At that moment it would have disrupted the League; he killed it by a short word—that the "unsectarian" platform was the only practical basis of unity and to proclaim secularism would "break to pieces" the whole organisation.

As well as Harcourt, Dilke was at this meeting. We find him, a few days later, cordially inviting the leader of the agitation to stay with him in London. The first of so many letters to

[1] Shrewsbury by-election, September 21, 1870.

[2] A body formed to watch the progress of the Elementary Education Bill, but not dissolved when the Bill became an Act.

[3] Birmingham, Carr's Lane, October 19, 1870.

[4] Birmingham, October 25, 1870.

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Chamberlain through three decades deserves for that reason to be quoted, and is terse as usual.

76 SLOANE STREET,
Oct. 27, 1870.

MY DEAR SIR—What day (except a Wednesday) could you dine with me? I should be very glad to see you sometimes in London and could offer you a bed for a few nights whenever you are coming up.—Yours truly, CHARLES W. DILKE.

Acquaintance made a little earlier now ripened into close political sympathy, though some years more passed before they became personally intimate and inseparable. A closer study of these friends as the duumvirate of Radicalism must be reserved for another place. Dilke already regarded Chamberlain as what he expected to be himself—one of the governing men of the Radical future. Twelve months before, in the autumn of 1869, a maturer judge in these things, John Bright, listened to an excellent little speech by Chamberlain at a breakfast meeting and made decided remark that this was "a man of whom more will be heard".

III

Toward the close of 1870, epoch-making at home and abroad, the first School Board elections were held. In these, women's suffrage and women candidates appeared for the first time in England. The combatants flung themselves into the fray with mutual execration. Denominationalists burlesqued the unsectarians as a faction both godless and expensive. The unsectarians parodied the denominationalists as the mean advocates of a bigoted ascendancy.

Chamberlain and his friends had set their whole heart upon success. They were dumbfounded by the results—even in Birmingham, where over-confidence led to a galling check. Helped by the cumulative vote, the Church party and the Catholics almost everywhere topped and swept the polls.[1] The very Mecca

[1] "The Tories and the Church party . . . achieved greater successes than they had done for generations in parliamentary and municipal contests." The system of voting papers under the Cumulative vote "was unintelligible to the great mass of the rate-payers. The result was that in the large boroughs one-half of the electors took no part." So with unabated heat twelve years after wrote Francis Adams, *History of the Elementary School Contest*, pp. 247, 248.

of the League, to its consternation, fell into the hands of the enemy. Birmingham was the first large town to set about forming a school board. The denominationalists won easily nine seats out of fifteen. The six unsectarians elected were at the tail of the list—Chamberlain thirteenth!

The reason was that the Liberal Association had made the mistake of grasping confidently at all the seats and running fifteen candidates. They polled a large majority of the electors but were beaten by the enormous advantage thrown by the cumulative vote into the hands of the minorities.

It was a drastic lesson and well learned by Joseph and his friends. From that humiliation sprang a spirit bent on making the power of the majority in Birmingham an exact and crushing science. The "Caucus" as a national machine would follow. Meanwhile Forster's system was hated the more. Chamberlain as usual derived double vigour and resource from defeat. He writes to Bunce, editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, that he is out to "fight tooth and nail" until the question is settled. He soon found an astonishing and amusing means of giving new life to the whole controversy and battering Gladstone's administration. He raised a new issue. Just when he seemed beaten, he became twice as dangerous. This was the first revelation of his mettle. Just as in the Irish controversy years later, he showed himself an opponent inexhaustible in tenacity and devices. In that particular respect he has perhaps not been equalled in English politics; certainly, never surpassed.

IV

From Birmingham and its School Board as a centre Chamberlain spread fierce struggle through the country.

What was the new issue this lynx-eyed tactician had discovered in the Act? It was in itself a little thing, but so by comparison was the historic cutty-stool flung by Jenny Geddes at the head of a bishop. Or as John Morley put it, himself in the thick of this "queer fray", the affair was like ship-money—a small levy raising a large principle.

The surprising manœuvre pivoted on "Clause 25", soon

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notorious.[1] It gave power to pay out of rates the fees for very poor children at any elementary school, denominational or other. The grotesque fact is that, unnoticed up to now by either side, the clause had slipped through the House of Commons without remark during the process of shuffling and renumbering other clauses in Committee. The Church majority on the new Birmingham Board proposed to make full use of this provision. The League had too incautiously taken Gladstone's assurance that the severance of voluntary schools from rate-aid was complete. One at least of the League's essential principles had seemed to be secured by the Bill however otherwise obnoxious. Now, what Parliament was supposed to have thrown out at the door was coming in by the window.

As yet the new kind of public elementary schools did not exist in Birmingham—nor in many districts for some years. Meanwhile there were no schools other than denominational. The application, however limited, of Clause 25 meant payments out of rates to sectarian schools under private managers. It was the sharpest possible challenge to principle—a violent irritant. Petty in substance, almost microscopic at the moment, the thing was a gnat in the eye.

Chamberlain was leader of the minority on the School Board. He moved that payment of money out of rates to denominational schools would infringe the rights of conscience and hinder the coming of free schools. The same contest breaking out on other boards disturbed the whole nation; rousing even Nonconformists who had been lukewarm till now. Before a twelvemonth was out, and when hardly any board school was yet opened, distraints for the recovery of rates were being made in a number of towns upon the goods of dissenters who refused to contribute to the support of voluntary schools.[2]

From beginning to end Birmingham was the cockpit of this

[1] The text of Clause 25 ran as follows: "The School Board may, if they think fit, from time to time, for a renewable period not exceeding 6 months, pay the whole or any part of the School fees payable at any Public Elementary School by any child resident in their district whose parent is in their opinion unable through poverty to pay the same; but no such payment shall be made or refused on condition of the child attending any Public Elementary School other than such as may be selected by the parent; and such payment shall not be deemed to be parochial relief given to such parent."

[2] Francis Adams, *Elementary School Contest*, p. 260.

bitter contention. The debates of its first School Board were on a level probably never excelled in any local body. They always drew a packed audience to the public galleries. Francis Adams, then secretary of the League and later its annalist, chronicles his own recollection. "The fortnightly meetings of the Board were looked forward to with the greatest interest and zest, partly because of the principles at stake, partly no doubt also because of the intellectual enjoyment they afforded. They were always inconveniently crowded by the public."[1] Another spectator records:

> In tactics, in the arrangements in private counsel of the plan of the battle and, above all, in the scheme concocted on the spur of the moment to avoid checkmate on a sudden and unexpected contingency—in these things Chamberlain was supreme.[2]

Words with him—we shall have to say it again for it is a *leit-motiv* in these pages—were but a means of action.

V

For three years the local question, as a key-point of the national question, was contested stubbornly foot by foot until the long scuffle was won by the Leaguers. And how? By another queer turn of the "queer fray". The Radical Town Council came into play against a School Board which was Conservative only by a fluke and for a while. The Board, of course, could not levy rates except through the municipal authority. The Town Council unwillingly met the first demand in 1871; but every subsequent precept they flatly refused to honour, in spite of the orders and scoldings of Forster and the Education Department.

Chamberlain told the Birmingham School Board that he himself and hundreds of people in the town would suffer distraint and let the bailiffs take their goods rather than pay a farthing to denominational schools under "Clause 25". To this resolve he pledges himself publicly in Manchester. "The last word has not been uttered. . . . I am a member of the Birmingham Town Council, and although I have no right to speak on

[1] *Ibid.* p. 255.

[2] N. Murrell Marris, *Joseph Chamberlain* (1900), p. 83. Miss Marris does not name her authority here, but is evidently quoting some first-hand witness.

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their behalf at this meeting, yet they are the guardians of civil and religious liberty, and I for one do not believe that they will honour the precept of the School Board, when it comes to them for such a purpose."[1] During the following months he proclaimed the same defiance at Newcastle and elsewhere.

His position, unbending as illegal, he maintained in the Town Council by a four-fifths majority. The Church party on the School Board threatened to apply for a mandamus, and at last they did. In May 1873 the Court of Queen's Bench ordered the Town Council to pay. The letter of the law was no solution. Far from it. The mandamus could not be enforced without wholesale seizure of effects amongst Birmingham householders determined to resist Clause 25 like the old church rate.

> For nearly three years the question was fought resolutely step by step; at the Board, in Parliament, in the Town Council, at the Education Department, in the Queen's Bench, and at every election and public gathering of Liberals in every ward of the borough. When at last the majority by mandamus from the Queen's Bench compelled the Town Council to honour the precept of the Board, they did not venture to enforce the bye-law they had made; since it was well understood that the levies would have been resisted in the homes of the rate-payers, and distraints on a scale wholesale and unparalleled would have been necessary to collect the rate.[2]

What would have happened in the Midlands had their civic Hampden fallen a victim to the bailiffs never can be known. For luckily before seizure of Chamberlain's goods and chattels could be attempted, the Church majority was swept away in the second School Board election of late autumn 1873. At that opportunity Chamberlain's machine, and with it the enthusiastic determination he inspired, worked with irresistible effect to reverse the discomfiture of three years before. The "Liberal Eight" were returned by tremendous majorities—George Dixon at the head of the poll and Chamberlain second.

In picturesque turbulence this contest stands out in municipal records like Fox's Westminster election in national. And it was itself of national importance. Chamberlain took out of himself

[1] Manchester, November 29, 1871.
[2] Francis Adams, *Elementary School Contest*, pp. 255-256.

the last ounce. At his meetings night after night he threw out his gibes and incitements. His speeches were what is called slashing. He describes one opponent as "remarkable for the weakness of his arguments and the strength of his language". "The schools ought to be free as the libraries and art galleries are free." "Sam Weller said that poverty and oysters went together—but that was before oysters rose in price." Mutual lampooning was ferocious. Immediately after his triumph Chamberlain sat down and dashed off to London the most rollicking and profane letter he ever wrote. It must be given in full, for it is an incomparable picture of a state of religious excitement in politics hard for this more secular generation to credit.

TO JOHN MORLEY

Southbourne, Birmingham, November 19, 1873.—You will be pleased to hear that we have given the "Beer and Bible" Tories a most smashing defeat. We have polled 291,000 votes to their 195,000, and seated all our candidates, who head the list of the new Board.

The fight has been tremendously hot and the incidents rather striking.

One clergyman assured his congregation that the Town Hall would be gutted if we succeeded—another declared that the Angels were anxiously looking for our defeat. They held political prayer-meetings against the atheistical crew that threatened to destroy the sanctity of English life—they one and all preached political sermons—they forged bills in the name of our people, urging them to vote for me as one who would "banish the Bible from the land and establish the Republic"—in short, they used every instrument of falsehood, bigotry and superstition—and yet they were beaten three to two.

One Revd. gentleman said the question really was "whether the Lord God should rule in the land", and enquiries are being freely made to-day as to whether the Almighty has sent in his resignation.

One person declared at a public meeting that the Holy Ghost was on their side—on which "Three cheers for the Holy Ghost" were called for and I believe given. . . .

A fortnight before, an equal triumph in the hardly less vehement and still more critical elections for the Town Council had made him Mayor-elect. Entering on that office and becoming Chairman of the School Board—but the account of his construct-

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ive work in that capacity belongs to a later chapter—he and his party now became, as for many a year they remained, masters of the civic situation. With the same man presiding over both bodies, the Town Council and the School Board were two minds with but a single thought on the sectarian issue. Despite the Government and the judges there were to be no distraints on goods and chattels. Clause 25 was dead in Birmingham. At length it was dead everywhere. The law was altered. Board schools multiplying, dispelled—in the towns at least as distinguished from the single-school villages—the first Nonconformist fears of a new Church ascendancy in popular education.

VI

We must next see how, in the wider political field, agitation by the League, and especially Chamberlain's part in it, became by degrees disastrous to Gladstone's administration and disintegrated his majority, proudly as it had towered.

At first the trouble was regarded merely as the aching tooth of the Government—painful but not dangerous. The Prime Minister had no comprehension of the Nonconformist mind. Forster, full of the peculiar obstinacy characteristic of quarrels in a strong-minded family, was now antagonistic to the spirit wherefrom he sprang.

Nothing was done to conciliate the dissenters but much to exasperate them. Apart from their own grievances they were more devoted than ever to the cause of general education. By one simple concession they might have been brought to a truce. Chamberlain and Dilke might be left to themselves when they both ventured to believe that a Radical Government of the future would make education free at once. But even at this time, any Liberal Cabinet worthy of the name ought at least to have remedied a serious weakness in the Bill by an amending measure conceding compulsory attendance. Undoubtedly Clause 25 ought to have been quickly repealed when its effects were seen. In itself it was too insignificant as well as too vexatious to be worth maintaining. Under it the annual payments in the whole country only amounted in 1872 to the paltry total of about £5000, just as ship-money in its day was small money. But Disraeli,

with his perceptive genius, put a finger on the truth to which his rival was blind. He said, "The 25th Clause may be called the symbol of the question". In the same vein Chamberlain proclaimed:

> It is futile to allege that the practical results are small and that the grievance is sentimental, for Dissenters are almost unanimous in their conviction that a grave principle is involved and that now or never they must take their stand against what they affirm to be a retrograde policy.[1]

VII

Upon conscientious objectors, refusing to pay what they called the new church rate, distraints, prevented in Birmingham, soon began elsewhere. These miserable affairs from 1871 onward became more frequent up to Gladstone's fall. The mischief to his Government was no longer an aching tooth but a wearing malady. Session after session saw the question raised in the House of Commons with increasing disruption in the Liberal ranks. During 1872, for instance, 132 Liberals voted to repeal Clause 25 and only 123 Liberals helped to maintain it by the aid of 195 Conservatives who trooped into the Ministerial lobby.

The League and the Nonconformist Committee reverberated in speeches, rained leaflets and pamphlets. Not only that. They entered upon direct electoral action in a hundred constituencies.

To this kind of work, hitherto new to him, Chamberlain applied himself with minute attention, a quick learner. He soon obtained a closer knowledge of the constituencies in detail than any statesman of his time. With agents everywhere, he kept his deadly little note-books in his precise hand. "As to Bristol I am not surprised at any aberration on the part of the self-styled Liberals. . . . C.T. is a very fitting leader of his flock."—"We are a little afraid of 'impracticables', men who would break up the best organisation."—"Peterborough . . . the Nonconformists are much divided, but if they agreed on a candidate they have influence enough to carry him."—"Dewsbury is a very Radical place . . . the working class is 75 per cent of the constituency and the present member is on the whole a favourite."—"Cardiff . . . our

[1] Francis Adams, *Elementary School Contest*, p. 257.

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Welsh agent reports that several boroughs with the Ballot could be carried for Radicals against the present representatives.'—"I do hope that there are enough good men and true in East Staffordshire to prevent the seat being secured by a trimmer." And so on and so on to various correspondents.

For a long while the manifold demands of the fight he had flung himself into engross all his available life. He is the master mind of a great manufacturing business now absorbing or over-bearing all competitors. He is leader on the School Board and the Town Council; he is on twenty Committees at once; as Executive Chairman of the League he energises every department of its activities; from headquarters he has to deal with the enquiries and work of the branches in all parts of the country; vigilantly he follows parliamentary proceedings and watches the constituencies; addressing crowded audiences he incites them and amuses. Sometimes desperately overworked, he soon rallies, longs for his holidays in Switzerland or France and enjoys them with the zest of a boy. Even he, devouring worker as he was, never worked harder than in these years. We wonder again how he did it all. But in his use of time he was a miracle of economy and as quick in transaction.

We have glimpses of his meetings during 1871 and 1872 at the Town Hall and elsewhere in Birmingham, at Manchester and Newcastle, at Scarborough, Stroud and many other places; in London. Wherever he spoke they wanted him to return. He puts life into them. His speeches in manner are full of satire and aggression, and dead earnestness. As thus, "We are paying seven times as much for pauperism and crime as for education; while in Switzerland they pay five times as much for education as for pauperism and crime".[1]

He takes the chair for the Liberation Society and, claiming complete equality for Nonconformists in the State, declares that while the enemies of the people have always been supported by the Established Church, the United States gets on very well without one.[2] No less zealous for temperance, he takes the chair in the Town Hall for the United Kingdom Alliance, then in its sanguine youth. He denounces to its heart's content the existing

[1] Speech at Scarborough, January 27, 1871.
[2] Birmingham, April 18, 1871.

conditions of the liquor trade as a national nuisance which must be brought under some kind of civic control; he says that if "a priest-ridden nation is very much to be pitied, a publican-ridden nation is very much to be despised". "The principle I contend for and to which I give my unqualified adhesion is that it is the right of the community to have absolute control over a trade which directly affects their moral, social and physical interests."[1] But at the same time he refuses to condemn or penalise publicans as a class, and he speaks on methods of constructive legislation in a spirit of practical good sense far in advance of his hearers. This address was amongst the most powerful yet fairest ever made on the drink question in England.

On education he made one of the keenest speeches in the whole struggle when he addressed in the autumn of 1871 the third annual meeting of the League.[2] No gathering of Liberals so numerous and representative coming from every part of the kingdom had ever met together to protest against the action of a Liberal administration. Chamberlain struck home: "Under the partial operation of compulsory bye-laws a new crime had been created, so subtle in character that it evaporated with a parochial boundary. What was a penal offence in Birmingham might be committed at Smethwick with impunity. What was a misdemeanour at Liverpool was none at Birkenhead. . . . Compulsion and free schools were their keystones with unsectarianism as a necessary condition."

VIII

We have seen very well already that he was now reaching out far beyond the education issue to a new conception of national reform and social organisation; but here it is convenient to complete the separate record of the Nonconformist revolt against the Gladstone Government.

He accuses Forster of "straining the powers of his department as they had never been strained before in order to put into force the obnoxious powers of the 25th Clause" against dissenters.[3] From the beginning of 1872, at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, and elsewhere, he calls upon Nonconformists to

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, November 21, 1871.

[2] Held at Birmingham on October 17 and 18, 1871.

[3] Manchester, November 29, 1871.

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resist the hateful rate to the last and to withdraw their electoral support from the Government until its tamer followers have "learned the Liberal alphabet and can spell out the first words of the Liberal creed".[1]

A passage in the same speech shows singularly how he is developing his power of breathing the genius of incitement into controlled words. "For years we have served the Liberal party; we have been hewers of wood and drawers of water; we have been very patient under somewhat contemptuous toleration very difficult to bear; we have accepted meanwhile every act of justice as a favour—and every instalment of rights as a singular and almost unmerited grace." Every syllable tells. And again, "let Mr. Gladstone, abandoning false friends, return to his true self and we will return to him".[2]

It was not to be. Even Mr. Winterbotham, that rising hope of Nonconformity, formerly one of Forster's ablest critics, had joined the Ministry twelve months before; and now in the spring of 1872, concerned for the fortunes of Liberalism, he ingeminated peace. Let dissenters accept the Act as the law of the land and make the best of it lest a Tory Government succeed.

Chamberlain went down to Mr. Winterbotham's constituency, Stroud, and roundly stated that on these terms it would be better for the Liberal party to recover its health and strength in the bracing air of Opposition. "I suppose what Mr. Winterbotham really means is that a Tory Government will probably come into office. I think that is very probable. But, sir, what is that to us? What matters it to education—what matters it to the welfare and prosperity of the nation—whether a Tory Government sits on the Cabinet benches or a Liberal Government passing Tory measures?"[3] At Sedgley towards the end of the same year he flings it out, "I come to you to-night as one of that little knot of fanatics, one of those much abused beings, a political dissenter; and I glory in it".[4]

We have a very attractive and human view of him in connection with a big meeting in the North. At Newcastle-on-Tyne, as a trouncing partisan, he made one of his best speeches up to

[1] Manchester, Free Trade Hall; at a Nonconformist Conference, January 22, 1872.

[2] Birmingham, at a meeting of the Nonconformist Committee, March 18, 1872.

[3] Stroud, March 26, 1872.

[4] Sedgley, December 2, 1872.

then, marred as were others of his utterances at this time by an unpleasant strain of gibe and invective against parsons and priests. Everyone thought it excellent; some thought it brilliant. "We propose to teach the three 'R's' to all and for all. We propose to leave the teaching of the fourth R, that is, religion, to be taught by the churches in their own time, in their own way." And what harm? "Nobody can say that the alphabet is a sectarian formulary: I have never heard that geography leads to atheism; and I have yet to be told that arithmetic is notorious heresy."[1] "Roars of laughter," says the reporter, followed one of his sallies: Mr. Forster favoured the denominational schools because it would be wasteful not to use them; "that reminds me of the reason why Mrs. Partington took a second husband. It was not because he was wise, or good, or rich, or handsome, but because he exactly fitted her late husband's clothes and she had got a great quantity of them and did not want to waste them".

On this occasion Chamberlain was the guest of that well-known and perfervid Liberal Dr. Spence Watson, who notes: "He made a remarkably good speech. He was in very good form. There was one difficulty about him. He would not go to bed until perhaps two or three in the morning."[2] It is a touch of life, and for over thirty years the difficulty was the same. After a long day hard enough to exhaust other men he loved to talk into the small hours, to the delight of his friends and concern of his family.

After this appearance there was a strong feeling along the Tyne that he ought to be asked to contest the borough against the Whigs in company with their own "Young Joseph". The latter, Cowen of Newcastle, was then confidently regarded by many as a coming leader of Radicalism in the North, like Chamberlain in the Midlands. But for temperamental reasons these two together never would have run well in harness. In both cases time was to play strange tricks with expectation. A few years more and "young Joseph" of the North will be too much in favour of Disraeli's foreign and Imperial policy to be forgiven by Gladstone; but Cowen, for all his glittering rhetoric learned from Kossuth, had true eloquence, signal capacity, and deserved a more fortunate political career than his was to turn out.

[1] Newcastle-on-Tyne, February 26, 1872.

[2] Percy Corder, *Robert Spence Watson*, p. 161.

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Bearing down Nonconformists by Conservative votes did not pay the Government. When the session of 1872 opened, the League—often amidst excitement and sometimes against disorder—had held over a hundred meetings in the preceding three months. Under Chamberlain's chairmanship at an executive meeting on January 18, 1872, a still more aggressive programme was adopted—"secularism". The new policy demanded a universal and uniform system of board schools giving secular instruction only; with facilities on week-days in the public edifices for every denomination to teach its doctrines at its own cost during specified hours "entirely separate and distinct from the time allotted to ordinary school teaching".

This was putting the bellows to the fire. The League, stronger than ever in numbers and funds, and as much more militant, called upon its supporters to make the repeal of Clause 25 an unconditional test question for all Liberal members and candidates.

IX

With the opening of its fifth session early in 1873, the Gladstone Government entered on its last phase, dismal and luckless.

In view of the nearing General Election, Chamberlain and his colleagues opened an elaborate "register of facts" in different constituencies. This compilation became a sort of electioneering Doomsday Book. When the League went to the extreme length of running its own men at by-elections against the Ministerial candidates, the result in some cases seemed a pitiable fiasco at the polls. But there was a second result less visible and more serious. An increasing number of Liberals refused to vote at all. Candidates who supported the official policy were regularly defeated. Majorities at elections were small in those days. Most Liberal members and candidates began to comply with the League's policy or tack towards it.

Not for us here to follow in detail this guerilla of the by-elections. It reached its worst in the summer of 1873 when Nonconformists exceeded in wrath and contempt and the credit of the Liberal administration, once so mighty, was irretrievably broken.

Some episodes amongst the divided Liberals were like scenes from Disraeli's novels. At Greenwich by-election there were for

one vacancy six candidates—amongst them ludicrously five rival Liberals; but a Conservative gin-distiller by a clear majority of the total poll became Gladstone's colleague for that borough.[1] A few days later at Dundee, Edward Jenkins, the sprightly author of *Ginx's Baby* and now a taunting rebel, polled more than half the real Liberal votes.[2]

A few weeks before, the Bath election[3] had been the talk of the country; Chamberlain always remembered it with sardonic amusement, as showing the power of bluff over nervousness.

He and his people sent an agent to Bath with instructions to run a third candidate at any cost if the official Liberal candidate in the by-election would not give satisfactory pledges. The League made a prodigious pother and scared the victim. Captain Hayter, who at first refused to give pledges, thought better of it and yielded to dread of the unknown.[4] Yet the League candidate, whose exceptionally unpopular intrusion was freely resented with cayenne pepper by the crowd, had found it impossible to obtain amongst Liberals the support of the necessary minimum of burgesses; and being innocent of any acquaintance with local details, he found his nomination-paper farcically completed by Conservative signatures. When he withdrew, it was too late to save the seat for the Government.

This comedy had rather serious consequences. Denounced as never in London by official Liberalism and its literary advocates,[5] Chamberlain retorted as we shall see by double defiance —typical of the new man.

During three sessions the Government had lost twenty by-elections; conditions were now disheartening for Liberal candidates of all stripes.

X

Was any session ever worse managed by a Government than that of 1873?

[1] As an electoral curiosity the figures are worth giving:

GREENWICH BY-ELECTION, AUGUST 4, 1873

BOORD (C.)	4525
LANGLEY (L.)	2379
ANGERSTEIN (L.)	1054
BENNETT (L.)	324
CONINGSBY (L.)	27
POOK (L.)	27

[2] Dundee, August 7, 1873.

[3] Bath by-election, June 28, 1873.

[4] This Bath by-election made a national din and contemporary accounts are full of diverting details.

[5] By Liberal Ministerialists, Chamberlain and the Leaguers were now in effect reprobated as jackals of the Carlton Club.

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Just before it opened, Chamberlain, reappearing at Newcastle-on-Tyne, where he equalled his former successes, "ventured to hope as almost a matter of certainty that universal School Boards and universal compulsion would be conceded in the next session of Parliament".[1] He and his friends would have been a good deal placated by reasonable concession of the second of the two points, but as to both their fresh hope was deluded. Why was not compulsory attendance at least conceded by the Cabinet? That reform was vital for the interests of popular education irrespective of the sectarian din. This time poor Forster was not most to blame. He strongly favoured a prompt measure for compulsory attendance, but weakly allowed himself to be thwarted in the Cabinet. Passing then and for the next two years through a strange, abstracted phase, Gladstone sought to legislate from the depths of his own consciousness with no normal regard to things external and obvious.

His Irish Bill, contemplating one central Irish University for all sects, with the chairs for modern history and for ethics left out, revealed that on these matters he misunderstood both Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants as much as English Nonconformists. The Bill on second reading was beaten by a majority of three in a damaging division; soon made fatal by the confusion of the ensuing constitutional crisis and by its unlucky epilogue. The Government resigned. Disraeli, waiting for riper fruit to fall into his hands, declined to take office before a dissolution.

For a few days in March 1873 a General Election seemed almost certain. Chamberlain and the League made ready for it with alacrity. By one of the capital misjudgments of his life, Gladstone did not dissolve, but resumed without any intention of conciliating the Nonconformists and rallying the Liberal forces.

Nevertheless, the fortunes of the Ministry being well-nigh past saving, and no retrieving chances negligible, the Nonconformists "once more and yet once more" were in hope of some gain from the emergency. Could any Government be so blind as not to see that something should be done? Or so lethargic as not to do it? Wholesale distraints were taking place in Plymouth. The Town

[1] Newcastle-on-Tyne, January 30, 1873.

Councils of Rochdale and Barrow were refusing, like Birmingham, to honour the precepts of their School Boards. Forster was about to bring in an amending Bill of unknown scope. There were vague rumours of accommodation.

At this extremity—hard as the fact is to credit—the Nonconformists were not at all placated by the Cabinet, but disappointed and stung. When the amending Bill was introduced[1] it was not an olive-branch but a blow. It did nothing for compulsory attendance. It transferred from the School Boards to the Poor Law Guardians the authority to levy rates for the objects of Clause 25. The dissident Liberals refused to regard this shift as other than a degrading dodge. At once the League and the Central Nonconformist Committee were up in arms together.

Chamberlain denounced "a pretended concession; ignoring principle; carrying sectarian conflict into the election of another group of public bodies; placing Magistrates, Guardians and School Boards in constant antagonism". Again the Government had taken up a hint thrown out from the Conservative benches; and this in spite of the plainest warnings in advance that Nonconformists would regard the new remedy as worse than the complaint. It was then that the League made its apparently farcical, but in fact destructive, foray into Bath.

Scornfully Chamberlain wrote to the *Spectator* in reply to its censures:

> With this knowledge of our opinions the Government has chosen deliberately to defy us. . . . This conduct leaves us no alternative. We should be the meanest and weakest of mortals if we did not pick up the gauntlet. . . . The great principle of religious equality must be accepted as part of the programme of any Party which in future seeks our support and alliance. Therefore you may expect to see the lesson of the Bath election again and again repeated. The "Nonconformist revolt" long threatened has at last begun, and parliamentary tacticians will do well to ponder its importance.[2]

That was no light threat. Dr. Dale declared that it was the duty of the great mass of Nonconformists in the country "when-

[1] In June 1873.

[2] July 1873. Quoted from the reprint in the "National Education League Monthly Paper," August 8, 1873.

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ever a mere Ministerialist invited their suffrages, to run another man". On the 1st of July the National Education League and the Central Nonconformist Committee met in joint conference in London. Chamberlain moved the resolution of protest. Above all, John Bright, reappearing in public affairs, spoke in sympathy for twenty minutes and was cheered to the echo.[1]

Preparing to sweep Birmingham himself within a very few months, as he did in the way already told in this chapter, Chamberlain had not a particle of faith in the intentions of the Gladstone Cabinet towards the Nonconformists and was bent on bringing it down to clear the way for the future.

XI

But at this tension of affairs the Leaguers and Radicals were momentarily disconcerted and checked by a very curious episode of political history at that time.

With an irresolute and belated hope of saving the situation for Liberalism, John Bright rejoined the Government.

After his long absence he had reappeared in the House of Commons at the beginning of the preceding session, but so far had hardly been heard. His hair had changed from iron-grey to silver, and the commanding part of his old personality had evaporated for ever. Chamberlain, with his uncanny acuteness, regards him as a "Ministerialist" in his heart and above all a Gladstonian, and remarks at once: "I am afraid he has only come back to the House to prop the Government".[2] Bright was more anxious than active. He saw that he could play no useful part if he lost contact with the Nonconformists; and we have noticed that at the beginning of July he seemed to support them against the Cabinet's inexplicable fatuity.

Six weeks later, yielding ineffectually to long-urged persuasions, full of affection for Gladstone and with many misgivings otherwise, John Bright became Chancellor of the Duchy and associated himself with a moribund Ministry. He did this when Nonconformist claims were rebuffed without discrimination and

[1] Bright's hearers for the most part misunderstood his state of mind. His own note is: "Spoke to allay the prevailing passion, but without much effect, I fear" (*The Diaries of John Bright*, p. 354).

[2] To Dilke, March 2, 1873.

when the whole of the Liberal Left were in revolt. Why did he do it?

Since the Ministerial crisis on the Irish University Bill, Bright had been concerned at heart for reconciliation between the Government and the Nonconformists, but was vague as to the means. The Prime Minister's mind was almost oblivious to that question and otherwise engaged.[1]

Some months before, Bright had written to Chamberlain:

Private. LLANDUDNO, *April* 10, '73.

MY DEAR MR. CHAMBERLAIN. . . I have done what I could to convey a correct expression of your sentiments to the Government and especially to Mr. Forster.[2] I am satisfied that there is a strong desire to do all that can be done to heal the wounds which have arisen much more from accident than intention, and I am not without hope that matters connected with the education question will wear a more cheerful aspect before long. . . . I think we could show how easy it would be to dispense with the 25th Clause. As you say, the questions of Boards in every district and of General Compulsion are only questions of time, and, as I think, of a short time. I will not fail to do anything in my power to help forward the conciliation we all desire.—Believe me always, Sincerely yours,

JOHN BRIGHT.

At this Chamberlain might well think, as he did, that serious Ministerial concessions were in view. When the hope was dashed, Bright, as we have seen, attended the meeting of protest held by the League and the Nonconformist Committee together at the Westminster Palace Hotel on the 1st of July. Then and there he made his round declaration that the Act of 1870 was "the worst Act passed by a Liberal Government since 1832". Yet

[1] On August 14, 1873, a week after Bright had agreed to rejoin the Cabinet, Gladstone had written intimately to him that some new force was required to reinvigorate the Government and unite the party. Such a force could not be found in a revision of the Education Act, but might be found in a plan of financial reform—that is, in abolition of the income-tax (*The Diaries of John Bright*, p. 359).

[2] Chamberlain, as already recorded, at the age of twenty-two had stood up to Bright in conversation, and was accustomed afterwards to speak to him freely. A reminiscence may refer to this time: "In that room" [the library at Highbury] "I once heard a great duologue between these representatives of the Old Liberalism and the New. It was prolonged, animated, and sometimes pointed, and of the dozen or more present, not one ventured to break in on that contest of controversial giants" (H. J. Jennings, *Chestnuts and Small Beer*, p. 97).

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holding these opinions, John Bright, of all men, consents within less than six weeks later to become Forster's colleague. Shadow of his former self as he was, the legend of his name was still mighty in the land, and everything concerning him was of high import in Birmingham. What did it mean? Had the Cabinet simply lured him? Or would he now overrule Forster? Had he rejoined with or without stipulations for the Nonconformists? More in disquiet than in hope, Chamberlain with Dale went down to see him at Manchester, dined with him at the Queen's Hotel and talked long. They came back convinced that he had rejoined without conditions.

Chamberlain sets down his impressions—thoroughly disbelieving in the new situation but seeing at once that it requires wary, temporising management and a suspension of arms by the League in its electoral war:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

Southbourne, Sunday, August 12, 1873.—I am going to Manchester to-morrow with Dale to see Bright and learn if he has obtained any satisfactory assurances before agreeing to re-enter the Ministry. If not we shall give him no support of any kind to ensure his return, and in the present state of affairs it is possible he may lose his election.

Southbourne, August 14, 1873.—Dale and I saw Bright on Monday and had a long interview. . . . But it is evident that he has as yet obtained no definite pledge, and I am myself of opinion that he has made a mistake in re-entering the Government and will fail to secure the reorganisation of the party.

On the whole, however, we came to the conclusion that the only course at Birmingham was to accept his appointment as a *pledge* of repentance and amendment, and in this view to suspend operations for a time till the Ministry bring out their programme after the meeting of the reformed Cabinet in November. . . .

Southbourne, August 19, 1873.—. . . Gladstone's speech is most irritating and imprudent but I am not certain it will bear your construction. If he meant to make Bright a catspaw surely he would not be such a fool as to take all the world into his confidence.[1] . . . I have written

[1] The Prime Minister had just made a speech at Hawarden and "thought voluntary education the best". Some school boards were doing "a vast deal of good", but the expense of their extension should be avoided where de-

Gladstone to ask if the report of his speech is correct and I have also written Bright . . . urging that he should make a definite declaration. . . .

Misgiving deepens with Bright's reply to further enquiries. The new Minister now addresses the coming man with more reserve:

JOHN BRIGHT TO CHAMBERLAIN

Rochdale, August 19, 1873.—I can say nothing more or less than I said to you. As to Mr. Gladstone's own views I merely said that on the question of *religious* teaching in schools, I thought or knew him to be much in advance of most or many of his colleagues. This is my opinion. But I think it must be admitted that the public or the people, the Electoral Body and others, are in favour of some religious teaching or what they consider to be such, say at least as far as was in practice in the British Schools. Neither Mr. Gladstone nor any other Minister can hope successfully to contend with this feeling, and we may resign ourselves to what cannot be prevented. On a clear issue of excluding the Bible from the schools I suspect you would be beaten in Birmingham. . . .

This looked flaccid. Still Chamberlain thought it shrewder for the League to affirm confidence in Bright while awaiting the issue: meanwhile, to "suspend aggressive operations". Bright had to be re-elected at Birmingham. For nearly four years his constituencies had not heard his moving voice. Expectation soon frustrated was raised high by the pathetic beauty of his strain on October 22. A vast audience thronged Bingley Hall. Chamberlain seconded the resolution of confidence in trenchant accents of fighting Nonconformity and Radicalism. Following him, the old orator condemned the whole basis of the Education Bill as favouring the denominational system. He objected to the Cumulative Vote. Above all he denounced the "25th Clause" as an "evil principle" and hoped that it "might be absolutely repealed". His audience surged with rejoicing. Chamberlain exclaimed: "Bright's speech is great, and if Forster now leaves there will be hope again".

But that other sturdy combatant, Forster, was in the habit

nominational exertions were already doing nearly all the work required. At this Chamberlain wrote his first letter to Gladstone enquiring, "respectfully" but curtly, whether the report in *The Times* was accurate (August 18, 1873). Gladstone in oblique reply said that his comment at Hawarden on local circumstances did not imply "any general rule".

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of speaking for himself, and he spoke at Liverpool in masterful contradiction of the sentiments of his new fellow-Minister.[1] Yet Nonconformists on the whole were mistakenly elated. They believed that Bright after his Bingley Hall oration would prove stronger than Forster; and that their hour of redress was at hand. What they expected was that the life of a Parliament, hanging not long since by a thread, would be stoutly prolonged for twelve months more. Reconciling work in another full session might compose ruinous dissensions in the Liberal party and restore its fortunes at a deferred General Election.

Interrupting the tragedy by a moment of comedy, another episode is too good to be omitted. The letters speak for themselves:

CHAMBERLAIN TO HARCOURT

Southbourne, Birmingham, September 3, 1873.—The National Education League holds its annual meeting October 22. If you are not a leading member of the Government by that time will you come down and pitch into them?

HARCOURT TO CHAMBERLAIN

Isle of Harris, September 8, 1873.—There are various reasons why I can't come to Birmingham but certainly not the *official* one which you suggest. . . . I don't know I endorse the whole ticket of the League. . . . I think with you altogether on the subject of the 25th Clause. But as to the rest I think that the mischief Forster has done is to a great extent irreparable. . . . I am not one of those who condemn the electoral crusade which you and the leaders of the Nonconformists have instituted. It is a bold and a successful policy and I think under the circumstances quite justifiable. But you will admit that there are things on the subject which are very fit for you to do in which it would not be proper for me as an outsider to join. I must therefore leave the external conduct of the campaign in your hands—and it can be under no abler management. There are many matters of principle in which we are thoroughly agreed. Hoping that before long we may sit on the same bench at Westminster. . . .

Not so many weeks later Harcourt joined the Government as Solicitor-General, expecting, like others, that another full

[1] See the correspondence between Forster and Bright on the latter's "collective responsibility" for the Education Bill of 1870. Bright, instancing the breakdown of his health at the time, denies real responsibility (Wemyss Reid, *Life of Forster*, vol. i. pp. 559-573).

and robust session might redeem the desperate fortunes of Liberalism.

Up to the end of 1873 we find Chamberlain protesting on the platform with more confidence than he felt in his heart that John Bright would be too much for Forster and that the latter —who had not the least notion of complying either way—would have to submit or resign.[1]

Even at the opening of 1874 the Nonconformists had no comprehension of the Prime Minister's mind or nature. He was not of them; and almost in absence of mind so far as they were concerned, he shattered their new hopes by a side-stroke and completed their alienation.

While Chamberlain still anticipated the meeting of Parliament, repeal of the 25th Clause, and adoption by the Cabinet of the League's great principle of compulsory attendance, Mr. Gladstone suddenly threw out the baby with the bath-water. He declared the most erratic dissolution of the nineteenth century. The Education Act was left as it stood. Liberal dissensions were left as they were. Compulsory attendance was not enacted: in spite of Bright's opinion of that "evil principle", Clause 25 was left unrepealed.

The wider politics of this drama, far-reaching in Chamberlain's connection, belong to the next chapter. Here it is more convenient to conclude the story of the Nonconformist struggle.

Taken once again by surprise like a thunderclap, the League threw itself fiercely into the contest. Chamberlain's personal combat at Sheffield must engage us in following pages. Something seemed to be gained. Out of 425 Liberal candidates in Great Britain 200 were pledged to repeal the "clause of contention"; Gladstone at the last moment inclined to the same course without giving a pledge. It was too late. Nonconformist abstentions from the poll were amongst several principal causes of total Liberal defeat; but Nonconformity itself had lost, as events proved, its last fight for the leadership of national politics.

XII

In the battle of some sixty years ago upon popular education the thing at stake was of great pith and moment then and of

[1] Birmingham, November 29, 1873.

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immeasurable consequence for the following generation and ours. Descended from Spicer and Serjeant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and deriving since then from five or six Unitarian generations, Chamberlain was an hereditary adherent of the extreme Left of dissent. He felt, and truly, in every fibre and atom of his being, that, whatever the merits, his part in the conflict continued the cause of the ejected ministers of 1662 against the Cavalier Parliament. His utterances were sometimes disfigured, then and afterwards, by the acerbity of polemics. His distinction between rates and taxes was philosophically absurd and practically vain. At least half of both were paid by those who objected to his programme; and their consciences were as good as his own. But he believed with his whole soul that his own idea of religious equality was just in itself and best for the nation.

His scheme of uniform schools was as impossible as logical. No man was more ardent for a national system of elementary instruction. Nothing but compromise and dualism could create it. Through the generations of the nineteenth century sectarian dispute had prevented all great reform; the illiteracy of the English masses had remained till now the by-word of Europe. More than half a century before, Bell was an apostle to the Tories and Lancaster to them was Beelzebub; while to the party soon to be called Liberal, Lancaster was "the British Confucius" and Bell but a vigorous bigot. From that time, neither the Church nor Dissent was able to carry any policy of its own, but each was strong enough to thwart the other. Their feud until Forster's Bill was passed had wrecked scheme after scheme. To the Nonconformists—as dispassionate history now admits—belonged an equal share of the blame; divided and subdivided, as they were for long, upon the very principle of State interference as well as upon proposed modes of religious teaching.

But the final victory of compromise in 1870 and after, as against Chamberlain, the theological leaders of dissent and Radical secularists like Morley—was it the highest gain for religion and moral energy in England as a whole?

Some good thinkers doubt it; and surmise instead that the Established Church and the Free Churches alike might have maintained a more living influence had they accepted common

schools for secular instruction and thrown themselves devotedly into the teaching of definite belief by voluntary effort during assigned hours of entry. That considerable man, Dr. Crosskey of Birmingham, a scientist as well as a Unitarian divine, testified his conviction before a Royal Commission long afterwards, that with common schools and equal rights of entry for definite instruction by voluntary effort, "the Churches would exercise tenfold activity; they would be thrown back upon their proper work: that is, to go and save the lost". That was the real Birmingham vision, no mean one. We have seen with what unsparing fidelity Chamberlain had lived up to it since his earliest discipline in personal service at Carter Lane Chapel.

As results have turned out, Chamberlain and Forster alike, and all the Liberal and Tory combatants then would have been confounded now. The new system of general education was to be followed in a few decades by the fall of Liberalism itself, the rise of Labour, the vogue of the popular press; and by complete democratic indifferentism or even oblivion with regard to the old burning controversies on Disestablishment and Disendowment.

It will be asked, and the question goes to the marrow, what, after all, was the good of Chamberlain's first flaming campaign in the field of education? The answer is substantial. When he took up public affairs, and was not much more than thirty, his original thesis was that national education should be "universal, compulsory, unsectarian and free". He proved right and effectual upon three points out of four. It is an uncommon proportion of success. To the failure on one point only, unsectarian uniformity, he lived to become wholly reconciled when more mature. He recognised that without the dualism of 1870 no national system of popular education could have been created at all.

Another consideration is pertinent. Chamberlain's movement, by its success in Birmingham and the stimulus of that example throughout the country, assured his aim of making board schools largely predominant over denominational schools. This was achieved to an extent that Mr. Forster and Lord Ripon never conjectured. Gladstone at that phase would have detested the sequel had he foreseen it.[1]

[1] In England and Wales, some sixty years after, there are about 9500 Council Schools with accommodation for over 4,500,000 pupils; and about 11,300 voluntary schools with accommodation for 2,500,000 pupils.

The singular General Election of 1874, and Conservative victory under household franchise, settled more thoroughly than any man then knew the four years' war on the future of education. In that decision the ardent Nonconformist dream of political supremacy in England went down for ever as it proved, though for many years this historic fact was not fully realised by the larger body of dissenters. Even their genuine and sore grievance in the single-school villages they never afterwards were able to redress.

Chamberlain was more realistic and far-sighted. For long he had not only predicted the defeat of the Liberal Government but worked ruthlessly to bring it about, in order as he hoped to break the Whigs and prepare the path for Radicalism. For long also he had come, and once for all, to the conclusion that Nonconformity by itself was not enough in any sense. Very shortly after the General Election, and a few days after Gladstone resigned the Liberal leadership, the Mayor of Birmingham writes, "I don't think the League will do".[1] Months before the dissolution he had confessed:

> I have long felt that there is not force in the Education question to make it the sole fighting issue for our friends. From the commencement it has failed to evoke any great popular enthusiasm. Education for the Ignorant cannot have the meaning that belonged to Bread for the Starving . . . the assistance of the working classes is not to be looked for without much extension of the argument.[2]

For several years more, the National Education League lingered as a shadow of its old self; but its distinctive cause, and that of its fading associate, the Nonconformist Central Committee, was irrevocably lost. Chamberlain's mind, always widening, was bent towards larger purposes. He is already hailed amongst working-class Radicals everywhere as the coming leader of democracy, and it is what he intends.

[1] To Dilke, March 17, 1874: "This was the death-warrant of the Education League" (Gwynn and Tuckwell, *Life of Sir Charles W. Dilke*, vol. i. p. 178).

[2] To Morley, August 19, 1873.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW RADICALISM—"THE PARTY OF THE FUTURE"

(1872–1874)

A WIDER Movement—"The Condition of the People"—The Agricultural Labourers and Chamberlain's Awakening—The First "Unauthorised Programme", 1872—"Free Land, Free Schools, Free Church"—The Charge of Republicanism—John Morley, Friend and Ally—Onslaught on Official Liberalism and its Leaders—What Mr. Gladstone might have done—His Plunge to Disaster—Dissolution and Manifesto—"The Meanest Document"—Chamberlain fights Sheffield—A Savage Contest and a Fortunate Defeat.

I

PRACTICAL emergencies were needed to reveal clearly to Chamberlain underworkings of his mind always far ahead of the immediate present. No sentimentalist, but full of strong human feeling for all his coolness of demeanour; responsive when considerately met but combatant at all costs when not; he had unyielding courage without fanatical abstraction. Uncommon compound of daring vehemence and efficient procedure, he fed on difficulties.

He had been at first the man of one question, a novice in general politics. That one question had been his consuming interest when roused to public exertion by the education battle. Before that fight was half through he saw a great deal further, and was out more than ever to trouble the land.

Some of his ablest colleagues wanted the new education for Radical, not Nonconformist, reasons. Amongst them was William Harris, an original but practical thinker, one of those men who count behind the political scene for more than ever is known. Harris as little liked Nonconformist clericalism as Anglican

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clericalism, and maintained that there was no future for any merely "politico-theological party". Chamberlain felt the force of this view, and with his usual thoroughness conceived the bold plan of alliance between dissent and democracy. It would carry him far though dissent was to play but a lessening part in the alliance, and democracy to become nearly all.

The League had been his chrysalis state, a necessary phase in his development. He soon ceased and for always to be a man of one question. General politics began to prevail over the politics of dissent and presently superseded them altogether.

His whole sympathy was with the working classes. Intimate with his own working people in the factory and in their homes, he knew how to win their allegiance. As we saw, there never was a strike amongst those in his service. He kept up the good tradition of personal intercourse between employer and employed. The more he now studied social conditions the more he believed them to be a disgrace to nineteenth-century civilisation. The clearer became his conclusion that the civic and national organisation of better conditions must be the first object under an extending franchise.

II

The beginnings of his first "unauthorised programme" came much earlier than is commonly supposed. As usual, a new public event was needed to clear his thinking and settle his resolves.

Just when the struggle with the Government was beginning, and two days before he encountered Mr. Gladstone for the first time, he had declared that "when education becomes general we shall no longer find Dorsetshire labourers contented—I will not say contented but compelled—to work for nine shillings a week".[1] This germ lay dormant, however, for nearly two years. The quickening impulse came with the uprising of the English agricultural labourers, hitherto perhaps dumbest and meekest amongst all the disinherited of the earth. This crisis became the political sensation of the spring of 1872. Joseph Arch on a wet February morning in Warwickshire was at home making a box when three labourers came to ask him if he would dare to address

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, March 7, 1870.

a meeting that very night.[1] He dared. The news was passed round by word of mouth. Around the big chestnut tree at Wellsbourne, standing in his corduroys, he addressed not a handful, as he expected, but a crowd; they had tramped in from all the villages within ten miles.

An Agricultural Union was founded there and then. Their poverty was dire, their homes squalid, their common lot miserable in manhood, a pauper's death the end; yet to most comfortable citizens the apparition of Trade Unionism and strikes in the deep shires was like a revolutionary portent. Without ordinary means of publicity the movement went like a wind through eight counties. It soon stirred the heart and enlisted the aid of all the best in the advanced Radicalism of that day. It had been six weeks in swing before the London newspapers discovered it and sent down their special reporters.

But it had begun in south Warwickshire and was under Chamberlain's eye from the first. For him it was a bright awakening to a new social and political hope. His intimate friend, Jesse Collings, a son of agricultural labourers, devoted his life to their cause, and at once became closely connected with Arch in that long sad struggle. Within twelve days after it began Chamberlain addressed a meeting at the Temperance Hall, Birmingham, and in an impassioned, even thrilling speech he not only championed the rural revolt, but declared for a new policy that might well shock the official Liberalism of the day. For it included not only the county franchise but Free Land, Free Schools and Free Church!

"Lord Derby lately stated that the Liberal programme was exhausted. If he had said the Liberal leaders were exhausted I am not certain I should have quarrelled with the statement. . . . If the present leaders will not lead us, Liberals will not have to wait long before they find new commanders. (Cheers.) . . . I shall not be satisfied until there is such a redistribution of political power as shall give a proper representation to the opinions of great towns like Birmingham, and until the agricultural labourers have some voice in the laws which concern them so nearly. These things after all are only a means to an end, and if I were to write the heading of the next chapter of the Liberal programme I

[1] *Joseph Arch, the Story of his Life told by Himself* (1898), p. 65.

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would write 'Free Schools', 'Free Land' and 'Free Church'. . . . In this country and this alone the agricultural labourer is entirely divorced from all interest in the soil he tills. . . . We have the horrible fact confronting us that in the present time of great prosperity there are nearly one million persons in receipt of parochial relief, and the agricultural labourer lives in continual expectation of the poor-house, as the only resort in time of sickness and old age."[1]

He went on to argue at length that the whole land question in England must be taken up where Bright had left it twenty years before. In essence, his warning to the comfortable classes, and especially to landlords then in the very heyday of their rents, was violent, even menacing. But the manner had his own touch of ominous control.

In measured force, as in the steady argumentative march of the clear sentences, in biting phrase with sub-emotional appeal, it was the best speech he had yet made and of capital importance in his career. The development of these themes will engage him for fourteen years of growing power in democratic politics until Gladstone—so far from being one of the "exhausted leaders", as the Young Liberals or New Radicals suppose in these early 'seventies—changes the issue and sweeps aside the social question by a prodigious manœuvre. Whatever else "Mr. Chamberlain of Birmingham" may be henceforth, he will be extremely formidable.

To the programme of Free Land, Free Schools and Free Church, Chamberlain soon added a Free Breakfast Table.[2] But electoral reform and the extension of the franchise to the counties were to come first—the instruments of the ideals.

In this new campaign and its hopes he was strongly confirmed when the Ballot Bill, thrown out by the House of Lords in the preceding year, became law in 1872. The ballot would of course be invaluable some day in the counties, but he thought it a very present help in the towns. The League's electioneering "register

[1] Birmingham, February 19, 1872.

[2] Dilke's memory misled him when in his private memoirs, written many years later, he claimed to have originated at Derby in January 1873 the above "F's" and other principles "on which Chamberlain and Morley afterwards went in the construction of the Radical programme" (Gwynn and Tuckwell, *Life of Sir Charles W. Dilke*, vol. i. pp. 167-168). Chamberlain's own declaration was made almost a year earlier, when he was nearer the scene of the agricultural battle.

of facts" had made him minutely acquainted, as we saw, with local conditions in constituencies. In one letter already mentioned he refers to very different places like Peterborough and Dewsbury as though he had lived in both of them. He gives his correspondent the names of most local leaders in Dewsbury amongst both employers and employed, and a number of names in Peterborough.

III

He was as familiarly known in twenty provincial boroughs as any Liberal leader before he made his mark at a public meeting in London. That occasion threw him into notorious controversy of a new kind, and came about in this way.

He had invited his friends, Sir Charles and Lady Dilke, to come again to "one of the ugliest towns in England" as his guests at Birmingham during the annual meeting of the League. He adds presently, "I am terribly seedy and low just now".[1] As he sometimes was then, and more often after, when there was no sign of it in his public work. His friends came; and some weeks afterwards Dilke makes a long and urgent appeal to him to take the chair at a big conference in London on parliamentary reform. It is a real emergency, says Dilke, and time is short.

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

76 *Sloane Street* [*October* 14, 1872].—I send Kennedy to Birmingham to ask you to do me a favour which I should never forget. . . . I want you to take the chair at the morning Conference on Parliamentary reform, and I ask you knowing you are over-worked and that, if you will do it, it will be as a kindness to me. A committee of delegates of thirty-nine Radical societies and Trades Unions has been got together. . . . Will you help me?

Though he is run down and has enough to do, Chamberlain consents not only to preside, but to appear as the delegate of various associations and committees—including the Birmingham Republican Club! Dilke was surprised and elated to hear of the latter detail. When the meeting was held in St. James's Hall[2]

[1] To Dilke, September 6 and October 15, 1872.
[2] November 12, 1872.

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Chamberlain's address as chairman was an eminent performance. Electoral anomalies, he said, were so gross that Liberals were "letting down buckets into empty wells and growing old in drawing nothing up".[1] "An intelligent traveller might pass through a great town like Birmingham, with its hundreds of miles of streets . . . and then see the excessive representation of a little village like Lichfield, the whole of whose streets could be contained in a single street in Birmingham; or a little country town like Evesham whose whole population would go into Birmingham Town Hall; and would then leave room for a good deal of Stafford and Lichfield. . . . These small places outweighed the large towns and nullified their representation."

But the excellent speech itself was little heeded. Instead he found himself not only criticised, even by friends, for having represented a Republican club but attacked as a Red Republican himself.

As misrepresentation on this point never was quite laid, we may dispose of it here. True that Chamberlain, like most young Radicals and old Chartists, had ardently welcomed after Sedan the fall of the Second Empire and the establishment of the Third Republic. "For my part I do not feel any great horror at the idea . . . of the possible establishment of a Republic in this country. (Loud cheers.) I am quite certain that sooner or later it will come. (Renewed cheers and 'Bravo!') But . . . there is really not any great practical difference between a free constitutional monarchy such as ours and a free republic."[2] Dilke, much "redder" in this mood, made himself the centre of an angry campaign and parliamentary tumult. Frederic Harrison, like some other intellectuals, thought the ultimate arrival of a British Republic was as certain as "the rising of to-morrow's sun". The Queen's seclusion had weakened the monarchy amongst the working classes. Chamberlain, like others, was at first carried away by the example of France added to that of the United States. As late as the autumn of 1871 he sent Dilke an impulsive letter of sympathy, and remarked: "The Republic must come, and at the rate at which we are moving it will come in our generation. The greater is the

[1] It should, and may, have been: "Dropping buckets into empty wells And growing old in drawing nothing up."

[2] Town Hall, Birmingham. Meeting of sympathy with the French Republic, September 12, 1870.

necessity for discussing its conditions beforehand and for a clear recognition of what we may lose as well as what we shall gain".[1]

Before long Chamberlain revised his own attitude with firm good sense. More than once he said publicly that a republic would come "some day". Very soon, that vision became one of the remote and receding nebulae; and he took an astronomical view of it until it presently disappeared from his attention. He ceased to think, if he ever thought, that "some day" was near. Never for a moment was he concerned to advance it even in this short and heady phase of his Young Radicalism.

At the time when belated attack made him a target like Dilke, he honoured the Crown and defended the royal house. He had no zeal whatever for reducing the Civil List. He was not a member of the local Jacobin Club,[2] a small and obscure affair. He had represented its support of electoral reform, not its Republicanism. Upon returning to Birmingham amidst this squall of abuse and misunderstanding he took an early opportunity, as chairman at a Liberal dinner, to propose the "Health of the Queen". He expressed the unchanged opinion that Republicanism in the abstract was the best principle for "a free and enlightened people". But—a very large "but"—"I am not at all prepared to enter into an agitation in order to upset the existing state of things, to destroy the Monarchy and to change the name of the titular ruler of this country. . . . In honouring this toast, we honour the popular authority, the popular will and the supremacy of law and order of which the head of the State is the representative. And in honouring these principles, we may feel satisfied also that we are doing homage to the personal virtues which distinguish the lady who now occupies the throne and endear her to the hearts of the people."[3]

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 140. The letter must have been written in November 1871, but there is no copy amongst the Chamberlain Papers. Dilke goes on to say (p. 144) that next, in December 1871, he spoke at Birmingham Town Hall, where "Chamberlain, who was Mayor, took extraordinary measures to preserve order". But Chamberlain was not Mayor until two years later, and there is no record of his presence at this meeting. It was a violent meeting. The monarchists flung cayenne pepper and kept up a continual uproar, so that amidst the sneezing and the shouting Dilke was hardly heard except by the reporters, though facing with the coolest pluck this scene, like similar ordeals.

[2] Dilke says (*Life*, vol. i. p. 144) that, unlike himself, Chamberlain had "joined Republican clubs". It is certain, however, that Chamberlain did not join any Republican club.

[3] St. Paul's Ward, December 6, 1872.

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And they all sang "God save the Queen".

IV

But he becomes more distrustful of Mr. Gladstone and the Government, and suspects they will not even attempt electoral reform—neither redistribution nor county franchise. He writes to Dilke:

> I suppose you have seen the extract from the *Birmingham Daily Post* on the future programme of the Government and also *The Times* article thereon. Bunce tells me he has his information from two quarters and that one of his correspondents obtained his knowledge direct from a Cabinet Minister. You will observe that nothing is said of redistribution or county franchise (November 26, 1872).

It proved a correct forecast of what would not be done by a Cabinet exhausted in its luck and its judgment.

Just before the next session, at the outset of 1873, Chamberlain accordingly spoke with the more plainness when the annual meeting was held in the Town Hall to hear from the members for Birmingham an account of their stewardship. His position in the town was now becoming paramount. Entrusted with the first resolution, he was cheered again and again when he gave a very full and uncompromising exposition of the state of Radical thought. He demanded no little from the coming session—county franchise, more equal representation by redistribution of seats; the vote for women if householders; universal school boards; compulsory attendance and abolition of Clause 25; and "such changes relating to land as shall secure its cheap and easy transfer and relieve it from the injurious restrictions of primogeniture and entail". He described the uprising of the rural labourers as "the noblest event of the present century"; and concluded: "We may regard with the most perfect equanimity the threatened Conservative reaction. (Cheers and laughter.) That reaction is a disease to which the infancy of democracy is liable. (Laughter.) It is very annoying and disagreeable like the mumps or the measles, but it is not dangerous to the life or health of the patient. It will pass away and be forgotten, but the progress we have made will be sustained; the great principles of popular

government will be maintained and developed in spite of all that Tory obstructives or half-hearted Liberals can do to hinder or prevent it." (Loud cheers.)[1]

By comparison with these hopes and misgivings the new session proved a bitter and almost a fantastic disappointment, not only on education but on everything. Chamberlain is now for revolt as a Radical even more than as a dissenter. Sounding the keynote of his character, he says, "the boldest policy is the best":

CHAMBERLAIN TO DILKE

Southbourne, March 2, 1873.—I have written to Bright. I am afraid he has only come back to the House to do what he can to prop the Government. The University Bill is going badly in the country and the non-Cons and Leaguers in the House ought to have the game in their hands. Viewed *ab extra* there is no doubt the boldest policy is the best —it is probable enough from what I have seen that the weakest course is best suited to the atmosphere of what some people are pleased to call a reformed House of Commons.

And again in July, when Forster's final refusal of concessions has made the schism truceless, Chamberlain writes to a friend in the Midlands:

June 28, 1873.—I am one of those who despair of getting any good from the present Ministry or from the Liberal party in its demoralised decrepitude, and I am convinced that a reconstruction of this party and a new programme with possibly new leaders is now become a condition of further progress . . . of course I know there will be a howl and an outcry about breaking up the party, but the party, as it is, is not worth holding together.[2]

He decides now to enter Parliament, though in no mood of allurement to London. He dreads to think how much it will alter his life in Birmingham. He loves his home. "Personally although I have promised to stand somewhere I care very little about success which involves a very considerable sacrifice" (July 3).[3] He settles to await the General Election, now less than three months away—much nearer than he and the country assume. "Although not very anxious on the subject I have made up my

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, January 20, 1873.

[2] To W. H. Duignan of Walsall.

[3] *Ibid.*

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mind to offer myself for the next parliament. . . . Sheffield seems to offer most chance" (November 22).[1]

V

At this very time he was further stimulated and enriched past compute by an acquaintanceship of a new type. John Morley came into his life. This event left so deep a mark upon his own existence and, in the end, on political history that the beginnings must be related. Chamberlain could be a very hard man, but when his affections were taken at this period he could be as gentle as his mother herself—somewhat as Josephine said of Napoleon. With his "genius for friendship", known to some but never to many, Chamberlain rarely succumbed at a first meeting to any person, however attractive, but when that happened and his confidence and affection were one, there never was a stauncher, more unswerving heart.

His friendship with Dilke was solid, but more political than personal at this phase. He had also found a vivacious friend, though on more occasional terms, in Captain Maxse, a sailor as engaging in character as advanced in opinion. Meredith was about to copy him in part, to create the hero of *Beauchamp's Career*, the best political novel in the language next to *Coningsby*. This aristocratic democrat was more intimately acquainted than any other Englishman with the leaders of the Third Republic; believed the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to be unjust; and sympathised more with French logic than with English compromise. Maxse was erratic and impracticable as a member of a party, and no constituency would have him; but his sense of political weather, his anticipation of how things would turn out, were sometimes like second sight; and he was a very penetrating reader of the inwardness of men.

At the beginning of July 1873 Chamberlain went to London for that important joint conference of the League and the Nonconformists already noticed,[2] and he stayed some days. Amongst the delegates for London were Captain Maxse and John Morley. The sailor already had said to himself that the new Radical leader from the Midlands and the editor of the *Fortnightly*

[1] To W. H. Duignan.

[2] See p. 138.

Review were made for each other, and he introduced them at the meeting in the Westminster Palace Hotel. They come at once into more sociable intercourse. For each of them it is a day to mark with a white stone. Four-and-thirty years after, when their relations long rent had been partly mended again, Chamberlain asked, "Do you remember my first dinner with you in London at the Regent Street restaurant with Fawcett, Courtney and F. Harrison? I wish we could all meet again and forget the intervening period."[1] For a little while they are like stage-Englishmen delaying to confess the degree of their mutual liking, and address each other as "My dear Sir" and end "Yours very truly"; before coming to "Yours ever"; and then feeling for years that nothing on earth could part them. Chamberlain was very soon to become far the more lonely in heart as well as the more compressed by nature. Even deeper in him became this friendship—dear as it was to the two—and its severance at last hardly bearable. But the far future was hidden from them as from us all, mercifully for most.

In a fortnight from first acquaintance Morley is a guest at Southbourne. "I paid my visit to Chamberlain last week at Birmingham—decidedly a leader for an *English* progressive party."[2] Immediately after that visit Chamberlain encourages the editor to stand for Parliament, despite his agnosticism—then an awkward obstacle,—and urges him to lose no chance of helping with his pen the new political movement. The editor in reply sends a proof of a forthcoming article in the *Fortnightly*—the first of a celebrated series afterwards published as a book, *National Education*—and furnishes notes of information on some details. Quite as extreme as his correspondent is Morley with all his perfection of selective and conscious style. An agnostic, incandescent against clericalism in every form, he never in his life wrote better nor on some points reasoned worse. In phrases more excoriating and partisan, if possible, than Chamberlain's, he attacks "the base struggle of the Anglican Sect for supremacy", and describes Gladstone's mind as "that busy mint of logical

[1] Chamberlain to Morley, November 9, 1897.

[2] Morley to Frederic Harrison, July 17, 1873. F. W. Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley*, vol. i. p. 276.

Lord Morley's own letters to Chamberlain from 1873 to 1880 were returned at request and are unknown to the present writer.

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counterfeits."[1] This was priceless reinforcement for the League and the New Radicalism.

Within another six months the two men will be like brothers. Hence Chamberlain will write to his new comrade with more freedom of confidence than to anyone. Though Lord Morley's letters to Chamberlain for the first seven years are unhappily missing, in the well-known chapter of his *Recollections* he does gracious and faithful justice to the memory and character of his friend. Far through the years, the present book must reckon with the fruits, sweet and bitter, of this "sworn alliance". The first result came quickly and made no small sound in the world.

We must mark a certain date, August 12, 1873. It was just after the damaging Post Office scandals, wounding Gladstone in the tenderest punctilio of his financial purism, and followed by the re-shuffling of the Cabinet, Bright returning without any stipulation.[2] On that date our Radical rebel tells the editor that he has been writing a paper upon the present state of Liberal politics. Would it do for the *Fortnightly*? "I know literary composition is not my *forte*, so reject if you like." We find him remarking on the same theme to the same friend some years later: "Yours is the Pierian spring . . . mine is a . . . pump which only raises water when I work hard at the handle". Though never literary in the sense of living in the atmosphere of great books, the extent of his good reading was already known to the accomplished editor. In his early political speeches, taking pains to vary his illustrations of repeated argument, he quotes from Shakespeare, Milton, George Wither, Dryden; from Cervantes and Le Sage; from Pope, Goldsmith, Cowper and Byron; from Sheridan, Sydney Smith and Artemus Ward; from Dickens as well as Thackeray. Some of this is borrowed and second-

[1] John Morley, *National Education*, pp. 57, 98. And note his private outburst to Harrison (August 15, 1873): "Nothing sustains me except my holy wrath against these dreadful clergy and their hypocrisies" (F. W. Hirst, *Early Life and Letters of John Morley*, vol. i. p. 279).

[2] On that occasion Morley wrote to Frederic Harrison after receiving Chamberlain's account of his and Dr. Dale's interview with Bright: "I send you the enclosed [Chamberlain's letter] (*confidentially*), as you may be interested to know first-hand how little Bright's appointment really means. It is only meant to lull the Dissenting storm for the elections—and Gladstone will give the League not a jot; see if he does. 'Tis a pity the old tribune lets himself be made a catspaw" (August 17, 1873). (*Early Life and Letters*, vol. i. p. 279.) Bright had consented (Aug. 6) to take the Duchy, then or in October. He actually took office on Sept. 30.

hand, though good; much is his own finding. Even when he read for pleasure he pounced upon adaptable matter, and as we recollect filled note-books with phrase, jest and anecdote.

VI

The paper was received and accepted. The editor at first thought it perilous to extend the political front so far beyond the education issue and to open battle on the wide ground of the whole social question. But Frederic Harrison, consulted, was delighted with the article and thought it thoroughly worthy of "a coming Liberal Leader". Straightway printed in the *Fortnightly Review* at the beginning of September 1873, entitled "The Liberal Party and its Leaders", it was an explosive criticism of the leaders and startled the party. Taking as his text the lassitude of the Government, the demoralisation of the ranks and the loss of by-elections, his sentences thrust and cut right and left. Needless to say, moderate Liberals seethed with wrath against the profane disturber.

But this article is far more than an ebullition. To this day it is amongst primary documents for any serious student of the transformation of British politics in the last two generations. Chamberlain argues that the heroic age of reform is not dead—for all the efforts from 1869 to 1872—but is only beginning, and cannot be retarded without shame and penalty. Mr. Gladstone and his colleagues are ruining Liberalism because they will not see that the social question henceforth must dominate and overshadow all politics.[1]

> The unexampled commercial prosperity of the last few years has led many to lose sight of the coexisting misery and discontent of a large portion of the population . . . whose homes would disgrace a barbarous country.
>
> The party will not be reunited until a programme has been elaborated which shall satisfy the just expectations of the representatives of labour as well as conciliate the Nonconformists who have been driven into rebellion.

The watchword for the party of the future is—"Free Church,

[1] This, as Chamberlain conceived it, was to be a vital part of the issues in the Home Rule convulsion of 1886.

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Free Schools, Free Land and Free Labour". He expounds each of these propositions at length, and notably defends the Trades Unions and rural labour against the cries of "wealthy legislators acred up to the eyes and consolled up to the chin":

> This programme may seem advanced. . . . But no one of ordinary foresight and intelligence will doubt that every item of it will be secured before twenty years have passed away. . . . Every electioneering agent knows that during the last two years there has been a total absence of this necessary enthusiasm on the Liberal side and that they have found the most absolute indifference as to the result of the contest. . . . If we are to have a temporary return to Tory practice, the conservatives and not the liberals are the people to carry it into effect. It is fatal to the sincerity and honesty of politics that men should sit on the Treasury benches to do the bidding of a triumphant Opposition. . . .
>
> Mr. Mill has written "whoever feels the amount of interest in the Government of his country which befits a freeman, has some convictions on national affairs which are like his life blood, and which the strength of his belief in them forbids him to make the subject of compromise or postpone to the judgment of any person however greatly his superior." Of this kind are the differences which now separate Mr. Gladstone's Government from those who in time past have been its earnest supporters and to whose labours and sacrifices that Government owed its strong position . . . their efforts will perhaps be better appreciated when the results of the ingratitude and contempt with which they have been treated become manifest in the approaching General Election.[1]

Prophetic enough of the coming debacle, but looking beyond that, he was charting out a policy for the next twenty years.

Neither Chamberlain nor any Radical could then suspect how the Irish tempest was to sweep across the track of British social reform and stay its full march for decades until in our own recent period all obstacles, and with them the old historic power of Liberalism, were swept away as by a head of waters. Wholly deceived though he was about the future of Nonconformist influence, and largely mistaken in the letter of his wider forecasts, there is yet a soul of prescience in this article on "The Liberal Party and its Leaders".

[1] *Fortnightly Review*, September 1873.

His private words, giving freer play to his thoughts, show the scope of his ambitions and their definiteness. CHAP. IX. ÆT. 36–38.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

Southbourne, Sunday, August 12, 1873.—I fully expect the next House of Commons will give a Conservative majority. . . . I do not the least fear the ultimate result, and if we can only break the power of the "moderates"—the respectable Whigs—and leave Toryism and Radicalism face to face, there will soon be an end of reaction. At present the Government is . . . encouraging the divisions it affects to deplore. Mutual concession is interpreted to mean the sacrifice of principle by the majority to the fears and prejudices of the minority and as long as the latter have the authority and influence of Government at their back reunion is impossible.

Southbourne, August 19, 1873.—The object just now should be to state as clearly as possible the programme of the party of the future, and to make a party thereby. At present there are only individual Radicals, each specially interested in some part of the whole, but with no connected organisation or idea of united action. There are Leagues and Associations and Unions but no party; and there never will or can be till we choose out the most important of all the questions debated, and weld them into a connected scheme which all or most of us may accept as our programme.[1] . . . My hope, therefore, is that the reforms and changes we require will be accepted some day as part of the whole platform of the party to whom the future belongs, and whose victory, when it comes, will involve the acceptance of a new political system . . . there are the germs of an heroic struggle which shall excite enthusiasm and devotion.

These estimates of the situation and the future could not endear him to the Ministerialists, and he was of course loaded with obloquy by most Liberals. Some of his friends who had hitherto seemed advanced enough, thought he had gone much too far. Again, some of his colleagues on the League felt with alarm that he was moving away from the education question.

Harcourt, following Bright, soon joins the Government, as we

[1] Part of this letter—"Education for the Ignorant" cannot have the meaning that belonged to "Bread for the Starving"—has been quoted in the preceding chapter.

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saw. Lord Aberdare could chuckle sedately—"we have effectually extracted the brains from below the gangway; Playfair, Harcourt, James, being gone, will leave Fawcett all alone". But the Ministry as a whole was torpid, and Gladstone intermittently galvanic in self-delusion.

VII

There is no doubt that Chamberlain was right in his immediate analysis of the electoral prospect and in his sense of the strategy and tactics required for a fight with a chance. Disaster yawned before "the Liberal party and its leaders". The only opportunity for them was to act further in the spirit of Chamberlain's letters to Morley and of his words to Dilke, "the boldest policy is the best"—persevering in vigour, facing another session, and devoting it to three things. First, instituting compulsory school attendance and repealing Clause 25 would have rallied Nonconformists. Second, the working classes might have been re-won by a measure to complete the legal freedom of Trades Unions. The Opposition could not without discomfiture have resisted either of these two things. Third, a Bill to enfranchise labour in the counties as well as in the towns would have been broad ground to dissolve on, whether passed by both Houses or rejected by the Peers.

The whole of our subsequent history might have been altered. For Liberalism, on the lines of a new domestic programme appealing directly to the working-classes, there was still a great chance. as the new man insisted. Remote were Gladstone's thoughts from these reasonings. His own were purely Peelite: "The nation appears to think that it has had enough of us, that our lease is out. It is a question of measures then. Can we by any measures materially mend the position of the party for an impending election?" (January 8, 1874).[1]

Revolving practical alternatives in the last month of his Premiership, Gladstone never took Nonconformity or the social question into the sphere of his speculations; and not being yet enamoured of county franchise in itself, he argued that it would be a losing card.

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. ii. p. 481. This is from the letter to Lord Granville docketed, "First idea of Dissolution".

Yet he too was a protagonist, weary but unquenched. What was his plan? The fact is that, as often, antecedent impulse determined his coming action. Months before, when in the reshuffle he made the mistake of becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer as well as Premier, he had at once begun in a most characteristic way to judge all policy from the financial angle. He wrote to Bright: "What we want at present is a *positive* force to carry us onward as a body. . . . It may possibly, I think, be had out of *finance*" (August 14, 1873).[1] Five months later, on the eve of dissolution, he is of the same mind, and writes to Granville: "My opinion is that we *can* do it: can frame a Budget large enough and palpably beneficial enough not only to do much good to the country but sensibly to lift the Party in the public view and estimation."[2] The plan involved some reduction of the military and naval estimates, but Cardwell and Goschen demurred. On January 17 the last of the bad by-elections occurred. Even in the Radical stronghold of Newcastle-on-Tyne the former Liberal majority was enormously reduced.[3] The next morning Mr. Gladstone writes in his diary, "This day I thought of dissolution", and he adds inimitably, "my first thought of it was an escape from a difficulty. I soon saw on reflection that it was the best thing in itself."[4]

On the night of January 23 the newspaper offices, the clubs, were astounded, as was all the nation next morning. Within twelve days of the appointed meeting of Parliament, when no hint had been given that it would never meet; when members were scattered all over the country and had made arrangements for everything but the event, Gladstone plunged into the most unpopular of dissolutions and issued a voluminous manifesto wherefrom only one bold point emerged.

And what was that point? The Prime Minister offered to abolish altogether the income-tax, already reduced to what seems to our day the bagatelle of a golden age—the peppercorn figure of threepence in the pound. Gladstone's notion of rallying distracted Liberalism—under household franchise the party of the working classes or nothing—was to propose a

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. ii. p. 479.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 482.
[3] From about 4000 at the General Election, November 1868, to about 1000 in the by-election of January 1874.
[4] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. ii. pp. 484-485.

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measure more attractive to comfortable Conservatives than to any other class of the community.

The working-class voters, angry and derisive when the Government attempted the match-tax, were stale when it proffered to abolish the income-tax.

Gladstone had swept off the crockery with the table-cloth. By comparison with 1868 there was no heart at all in the Liberal fight; and Disraeli came to the Premiership with a majority as strong in effect as Peel's in 1841 and sure to be husbanded more astutely.

Chamberlain's sulphurous language is not to be excused, but his feelings are intelligible when he declares months later with unallayed bitterness: "Anything would have been better than the course actually followed. At a moment's notice the dissolution was resolved on. Mr. Gladstone promulgated through the country the meanest public document that has ever in like circumstances proceeded from a statesman of the first rank."[1]

VIII

Like other members and candidates he had to look to himself, for he too was a candidate for Parliament, and in a breathless week and a half his own electoral fate must be decided.

In the foregoing months, advanced Liberals in various democratic boroughs had urged him to stand. One strong section of Radicals wanted him in Newcastle-on-Tyne; another in Nottingham; and he was offered a safe seat at Leicester. This latter invitation he would have accepted had he not felt himself bound in honour to another constituency.

On his first visit to Sheffield in May 1873 he found himself singularly at home there amongst the Radical workmen. Returning in September after his *Fortnightly* article he was received as nothing less than a Prime Minister of the future. Advocating complete liberty for Trades Unions and speaking of the law of conspiracy as it stood, he said admirably, "there is nobody to defend this law, although nobody does anything to amend it".[2]

[1] *Fortnightly Review*, October 1874. Undoubtedly Gladstone had offered pecuniary gain for political support, and it was not a desirable method to introduce into the competition of parties.

[2] Sheffield, September 22, 1873.

After that, Sheffield Radicalism had one fixed idea—"This is our man". It was understood that Mr. George Hadfield, a veteran Nonconformist who had represented the steel-making city for over twenty years, would not stand again. The Trades Unionists shouted for Chamberlain; the general fear amongst advanced Liberals is that he will go elsewhere; and sanguine partisans besiege him with assurances that success is certain.

Chamberlain is attracted and committed despite the alarm expressed by Captain Maxse with his usual weird intuition. And now comes a split amongst Sheffield Liberals. One section wants Mr. Allott, a moderate dissenter and local accountant of some fortune. The Radicals have already one sitting member, Mr. Mundella. With what face—cry the Whigs—can they claim both seats? The chief local Liberal organ, the *Sheffield Independent*, wishes Chamberlain to retire, while the *Sheffield Telegraph*, at that time under Christopher Leng, perhaps the cleverest Conservative organ in the country, is hostile in a deadly fair-seeming way of its own, feathering its barbs with qualified appreciation. Yet on the surface, working-class support looked irresistible, and Chamberlain resolved to see it out.

On New Year's Day 1874 he addressed a multitude in Paradise Square, where at least twelve thousand persons were assembled. Received with a tumult of welcome, he far and away surpassed all his former speaking. Traversing the entire range of national politics, he repeats and amplifies his *Fortnightly* programme—Free Labour, Free Land, Free Church, Free Schools and a Free Breakfast Table. He depicts with intense power the glaring contrast in town and country between the luxury of the few and the squalor of the many. Abolition of the income-tax? Yes, some day; but not before a corresponding reduction is made in the taxes pressing principally on the poor. Emphatically he asserts that temperance reform will make no headway until the principle of compensating publicans is frankly accepted. In answer to questions he retorts that Republicanism is not a practical issue. On Irish Home Rule he gives the following answer, well worthy of remembrance by friend and foe: "I believe the extension of the system of local government would be of the greatest advantage both to England and Ireland. But it is only fair and candid to add that I am not in favour of any

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system which would go further than this, and which would separate the imperial relations which at present exist between the two countries."

We may well recollect this, when we come to the question of Chamberlain's consistency at a great moment. With unbounded enthusiasm the multitude adopted him as a candidate. But Allott had now come out as a rival and refused to withdraw. The local squabble was dragging on with no sense of urgency when the sudden announcement of a dissolution fell upon them. Sheffield seethed with excitement.

IX

On that very day, January 24, 1874, Chamberlain's father died. We know enough to realise what that severance meant to his heart so rooted in household affections. His ordeal was severe. When every hour counted for the prospects of his candidature he could not leave Birmingham until within five or six days of the polling day at Sheffield, where he arrived to find all in confusion. He at once endeavoured to unite the ranks and offered to put the choice between Allott and himself to any fair test. It was arranged to hold another open meeting in Paradise Square and settle the quarrel by a show of hands. After the address, a forest of hands shot up for him and he carried the mass of the crowd. But Allott retired in sulks, and refused to help the adopted candidate, while many of his supporters were set on voting to keep Chamberlain out.

And he had a very dangerous opponent—a veteran of a hundred fights and of many Parliaments—no less a person than J. A. Roebuck, old "Tear 'em", renowned since the Reform Bill. Few remembered that Roebuck forty years before had been a champion of popular education like Chamberlain, and a young rebel as fearless. He had lost in 1868 his position, held for twenty years before, as senior Member for Sheffield, but at the age of seventy-three he now re-emerged, and was the idol of the rougher mob. Feeling not only rose; it raged. Between Roebuck and the leader of young Radicalism, old "Tear 'em" and new "Tear 'em", the struggle was a visible fight betwixt past and future, and arrested national attention. This contest was amongst the most savage and disorderly of Victorian times. Various were the mis-

siles. Dead cats were thrown. A red herring caught Chamberlain on the forehead while speaking in the Square; he laughed and went on. He was abused as an atheist and a Red Republican; the basest calumny called him a rich monopolist and sham Radical who ground the faces of his own work-people. But his own work-people sent a deputation of their fellows to crush this slander by their testimony.

The "Beer-and-Bible Alliance" was a real and great power at that moment of politics. Fifteen hundred publicans and their assistants worked against Chamberlain day and night with the foaming power of what used to be called the "long pull". A respectable publican elsewhere some months before this was reported to have said, "If I have twenty-one men in my bar on the day of polling I can make sure of twenty-one votes by distributing twenty-one pints of fourpenny: I have done it and can do it any time".[1] "Here's to Roebuck and the Bible" was one tavern cry, followed by round oaths and "Rule Britannia". A placard in public-house windows adjured all sturdy citizens to "stand by your National Religion and your National Beverage". On the polling day much of the town was full of liquor and "lambs", as the roughs, native and visiting, were dubbed. Allott's people nominated their man; the nominal protest he was bound to make against this was more tardy than helpful. The result of the poll on February 4 was as follows:

Roebuck (Liberal)	14193	elected
Mundella (Liberal)	12858	elected
Chamberlain (Radical)	11053	defeated
Allott (Liberal)	621	defeated

The fall of the League's own champion in what had been called "Radical Sheffield" resounded through the national battle, and many Liberals as well as Conservatives raised shouts of glee.

Praise and sympathy from his friends poured in upon him. Mundella writes from the Reform Club: "Here in this Club I am surrounded by an army of martyrs and I should have felt no chagrin to be one of them. Fawcett, one of the ablest men in England, at the bottom of the poll,[2] with the greatest fool in

[1] John Morley, *National Education* (1873), p. 107.

[2] At Brighton, February 5, 1874. But a few weeks later when Fawcett was returned for Hackney, another Radical wrote: "Gladstone, I imagine, is the person least pleased . . ." (Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 173).

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England at the top." An old Sheffield Chartist wrote to Chamberlain deducing democracy from the New Testament, and adding fervently: "God himself requires you. Gird yourself anew for the great fight. What are the strifes of mere party?" Another working man who had voted for him added: "I do feel that if it may please God to spare your life (which is my earnest prayer) we shall have one who will listen to our complaints".

This result came, as fate ordained, a few days after Chamberlain had laid his father in the grave. By common admission he had gone through all the fierce rowdyism of this Hogarthian election with cool intrepidity and without a moment's loss of good humour. The experience marked him. However gamely he appeared to take the Sheffield defeat, he felt it as an annoyance as well as a spur. "I was very much harassed when I left Birmingham, but the hurry and interest of the election and the excitement of the meetings (22 in 5 days) kept me going and did me good. I was vexed by the result and don't like being beaten."[1] John Morley was his guest again at this very moment, and remarks: "He is a lively and cheerful spirit—has already recovered from his mortification, and is intent on great things as Chairman of the School Board and King of Birmingham".[2]

For several reasons it was a providential check and the best thing that could have happened to him. In the two humdrum sessions before he entered the House of Commons he could have made no mark, the attempt would have been like hitting a feather bed. The great municipal work he now grappled with never could have been done. And Sheffield never could have become that solid and commanding base of his parliamentary career that his own city was destined to be for over forty years. A few months before, the *Labourers' Union Chronicle* had defended him when the *Spectator* accused him of bigotry and disparaged his pretensions:

> Mr. Chamberlain will yet make his mark in the House of Commons and excite the admiration and envy of a wide constituency. When he is known . . . his theology will be found too negative to feed the fierceness of a bigot. And as to his "power", the power of intellect, of keen humour and dry sarcasm and the rolling periods of denunciation or exposition,

[1] To Jesse Collings, February 10, 1874.

[2] *Early Life and Letters*, vol. i. p. 296.

it will give him a foremost place in the House of Commons. England will yet glory in the rising statesman that Birmingham has nursed.

This view was echoed in many small weekly journals now forgotten, read then by Radical working men throughout the country. After his Sheffield campaign he was more conspicuous in the nation, while amongst "his own people", as in truth they were henceforth, his influence very soon now was to surpass that of John Bright or of any man whom Birmingham had possessed.

CHAPTER X

HAPPINESS AND A NEW CALL—THE AWAKENING OF BIRMINGHAM

(1868–1874)

His Second Marriage—Happiness and Success—His Power in Commerce—Consolidation not Competition—The Pioneer of Modern "Rationalisation"—Retirement from Business—Public Service before Wealth—The Tobacco Parliament at Southbourne—The Social Question in Birmingham—A Reproach to Civilisation—The Movement for a Civic Renaissance—"Men of the Eve"—The Idealists find their Man.

I

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NEXT, the new Radical leader was to prove himself in his own town perhaps the greatest executive citizen of the nineteenth century. At least, in that capacity and in Britain, a person fit to be mentioned in the same breath with him has yet to be named. Before entering on that part of the record, we must see what had been the course of his personal life and what stamp of man he had become.

Resolved to devote himself wholly to public life, he severed his connection with Nettlefold and Chamberlain, and retired on terms making him a rich man for that time, though by no means the magnifico popularly supposed and cartooned by his opponents.

This critical decision in his life he took in the spring of 1874, shortly after his father's death and the General Election. With twenty years of ceaseless commercial energy behind him he was still in his thirty-seventh year. All events and purposes had conspired to bring him to a parting of the ways. Within a few short months he had become Mayor of Birmingham, Chairman of the School Board, a candidate for Parliament; he hoped still to enter

the House of Commons sooner than he did; and in national politics he meant to lead "the party of the future", and to rise very high in the State. Already some reflective men like Dr. Vince expected that he would some day be Prime Minister.

With all these responsibilities on his shoulders, and all these dreams and ambitions in his head, he had to choose once for all between accumulation of money and public achievement. Impossible for him to go on working both closely and intrepidly through long business hours daily as he had done since he was eighteen—how far away it seemed at thirty-seven—and at the same time excel in civic reconstruction while rising as a national leader and organising a new kind of democratic politics. Of the higher part he made his election.

Something must be said of the latter phase of his business career, for it not only concerns his personality. It is an outstanding episode in the economic progress of the country at a period when British commercial supremacy in the world became relatively more complete than ever before or after.

II

When last in these pages we looked at him in his office in Broad Street, he was still not out of his twenties and had completed his first decade of activity in the firm.

If that first decade was signally successful, the second was conquering. Not so very long before the boy was sent to Birmingham, and called upon to become a man in a minute, the total number of screws made in all England was estimated at 70,000 gross per week. In 1865 the yield of Birmingham alone was 130,000 gross per week, and of that total Nettlefold and Chamberlain made 90,000 gross, much more than the total make of the whole country had been just before 1850.[1] As the firm developed from 1865 to 1870 the smaller concerns could not stand against it. Under Chamberlain's financial management it built larger works for the production of its own wire, erected its own iron-mills, linked up with collieries.

Success attained a summit while the education struggle was raging and during the trade boom accompanying and following

[1] *Birmingham Daily Post*, July 4, 1914.

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the Franco-German War. As though he had not enough on his hands, Chamberlain from about 1869 onwards entered upon Napoleonic operations and pursued them until almost the whole of the screw trade of Birmingham and its neighbourhood passed into the hands of his firm.

The commercial reasons for his campaign of amalgamation will be stated in a moment, but first we must notice that there was also a personal reason for this new strategy and his enjoyment of it. Through former years, curious to say, he was only his father's representative and not formally a member of the firm, though its real master spirit. He was not made a partner until 1869, in the year after his second marriage. Then indeed he went ahead. He acted as a pioneer in Britain of what is now called rationalisation, and grasped the whole sense of that process. While competition prevailed he had been more than equal to every rival move. He got out the first price-list for all the different sizes of screws, and knew it by heart. When other firms tried to beat him or save their own footing by "cutting their lists", he manipulated his own more adroitly and won again. "We never make mistakes, do we, George?" [1]

But deciding that this sort of competition, however expert he might be in its practice, was wasteful and stupid as a method, he made up his mind to abolish it.

The firm had overcome American rivalry, severe for a time, and won the highest position in the world's markets. But he saw that foreign competition was bound to become more serious in the approaching years and that small-scale production and cut-throat methods among makers at home were already out of date. For enhanced efficiency, security and prosperity alike, he resolved to unify as far as possible the British manufacture. That done, the trade, he was confident, would be able to meet all comers for many a year. How did he set about it?

First, he negotiated with two of the largest competing firms and absorbed their businesses. Then, of course, he was better able to buy out other rivals, and was not to be withstood until he established, before he retired from trade, the dominating position called "monopoly".

[1] The *Searchlight*, Birmingham, November 13, 1913.

III

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Needless to say that on this score he suffered bitter personal attack, his first experience of what was to be a lifelong luxury for all manner of opponents. There was no bottom for the malicious fables about the methods he employed.

The slanders were not only groundless but dull-witted. He did not squeeze, he attracted. He took infinite pains. One obstinate matter of litigation filled four or five books of Nettlefold's correspondence, and every letter was in Joseph Chamberlain's own hand. When he had to fight he fought relentlessly but did everything to avoid it. Consummate man of business, he went on the sound maxim that the best bargain satisfies both sides. In his personal conduct of all these negotiations for several years he was as conciliatory as dexterous and determined. The terms offered to those he bought out were accepted just because they were liberal. Even the firms who refused to be swallowed extolled him for protecting the price of screws from haphazard under-cutting.

As his own work-people grew in numbers they were benefited by brighter and healthier conditions, surer employment and higher wages. Strikes and lock-outs were unknown in his time. When a strike was threatened he could be at first "like a lion rampant"—as a Trades Union leader remarked—but then he called men by their Christian names, and settled down to friendly talk. Bent on restoring good feeling and removing grievances, he always found the smooth way out.

Such as few employers at that time received was the evidence of his own work-people. They would not hear a word against him. During the Sheffield election we have seen them sending a deputation to defend him. Not again were they to find a helper so devoted and stimulating in and out of working hours.

Years afterwards the old libels on the "merciless monopolist" were revived for political purposes. Then they were finally refuted and withdrawn. But that episode belongs to a hot fight of his future, and must not be anticipated here.

Now in business, though not in civic or national politics, the parting between him and his work-people had to come. When his resolution to sell out was taken in the early spring of 1874,

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his brothers retired with him. On June 24, 1874, the work-people made him a presentation with affectionate speeches. He ended his reply with: "The King is dead; long live the King; Nettlefold and Chamberlain die to-night, and now I have to ask you to give three cheers for the new firm of Nettlefold". That was not the end of his acknowledgment. A week later two thousand of them were taken to London and entertained at the Crystal Palace. They had a great day. "There was a grand banquet"; and he shook hands with them all. With him his two brothers were founders of the feast.

"We shall never see another man like Mr. Chamberlain," said his old cashier forty years after.

All that part of his career was over, after twenty years; though in other spheres his work never would be less for a generation to come. Had he continued in the great field of industry and commerce he would have become a trust magnate and a millionaire. It was said at the time that £600,000 was paid for the total Chamberlain interest when Joseph and two of his brothers sold out of the firm wherefrom their name then disappeared. Joseph himself, since he was eighteen, had made all the money—at least twenty times, perhaps thirty times, the amount first risked by his father. The brothers had contributed nothing to the creative finance. But the father had been rigid in his ideas of equal distribution amongst his sons. It seems improbable that Joseph Chamberlain, to whom all was due, received, after all family claims had been adjusted, more than £120,000—a fifth part of what he had made. When he severed himself from money-making he never looked back. But his practical knowledge of industry and labour had given him among the statesmen of his age a unique equipment. Nothing is more important for an understanding of Chamberlain than to remember that in Britain he had been a pioneer of large-scale production by consolidated enterprise, for the same spirit stamped him as a new kind of public leader contrasted with the traditional type. Since then amalgamation or rationalisation has become a prevailing principle in modern industrial systems. Escaped from commercial duty—exacting as he had made it, and proud of it as he ever remained—this born and unchangeable man of pioneering initiative devotes his ideas of larger and more

definite organisation to civic and national life. As in the long run he will apply them to Imperial affairs.[1]

IV

Private peace had come back to him, and he sometimes forgot the old shadow of dread. After Harriet's death, he feared strangely that if he sought happiness once more it might turn to tragedy again; and this misgiving he could not for several years shake off.

Of the beginning and growth of a new affection he has little to say. We may surmise. Florence Kenrick was his first wife's cousin. His thoughts, attracted to her as much by resemblance as by differences, became fixed when she was out of her 'teens. No comment can fitly touch his own compressed words:

> We were married on June 8, 1868, nearly five years after Harrie's death. That great and terrible loss, constantly in my mind up to my second marriage, left with me always a sense of insecurity and a dread of possibilities which were too full of pain to dwell upon continually. . . .

In this way he yielded, not easily, to another dream of happiness, and it was fulfilled for a term longer than before, yet not for very long as measured by life's ordinary reckoning.

Florence was at first very diffident. Her aptitudes ripened in response to the calls of his career as it moved swiftly after their marriage. "While we were at Ilfracombe in 1869 I received an invitation to stand for the Town Council, which I accepted with her cordial concurrence, and after our return I was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Education League, an appointment which gradually introduced me to active political life." [2] She aided him in all his interests, attended his meetings, studied botany to share and increase his pleasure in gardening.

[1] An epilogue to his business career showed how much he was esteemed and trusted by employers and employed throughout the Midlands. A couple of years after his retirement from manufacture, he consented at the unanimous request of masters and men to become president of the Wages Board in the South Staffordshire Iron Trade, and this work of conciliation he made time to discharge until he became a Cabinet Minister in 1880. In this task also, as his papers show, he took minute pains and kept to the end the entire confidence of both capital and labour.

[2] This account of his second marriage is mainly from an account written down by him just after her death.

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He consulted her about his speeches and articles. She sustained him through every hour of difficulty and disappointment in these stirring and sometimes wearing years. One sentence says much. "The articles which I wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* were submitted to her criticism first, and it was with her approval and at her desire that the first of these articles was sent to the press." Further, "She gave up much time to the arrangement of reports and extracts and speeches which might be useful in my work, and which she took pleasure in indexing and arranging for ready reference".

They lived at Southbourne, a house in a part of Edgbaston then green and open; it came to be nearly as well known as Highbury later; and they entertained largely. As hostess Florence took her full part in making their home delightful to neighbouring friends and notable guests who now came from London. When her social duties became civic she contributed much to his complete popularity. In his own words again there was "no thought or action" at that time which she did not share with him. Yet his happiness was crossed suddenly now and then by apprehension: "She was never very strong, and had a delicate and spiritual look which sometimes made me anxious, but her spirit was indomitable and she did not know what idleness was."

V.

On the whole all was hope and elation again. Forgetting "the shadow", he was the life and soul of any company. As before, no man worked harder at whatever he put his hand to or got through more in the time, but when not working he not only looked like a boy, he felt like one. With the widest variety of active interests, he used and savoured every minute of his leisure. In his relaxed moods—there was a depth of tranquillity in him always when he was not driving things or revelling in his fun—he forgot everything else in the joys of gardening.

In his summer holidays he is still pedestrian, swimmer and fisherman. He loves the hills and the streams. He entreats Jesse Collings—one of his two dearest friends; the other was John Morley—to join him in Wales. "The hills splendid, the river cool and beautiful . . . let us repeat the scenes of our youth. You shall

dance in the moonlight if you desire it, or fish—and catch salmon if you can."[1] When he takes a good salmon himself it is like winning an election.

Every winter he enters with the same gaiety into private theatricals given chiefly at Oakgate, the residence of C. E. Mathews, a fast friend in public and private and a man of gifts. As an amateur actor our Radical excels in this circle, where some knew the stage not only in Birmingham but in Paris as well as London. A witness remembered forty years after that his playing of Puff in *The Critic* carried away his audience of four or five hundred persons. He already showed, it appears, traits that became known on the public stage, "the biting sarcasm, the gentle elevation of the eyebrows, the change in intonation and the curl of the lip . . . ", and the sneer too. Another principal performance of his was the Frenchman's part in a piece now forgotten, *The Wonderful Woman*. But, in this as in everything, he took much trouble to do well: rehearsals went on for a month.

Early in the 'seventies—about 1872 it seems—this phase was ended by the pressure of politics and civics. But his vivacity only changed direction. When Mayor he refused to become solemn or pompous in private life, and once when a company in his smoking-room was carried away by high merriment, the Chief Magistrate capped the fun by mounting the mantelpiece and dangling his legs "like a medical student". "And they call that man Mayor", said with stage voice and attitude a chartered local comedian.

That was the lighter side. There was another, and Lord Morley has left the best picture of it:

> Chamberlain came to be more widely read in books worth reading than most men in public life, and there was no limit to his interest in art, modern history, imaginative letters, with all that they import in politics. As it was, he drew round him at Birmingham a remarkable circle, and in after-dinner conversations with them in his library there was an activity of mind, a discussion of theoretic social views in terms of practical life, an atmosphere of strenuous and disinterested public spirit, all far superior for effective purpose to the over-critical air and tone of the academic common-room."[2]

[1] To Jesse Collings, written from Machynlleth, August 22, 1874.

[2] Morley, *Recollections*, vol. i. pp. 148-149.

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Chamberlain held Tobacco Parliaments like Frederick William. The jovial and purposeful sittings were often held two or three times each week. In "Smokerei-and-Talkerei" as he called it, with allusions to the original Tabaks-Kollegium, the polity of Birmingham was settled; Council House and Town Hall duly registered the decisions. Conservatives, disturbed by the growth of his influence every way, whispered that there was method in his hospitality. "At Southbourne", remarked one, who was no uncritical admirer, "were laid the foundations of Mr. Chamberlain's power. Here the great and daring schemes . . . were planned."[1] John Morley, like Captain Maxse, often took part in these meetings in the big library, and he goes on to evoke scenes long past.

> Seriously as they applied themselves to their topics, gaiety was abundant. . . . Nobody could be more readily and cheerfully silent than the host, nobody a more narrowly attentive listener. He had a certain testing, half-ironic, yet never supercilious glance, that kept men to their point. . . . Swift in debate, he was not in the least affected with the barren spirit of contradiction. . . . But he was an open man, a spontaneous man. I have always thought him, of all the men of action I have known, the frankest and most direct, as he was, with two exceptions [probably here Morley means Gladstone and Parnell], the boldest and the most intrepid. . . . He was not easy to disconcert, either by adverse argument or untoward news; he listened, and in an instant his mind turned in search of the best way out. Right or wrong in his conclusions, in thought or reasoning, or decision or act, nobody was keener in clearing a question of its lumber. Firm in character, he was as yet a moderate in the cast of his intelligence. Conciliatory by temperament, as the really good man of business is conciliatory, he was Thorough in his methods. People who are careless about using right words called him cynical, when they meant no more than caustic.[2]

Leslie Stephen, who met him at this period, thought him "a very pleasant intelligent person", in spite of his repute as a Republican bugbear. At social gatherings for his own workmen and other humble supporters they were made in another way at least as happy as any other guests; he forgot no one he ought

[1] The *Searchlight*, Birmingham, November 13, 1913.

[2] Morley, *Recollections*, vol. i. pp. 151-153.

to notice; and by quick, kindly attention he made thousands of friends who stood by him all their lives.

Turn to a third picture. He did not think that a democratic leader required Jeffersonian carelessness in his person. He dressed with a little dandyism sometimes too noticeable in his earlier public years, though far from being so conspicuous as that of Fox and Disraeli in their earlier manhood. Birmingham thought him what the vernacular called a "swell". He liked to wear a red tie drawn through a gold ring. He particularly liked long top-coats in the last cut of the fashion. He once took away the breath of a municipal meeting by appearing in a top-coat of seal-skin. Like King Edward, he was exact in the article of tall hats, and his monocle was already as familiar as presently the orchid in his buttonhole. His look of youthfulness, and it struck everyone, carried him off in these things.

A little later he remains a pattern of spruceness in appearance, while avoiding all singularity except his orchid. Tall, elastic, well-knit, he had with dark hair the clear pallor often belonging in their earlier years to many men of tough physique and powerful feeling. His very poise seemed watchful and purposeful. In all ways when in activity he was as "alert" and "all-there" as at University College School. His profile in his taut mood rather suggested a bow full drawn with the arrow ready to fly.

VI

We must conceive the state of his city in the 'sixties and appreciate what he owed to others before we can understand what he did there.

We are not accustomed to think of Birmingham as either ancient in origin or romantic in association at any time, but it probably began as a Saxon clearing in the forest of Arden when that forest was one of the land's widest. From the Middle Ages, renowned was this place for iron-work, and excelled in sharp blades. Old Leland in Henry the Eighth's time went up the long street and thought it beautiful, remarking also: "There be many smiths in the town that use to make knives and all manner of cutting tools and many loriners that make bittes and a great many naylors".

Its spirit was like the nature of its trades. Clarendon thought

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it as dangerous a nest of sedition as any in England, and when it was taken by Prince Rupert, the Cavaliers as they rode in sang and cursed with hearty satisfaction. Then, and for long afterwards, it showed a cluster of gables rising up green slopes with one spire pointing high. After the industrial revolution its population rose rapidly. In its new bigness and ugliness it was from 1832 to the age of household franchise as stubborn a stronghold of reform as it had been of the Roundheads.

Like the other industrial towns in the beginning of the steam age it thickened and spread and darkened and sprawled, without a notion of town planning. The fields were swallowed up by brick and mortar, and as streets and alleys extended their dingy warrens, ground was economised by squeezing as many human beings as possible into a given space. The demand for housing meant of course maximum rents, and minimum accommodation, in those days when free trade and *laissez-faire* were one. Where the clearing in the forest of Arden had first been made, the inner parts of this huddled maze became as foul as dense. The slums were created and spread, and grew worse as the houses grew older.

Up to household franchise, and for some time after, the old Birmingham Town Council, like many other municipal bodies in the country, was a perfunctory, disrespected clique of Bumble-minded nobodies. As much as possible they dodged municipal duties to spare the rates. Their proceedings were prearranged at a tavern felicitously called "The Old Woodman" in "Easy Row". For twenty years and more, successive experts had made appalling reports upon the sanitary condition of the town. For twenty years and more those conditions were left to fester.

The full tale of these abuses would be too noisome to repeat in this chapter even were there room. Masses of houses were built back to back, or almost, so as to block through-ventilation. There were dens within dens. Close alleys wormed off from the streets; and in many cases, behind these alleys again, archways and passages gave entrance to enclosed courts reeking with squalor. No constable single-handed durst enter some of them; no family could dwell there with decency. In the absence of main drainage the stench rose from thousands and thousands of open ashpits. Gutters stagnated or trickled with pollution, and

more than half the inhabitants depended for their water supply on surface-wells, tainted with sewage. Cobble-stones called "kidneys" were set together to make unclean pavements. Preventible disease was virulent always.

VII

Every day Chamberlain, on his way from home to business and again from business to home, passed and re-passed some of the worst of these places.

What stung him most was that amongst the ruffians and drunkards and degraded tatterdemalions created by these surroundings he found "decent families" lodged and herded more vilely than beasts. Before he learned that, in the early 'seventies, there was not a pin to choose between the two political parties in the matter of housing, Liberalism and *laissez-faire* still being the same, he thought that these things were the result of social privilege and that the Established Church was its accomplice. We must make allowance for his vehemence of feeling in those days, and for his immoderate language. He lived in sight of these things, and he burned with disgust and pity. To him the state of the town was a cry that rose to heaven. He wanted to do something; to do much. It was his nature.

The way was prepared for him by other men, his sympathies were saturated by their teaching; they were remarkable; his life owed so much to them that their portraits look from his walls. Birmingham at that time possessed a group of leading citizens whom any town in the world might envy. They desired a civic renaissance and created municipal idealism.

Earliest and foremost amongst them was George Dawson. He was the prophet—known throughout the country as a lecturer on a wide range of subjects. Charles Kingsley thought him in that capacity about "the best public talker in England". To his Church of the Saviour his unconventional pulpit drew congregations who thought all other preachers conventional by comparison with Dawson and his irregular fascination, his witty or moving comment on life, the universal charities of his humanism. All the rest more or less through many years received from him in vapour what they gave back in flood.

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Dr. Dale on the other hand, a truly great preacher in another way, was the theologian both systematic and mystical; massiveness, cohesion, glow, were the traits that built up the impression of him. Swarthy as fervent, he was unclerical in his cut and wore a heavy gold chain across his waistcoat.

> His thick black beard covered all indications of a tie white or otherwise. His face, with great bulging eyes shining out from behind gold spectacles, was framed in a circle of thick black hair which above his forehead was brushed straight up.[1]

As a political orator on the platform this Nonconformist leader, looking like a cross between a pontiff and a stockbroker, was no longer second even to Bright. No Liberal meeting was complete without him, and when he made his usual effective appearance, somewhat after the proceedings had begun, welcome shook the roof. Dawson's gospel of civic regeneration he preached with more commanding power than the originator.

As different again, Dr. Crosskey, minister of the Church of the Messiah, where Chamberlain attended, was a foremost Unitarian of his day, calm and broad, pondering how to reconcile science and faith. His defence before a Royal Commission of the principles of the Education League against the charge of irreligion, was one day to be the clearest, highest statement ever made on that side; when he contended that the spiritual vitality of the nation would have been better secured had the clergy of all sects accepted a uniform system of common schools for secular instruction, and thrown themselves into the supplementary work of religious teaching as into a mission or a crusade.

Dr. Vince, leader of the Baptists in Birmingham for many years, though a Puritan, was no sour fanatic but sensitive and lovable, full of sweetness and humour in manners, as of austerities in practice. These were the preachers and pastors who had come to regard social reorganisation as an imperative of religious duty.

The laymen were not unworthy of them. Since 1867 George Dixon, formerly Mayor, had been Bright's colleague in the representation of the town and stood for better local government

[1] R. S. Kirk's "Recollections of Chamberlain and his Times" in the *Searchlight*, Birmingham, November 13, 1913.

in general as well as for education first. Jesse Collings was surpassed by none of them whether in the warmth of honest human feeling or unwearied exertion. "That unselfish and whole-hearted man brought the needs of the toiler in the fields into the forefront with all the force of living experience." [1] But not less dedicated than those other "men of the eve" to the reconstruction of the town. J. T. Bunce, the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, was a man of trusted ability and judgment. "Through the columns of the most powerful newspaper in the Midland counties," said Dr. Dale, "the new ideas about municipal life and duties were pressed on the whole community." Bunce's occasional leader-writer, William Harris, already mentioned, was a far more distinctive person; he had the real originating intellect. Wielding influence without seeking the appearance of it, his suggestiveness behind the scenes was second only to George Dawson's in the open. His *History of the Radical Party* is only a large fragment, but still useful. John Skirrow Wright, with the most stentorian voice in Birmingham, was for a score of years the kindly physical giant of the team, but fated to a sad death immediately after his election to the House of Commons.

Schnadhorst's part in the municipal movement came later, but then his methodical gift was a first-rate reinforcement. Emerging, in the manner already related, as Secretary of the Central Nonconformist Committee formed to resist Forster's Education Act, he became in 1873 secretary of the Liberal Association of Birmingham. Though his ancestors had been settled in England for a century, this draper turned political organiser had the Prussian quality and its drawbacks. He would do anything to win and was absorbed in minute calculations. Efficient and devoted in method and detail, he was superior when his direction was given by a captain's mind like Chamberlain's, but inferior in judgment when left to himself, as Gladstone ultimately found. Meanwhile he gathered a thousand threads in his hands; his name became the synonym for occult powers of organisation; and he was one of the indispensable personalities of the Tobacco Parliaments at Southbourne.

What apology is needed for these sketches of former provincial life? Not all first-rate men go to London. These people

[1] Morley, *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 149.

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would have counted anywhere. Birmingham in the early 'seventies was vitalised by a shining group of good citizens; and at last they found in Chamberlain the leader who framed them into a phalanx not to be withstood.

VIII

All these came to see that to reform the town they must first reform the sort of council which frequented "The Old Woodman" in "Easy Row". For long years George Dawson had urged the best citizens not to despise municipal politics but to come into the service of the town and to count it as not less honourable than parliamentary success.

Among those who responded to the appeal at last, when reforming impulses filled the air, was Chamberlain. And as he did nothing by halves, he not only enlisted in person but worked to recruit others amongst those of his own class and standing. At the end of 1869 he was elected, as we know, for St. Paul's Ward and, unawares, formed a lifelong tie with a district forming later a solid part of his parliamentary basis.

It is amusing to recollect that when Chamberlain entered the Town Council—just before the education controversy brought him out in every sense—he was an uncertain speaker, sometimes halting and laboured. He of all men occasionally lost the thread of an ambitious argument and stood confused. One reason was that he still composed and memorised. He was cured of this fault by practice on the Council, on the School Board, and more and more on the platform. He was to become as great in debate as Bright in oratory, but perhaps no one who ever rose to this kind of excellence had at first less spontaneous aptitude. His success is a lesson in what men may do to make themselves. His principal arena was for some time the School Board, where leadership of the minority called out all his fighting qualities. His quick repartee, dexterity in full reply, cool wickedness in obstructing proposals he thought bad, skill in expediting those he thought good, won growing admiration from the bulk of the townsfolk.

When he took command of the Town Council he showed equal qualities in discussion and tactics with far greater powers of constructive action and impelling leadership.

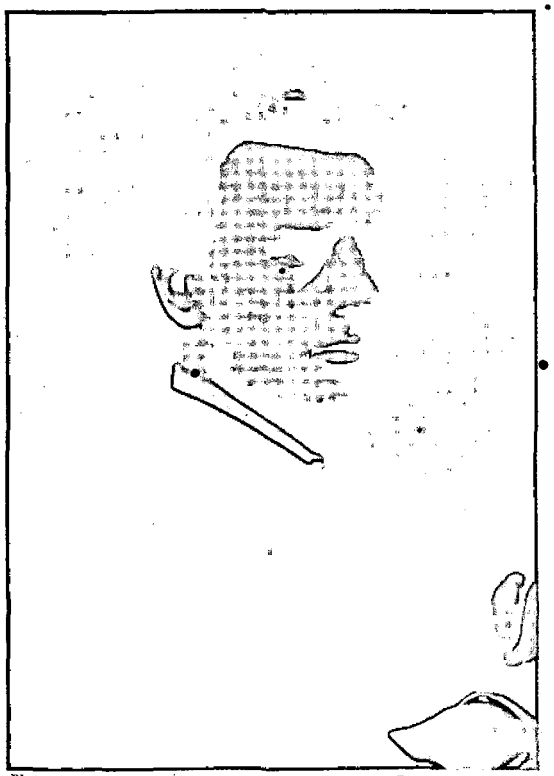

Photo *Draycott, Birmingham*

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN, 1874

Mayor of Birmingham

Photo *H. J. Whillock, Birmingham*

FLORENCE KENRICK AND

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, 1869

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT CITIZEN IN ACTION

(1873–1876)

THE Great Mayoralty—Fall of the "Old Woodman" in "Easy Row" —The "Dictator" and the Machine—Transforming Birmingham— "By God's help the Town shall not know itself"—The Sequel— "Parked, paved, assized, marketed, gas-and-watered and improved"— The greatest Executive Citizen of the Nineteenth Century—A Royal Visit and National Praise—Death of his Wife and his Mother— Chamberlain despairs of Life—A Black Period—From Faith to Stoicism—His Work resumed and completed—Birmingham's Forty Years of Fidelity.

I

IN a word, Chamberlain was determined to materialise the long-thwarted dreams of the civic idealists; to throw down the "Old Woodman" regime and the "Easy Row" methods; and transform the town. In the autumn of 1873, when his name was nationally known, and after four years on the Council, he had become its compelling personality, though not yet its official head. Everyone, friend and foe, knew that were he made Chief Magistrate something would happen. It was serious at last for the old regime.

At the end of October he tells John Morley, "The Liberals have determined to run me as Mayor, and the result is that nearly every Ward in the town is to be contested . . . the air never was hotter".[1] All the forces of opposition appealing to the citizens on the cry of low rates and high patriotism roused themselves to throw him out; and nearly did. His tough Conservative antagonist in St. Paul's Ward denounced him as a "monopoliser and a dictator"; an autocrat masquerading as

[1] To Morley, October 26, 1873.

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democrat. By tub-thumpers he was execrated as a conspirator with sinister designs, republican and atheist at heart.

St. Paul's Ward was the cockpit of the whole municipal battle. "To be or not to be?" Was it tolerable that in the same month this notorious and dangerous man should become master both of the Town Council and the School Board? It seems to have been at this time that the remembered cartoon, exhibited in New Street, parodied him as addressing the working classes: "Now, me lads, let us be equal and I will be your King". He saved his seat by a hair's breadth, but it would do.[1]

On Guy Fawkes' Day his bulletin, without exuberance, goes to John Morley:

> The Municipal Elections here have resulted in a victory for the Liberals, and I suppose my Mayoralty is a certainty. It is a laborious and responsible undertaking for me but a clear gain to the party. We are now hotly engaged in the School Board fight. It is a true "religious war", and with all its necessary bitterness. "Bible or no Bible" is the Church cry: "the People above the Priests" is ours. I hope we shall thrash them.[2]

How "they" were thrashed on both floors has been seen in preceding pages on the Education fight.

II

He would have been beaten in the Municipal contest, and perhaps in the School Board tussle as well, had it not been for his "new model" in organisation. This accounts for the lasting solidity of his Midland foundations, and that basis must be looked at before we can understand how he built upon it.

Civic elections no less than national were to be fought on strict political lines—Radicalism against Conservatism. Schnadhorst was employed to do the detail of drilling the "new model" for municipal war. Chamberlain, continuing his trained methods in commerce, organised as Dr. Johnson talked—"for victory". He had no other thought in his head.

This method was of more than local interest; the principle

[1] After the fight he distributed pencil-cases and other little souvenirs amongst those who had worked for him, and entertained them at a dinner. Of this occasion one of them said forty years after: "I have never met a man since who so captivated his guests".

[2] To Morley, November 5, 1873.

involved was for years disputed all over England. Many moderate persons doubted both the logic and wisdom of carrying the old battle of the reds and blues into every nook and corner of public life. Others accused Chamberlain of introducing a Tammany system and the tomahawk with the wigwam. His answer was plain—that there was no alternative in Birmingham if the forces of reform were to master those of resistance. The milder way had been tried for a generation, and glaring was the scandal of its failure. Birmingham could wait no longer. The social issues between the forces of reform and those of obstruction were, he maintained, even more vitally at stake in municipal affairs than in national. Above all was he confident that the rousing method, lifting the average citizen's sense of the importance of local self-government, would bring out "the best men".

In this he proved right. The "Caucus" method in civic affairs came to have its partisan abuses; Conservatives chafing for years under the yoke of the majority bitterly caricatured the "spoils system"; even street sweeping, they averred, was reserved for reliable Liberals. But, on the whole, Chamberlain's action in fighting municipal contests on political lines was vindicated by civic efficiency. No other way has yet been found to stir average persons of all classes out of their bad apathy in municipal affairs.

At the first shock the old regime went down before the new discipline. The municipal contests pivoted on the personal question: Who was to be Mayor?

Everyone knew that Chamberlain would be appointed if the Liberals won. They won all along the line. In the School Board election by a nice distribution of their votes they reversed the bitter defeat of three years before, and returned all their candidates, "the Liberal Eight", by immense majorities. Chamberlain exults to John Morley on November 19, 1873: "We have given the Beer and Bible Tories a smashing defeat—polling 291,000 votes to their 195,000". The axe was laid to the root of the "Old Woodman's" own tree; and well might George Dixon write a couple of months later, after Chamberlain's heavy check at Sheffield, that there were unusual compensations for not being M.P.:

> You are only Mayor, Chairman of the School Board—prime mover of everything good in Birmingham, and amongst the Non-Cons., etc., etc.

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"... I do hope you will now take some care of your health. I did not at all like your looks last Sunday.[1]

III

This period of killing exertion and his father's death had left their mark upon him. Retirement from private business partly relieved the strain. Soon he was his grappling self again, and his programme took away the breath of the timid.

Much had been expected from him. Much he did. Into two years and a half he crowded more cleansing and reconstructive measures than before him had been seen in a lifetime. For twenty years the air had been rife with unfulfilled ideas. He put them into action at last and added bigger ideas of his own. His whole spirit was expressed in one splendid sentence before his term of office was half-way through: "In twelve months by God's help the town shall not know itself." It was a Cromwellian word, and he kept it.

In the two and a half years of this mayoralty he carried out three principal designs, while making a hundred administrative improvements. His opening procedure was a pattern of forth-looking method in civic statesmanship, animated by "sagacious audacity"—as he said himself in one of the best phrases he then coined.

He must first use finance to break a path for sanitary reform and architectural improvement. For his purpose the town needed a large increase of revenue.

How was he to find the money without raising the rates? This question involved an examination of the fundamental principles of municipal government; and led him to start from two propositions. (1) "All monopolies which are sustained in any way by the State ought to be in the hands of the representatives of the people, by whom they should be administered, and to whom their profits should go." (2) "He was inclined to increase the duties and responsibilities of the local authority, and would do everything in his power to constitute these local authorities, real local parliaments supreme in their special jurisdiction."[2] Other large cities owned land, docks, tramways, gasworks and

[1] February 5, 1875. Dixon writes from Cherkley Court, Leatherhead.

[2] Speech to the Council, January 13, 1874. For the history of the whole transaction see John Thackray Bunce, *History of the Corporation of Birmingham*, vol. ii. (1885), pp. 346 *seq.*

waterworks, deriving from these properties a large non-tax revenue, such as Birmingham did not yet possess. Birmingham must provide itself with similar resources.

Lighting, first. *Fiat lux* must be the Biblical and profitable beginning. Chamberlain meant at once to lay firm hands on the private gas monopoly. Gas for lighting was first applied in this town.[1] The supply belonged to two companies. Immediately on being elected Mayor, and before unfolding his proposals to the Council, he had entered on his own responsibility into communication with the boards of the two companies. More experienced than any man in the country in that sort of negotiation for purchase, he made the ground pretty sure before committing himself publicly—a typical trait of his "sagacious audacity". He explained with clear candour the opposite sides of the account.

Liabilities? On the one hand his scheme, if carried out, would raise the borough debt at one stroke from about £500,000 to £2,500,000. Assets? On the other hand he saw his way to make a great profit for the town by ample savings in the costs both of management and equipment as the result of unified municipal control; while he expected in addition to secure an expanding revenue from increasing consumption. Satisfactory terms could be offered to the companies, and yet these terms were such that the acquisition might be made without any increase of rates, and with "the certainty of receiving in a short time considerable sums in relief of taxation". Widely enlarged would be the responsibilities of the Corporation but also its power.

Convinced, as it might well, a full Council voted (January 13, 1874) for purchase by 54 votes to 2. But the appeal went to a ratepayers' meeting; unbelievers were still scornful; the Mayor won by what must be called a coup of character. He had named the large but advantageous sum at which the undertakings could be bought. "Would *you* give that for it?" cried a pointed antagonist. The retort won the day: "I will repeat the offer I made to the Town Council . . . that if they will take this bargain and farm it out to me, I will pay them £20,000 a year for it, and at the end of fourteen years (he was only thirty-seven) I shall have

[1] In 1798 at the famous foundry of Boulton and Watt, when James Watt himself was still in the business.

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a snug little fortune of £150,000 or £200,000".[1] That settled it. Next he completed the negotiation with the companies; appeared with signal success before the parliamentary committees; and overcame the opposition of various local bodies with tact, temper and resource.

When the Bill was passed he took the chairmanship of the Gas Committee; devoted to it all the efficient attention and minute grasp of detail whereby he had achieved success in his own commercial affairs; and soon placed it on a sure foundation. In the first half-year of his management he made a profit of £25,000. Reviewing results some years later, he could show that the service had been in every way improved, that the price of gas had been twice reduced, and yet that a clear profit of £80,000 had been directly applied to relief of rates, while another sum of £85,000 had been partly devoted to the Sinking Fund and partly carried to Reserve.

A municipal colleague in these transactions has left the following testimony:

> The works were enormously increased, the expenditure was rigidly controlled and at the same time the condition of the workmen was materially improved. . . . I consider Mr. Chamberlain the most able negotiator I have ever met. He always discerned the line of least resistance and advanced along it, concentrating his force on the vital points to be secured, while surrendering, where necessary, unimportant advantages. There was no guess-work in his methods; he secured good information, carefully prepared his plans; and, in a word, knew exactly what he wanted and how to get it.[2]

So much for the first task and the first year.

IV

At the end of it he was re-elected Mayor with unanimity and acclamation. He had surprised and attached former doubters by other qualities than those so far described. In fairness and amenity they had found him a model chairman in spite of the pace he made in pulling them along. He had a habit of play-

[1] Speech at Ratepayers' Meeting, Town Hall, April 13, 1874.

[2] Cited by N. Murrell Marris, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 116.

ing with a heavy gold pencil-case and bringing the head of it sharply down on the table to enforce a point. "He is impartial to a degree that twelve months ago his opponents would hardly have given him credit for", wrote George Dawson's short-lived newspaper, always very critical.

Of course, he was uncomfortably "alert". Slower members found the motions put before they could get out of their mouths their intended speeches or amendments. There was no harm in this method but much gain. They got used to it and liked it. It saved time and excluded boredom. Nothing that mattered seemed to be omitted or misjudged. Behind the scenes, however, there was always a good deal of the harassing objections and petty friction that every man of this stamp has to encounter. The work never was so easy as it looked from the outside. He and it went on.

After light, water. From the end of 1874 into 1875 the second great plan had long been meditated. The task of providing a civilised water supply was more difficult as more essential. It was his dearest aim from the first, and he had only postponed it for strategic reasons.

Bent on this more than anything, he took care. The water supply of Birmingham was still a mixed matter of private trading and primitive resorts—a queer and maleficent barbarism for a community of 300,000 people entering on the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Water Company's pipe service was good enough as far as it went—but only ran on three days in the week! Half the population drew its drinking water from surface-wells, most of them tainted, some horridly polluted, by percolating sewage. Perambulating carts eked out the distribution of this fluid.

Long ago, at a time between Trafalgar and Waterloo, the "private-pump" interest had resisted the first dream of reservoirs, pipes and taps, declaring that "the erection of water works in this town is wholly unnecessary and would be productive of great evil".[1] For many years visions of total reform had been cherished by the municipal idealists, but the visions had remained in the air. Before making his official proposals for municipalising the water supply, Chamberlain opened his

[1] Bunce, *Birmingham Corporation*, vol. ii. p. 394.

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private communications, as in the case of the gas undertakings; but with less success this time. The Water Company would have to be fought out before it could be bought out. As wells had to be closed for sanitary reasons the better it would thrive. The Company believed itself to command the position, and for compensation opened its mouth like Jonah's whale.

In December 1874 the Mayor moved to promote a bill for the compulsory purchase of the water system, failing transfer by agreement. His speech carried the Council to a man, and he never made a statement more completely silencing criticism. This speech is a classic in municipal records. As a piece of pure exposition, extended yet not wasting a word, lucid, restrained, yet damning, we may doubt whether he ever transcended it in his life.

He based himself again on his first principle of municipal government, "that all monopolies, regulated monopolies, sustained by the State in the interests of the inhabitants generally, should be controlled by the representatives of the people, and should not be left in the hands of private speculators". The death-rate in Birmingham from contagious and preventible diseases was high and rising, especially amongst children. The Mayor went on to state that he himself had seen direct connection between drains and wells. Most of the wells on which half the poor population depended were vilely contaminated. Many of them were noted in the medical officers' reports as the sources of "small-pox" or "fever"; none of them was safe; the town must close them all.

"Many of the most experienced magistrates of this town have told me that of all their duties the saddest is that of registering convictions against poor people brought up at the instigation of the Water Company for stealing that which is one of the first necessities of life. They might almost as well be convicted for stealing air. I have sometimes wondered why the supply of air is not regulated by the Legislature and handed over to some Company with a dividend limited to 10 per cent!" [1]

Was it tolerable or thinkable that the extensive or complete closing of the wells should be allowed to result in "enormously

[1] *Borough of Birmingham. A Short History of the Gas Act, Water Act and Improvement Scheme, with the Speeches of the Mayor. Chamberlain's Speech, 4th December 1874*, p. 61.

increasing the profits of a private Company, which profits we are afterwards expected to buy at an enormous premium"? Already twenty years' delay had increased and multiplied the cost of a purchase inevitable in the long run. Almost all the other large towns, fifty or sixty of them, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Manchester, Belfast, Dublin, Plymouth, Cardiff and the rest owned their water systems. "I find in almost every case these undertakings have resulted either in a large profit to the town, or in considerable reduction of rates, or in both."

Small wonder that there was not a dissentient vote in the Council; from that day the whole support of the town was behind his determination that a "power of life and death" should not be left in the hands of a commercial company.

Finally, a little later, he secured equal assent to a proposition in the highest spirit of his civic policy, that "whereas there should be a profit made on the gas-undertaking the water should never be a source of profit; all profit should go in reduction of the price of water".

In the parliamentary proceedings during the session of 1875, Chamberlain, as chief witness for the Corporation, appeared again with the same mastery and his evidence was conclusive.

As soon as the Bill was passed he resumed his earlier efforts to do by conciliation what otherwise he meant to do by compulsion. It was now to the interest of the Company to settle on reasonable terms, and they agreed to be bought out on a basis of perpetual annuities equivalent to a total price of £1,350,000.[1] Then the water supply was extended, cheapened and improved in every way. The second achievement of the great mayoralty was a benefit beyond estimate to the town and to all its humanities.

It should be added in this connection that throughout his term sanitation was ceaselessly advanced in other ways. The Health Committee was made far more powerful; strong by-laws in the interests of housing were carried and enforced in spite of stiff resistance; smoke nuisances were restrained; the hospital system extended. Birmingham's new ways with sewage problems attracted wide attention at home and abroad; and before

[1] Bunce, *Birmingham Corporation*, vol. ii. p. 414.

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he left office a union for main drainage was formed with surrounding districts. He always thought of Birmingham as the metropolis of the Midlands.

V

After lighting and water, slum clearance and rebuilding. This third design was his ablest—a plan as original as daring by comparison with former conceptions of provincial government. So much had been pressed into eighteen months. So much of it undertaken in happy hours had now to be completed—as we shall see—in private circumstances of sadness nigh despair. Tired of his own life once more, and more than ever for a time, he was neither satisfied nor wearied in his public effort.

The lighting and water services were no sooner acquired than he undertook and carried through the constructive revolution inadequately called the Improvement Scheme—in reality a scheme for transforming the heart of the town. There, extending from near the fine structure of the Town Hall and shaming it were masses of tumbledown tenements "unfit for human habitation", as its medical officers said—"unfit for a dog to die in", as this Mayor said.

These nightmare purlieus, where morality and decency were impossible, and drunkenness the only refuge from reality, were a wretched labyrinth of alleys, courts, yards and "gullets"; bearing, many of them, ancient and pleasant names dating from the days when Birmingham, clustering up round St. Martin's spire, opened everywhere towards green fields and towards near woodlands and clean streams. "Cherry Street, Bull Street, Coach Yard, Lower Priory, Minories, Rope Walk", and the rest; their names tell their tale. Now, far parted from free air and light, they were full of foulness, darkness, vice, rags, stench and misery; where the fading and burial of children in unusual numbers was the accepted commonplace; the regular scene on Saturday nights of drunken brawling and obscene din, with wife-beating, women's shrieks and children's wailing.

The Mayor now meant to sweep away this congeries of slums; to provide fully for rehousing the inhabitants; to create, where the rookeries had been, a new main thoroughfare planned on broad handsome lines, worthy of any city—a "boulevard", as he

liked to call it—and to do all this not by crushing the rate-payers but by endowing the town.

He was opportunely aided by the Artisans' Dwelling Act carried at this time by Disraeli's Government to its honour. That Act encouraged municipalities to cope with the slum problem in a larger way than before by enabling them to borrow money cheaply, while becoming the freeholders of the land which might have to be acquired. Intensely interested in this measure from the first moment of its introduction in the session of 1875, Chamberlain contributed to its amendment by personal interviews with Cross, the Home Secretary, and Sclater Booth, the President of the Local Government Board.

At the end of July 1875 the Mayor opened his "grand design" to the Council. He told them that what had been already done and undertaken was much, but it was not enough. "Unless we go to the root of the evil, unless we deal with the dwellings themselves, unless we improve some of these dwellings off the face of creation, our arduous work will be useless. As for the labour of the minister of religion, the schoolmaster and philanthropist, it will be thrown away. So long as there is this canker at the root, morality is an empty name, and our civilisation is a thing to scoff at. . . ."

Next, after his way, he set all resources at work to bring together an irresistible array of detailed evidence concerning the bad areas. The conscience and energy of Birmingham were roused again. A few months later he carried his proposal. His speech on that occasion is another classic in municipal records.

He showed that the death-rate in the poorest part of the town was twice the rate in the best residential quarters. Some thousands of deaths in Birmingham were preventible, as were cases of disease numbering many more thousands. How could it be other than mockery to say that these were civilised conditions? Amidst the slums, how could any "sense and appreciation of beauty" exist?

One passage in this part of his statement left its mark upon the memory of Birmingham:

"We bring up a population in the dank, dreary, filthy courts and alleys . . . we surround them with noxious influences of every kind, and place them under conditions in which the

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observance of even ordinary decency is impossible; and what is the result? . . . Their fault! Yes, it is legally their fault, and when they steal we send them to gaol and when they commit murder we hang them. But if the members of the Council had been placed under similar conditions—if from infancy we had grown up in the same way—does any one of us believe that he should have run no risk of the gaol or the hangman? For my part I have not sufficient confidence in my own inherent goodness to believe that anything can make headway against such frightful conditions as those I have described. It is no more the fault of these people that they are vicious and intemperate than it is their fault that they are stunted, deformed, debilitated, and diseased."

False economists resisting the lesser cost of reform helped, he showed, to pile up the more indirect but heavier cost of abuses. Then he came to his constructive case. The new thoroughfare would add to the business and wealth of the town in adding to its health, convenience and dignity. Birmingham ought to be in every way the metropolis of the Midlands. The whole scheme would far more than pay for itself. What of the increase in rateable value? "It is hardly possible to place too high a figure on it." And he concluded: "I believe the town, and above all the next generation, will have cause to bless the Town Council of Birmingham if it carries out the scheme before it, and exercises what I venture to call a sagacious audacity. . . . I venture to commend the scheme in its entirety and not in fractions to the support of the Council. I have had the matter under my consideration for a long time; it has been a matter of anxious and continued deliberation with me; I have thought of it during the day, I have thought of it during the night. I have even dreamt of it. It is a case in which bold action will be in the long run the cheapest and most profitable. . . ."[1]

"Sagacious audacity"—two good words. One may doubt whether two better came from any man of his time. Some years later he illustrated his doctrine of social reclamation another way in a very fine image: "We all know how from time to time

[1] *Borough of Birmingham. Proceedings on the Adoption by the Council of a Scheme for the Improvement of the Borough (1875)*, p. 19. Speech by the Mayor, Joseph Chamberlain (October 12, 1875).

upon our coast vast operations have been undertaken by which large tracts of land have been redeemed from the sea, and what was formerly the sandy bed of the ocean has been converted into smiling fields. I say that no less meritorious and no less necessary is the work we are undertaking in this inland town, by which we hope to wrest from the fell grasp of disease and misery and crime whole populations which would be otherwise abandoned to them." [1]

It would be untrue to say that this appeal to far-reaching vision was answered at the outset by as much confidence as had been given to the earlier plans. While critics were rampant, the fidelity of many supporters was reluctant, and they were inwardly doubtful. It is the usual difficulty in human affairs when leadership inspired by sure foresight takes what seems to the generality a plunge into the vague.

Between forty and fifty acres of property were to be bought. The cost—it turned out to be a million and a half sterling [2] and would have been more but for shrewd management—was bound in any case to stagger the "Old Woodman" type of mind. Local opinion agreed that, proposed by anyone else, the scheme would have been scouted. But by this time the town at large and its Council had a faith in what they had begun to call "his genius", and were ready to follow his lead—believing where they did not understand.

The enterprise went "Forward" according to Birmingham's motto. The Local Government Board held its enquiry. Ranks of eminent counsel representing property owners and others made strong opposition. Chamberlain, as advocate for the Corporation, argued upon ground where he possessed unequalled knowledge; in command of the matter and in ready acumen he was too much for a whole phalanx of learned gentlemen, whom he faced for a week. "He was his own Counsel", as was said. In the sound opinion of the Corporation there was no need to fee the Bar while the Mayor was available without cost to the borough. Approved by the Local Government Board, the Bill embodying the schemes buffeted some rough water, but passed both Houses.

[1] Speech of Mr. Alderman Chamberlain, M.P., at the Town Council, June 11, 1878, nearly two years after he had ceased to be Mayor.

[2] Bunce, *Birmingham Corporation*, vol. ii. p. 485.

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The powers thus obtained in August 1876 were speedily exercised, and through following years steadily applied. Already, indeed, action in the spirit of "sagacious audacity" by a group of citizens had taken time by the forelock. In advance of the Bill's passing it was advisable to acquire as much of the property concerned as was offered in the market. On the Mayor's initiative a private trust was formed to purchase such properties and to hand them over at cost price to the Council, as soon as it obtained its statutory powers to buy. The guarantee fund reached nearly £60,000, and of this contingent responsibility £10,000 was undertaken by the Mayor himself. Public spirit under his civic rule was of that calibre.

VI

From that day the centre of Birmingham began to be Haussmannised. Where the jumble of slums had stood Corporation Street rose into being. Twenty-two yards wide, it was; with tall shops, offices and institutions on both sides, creating a new architectural vista. Built in the better Victorian manner of that day, not devoid either of unified effect or moderated variety —falling short of massive harmony and simplicity but escaping the pretentious frippery of some later modes—the new avenue was Augustan by comparison with the slum scenes obliterated.

Behind the edifices of Corporation Street wider work of clearance and reconstruction went on. The death-rate fell rapidly year after year, and general disease decreased. On an area of over forty acres and odd more decent and intelligent housing prevailed.

The children did not perish nor become withered and stunted, as they used. Good lighting, pure water, fresher air, cleansed streets, more space within and without, sanitary measures of strict vigilance—all these benefits were brought into the reconstructed quarter. Figures like the following statistics[1] are beyond eloquence in their silent tribute to this short but intense part of Chamberlain's career.

[1] Bunce, vol. ii. p. 484.

Streets.	Average Death-rate per 1000 for 1873–75.	Average Death-rate per 1000 for 1879–81.
Lower Priory	62·5	21·9
Rope Walk	42·0	24·9
Bailey Street	97·0	25·6
Balloon Street	45·0	(No populn.)
Potter Street	44·0	28·8
Russell Street	55·0	19·1
Princip Street	46·0	13·2
Aston Street	40·0	15·0
Tanter Street	47·0	22·0
Average	53·2	21·3

Well may we say that to preserve and enhance life itself to this degree far exceeds the virtue of making two blades of grass grow where one grew before.

We come to a special trait of this practical organising idealist, such as the world is always wanting and so seldom finds.

Did he do it in the ordinary facile manner by increasing the amount of non-productive debt? On the contrary, this good steward of a civic purse made municipal reform a means of creating property. Nearly the whole of the buildings on the central sites acquired under the Improvement Scheme were erected under leases of seventy-five years' duration. Cautious councillors feared that anything less than ninety-nine years would deter leaseholders and endanger the finance of the scheme.

Chamberlain insisted that the shorter period was as practicable as advantageous. He had his way; he proved right again; the town drove a rare bargain. Its properties were acquired for it at prices below the original estimates. Leases for seventy-five years instead of ninety-nine were readily taken up.

As they fall in, about twenty years hence, these properties will become the absolute possession of the Corporation and will make Birmingham, as he intended, one of the richest municipalities in the kingdom. When this occurs his civic greatness, as remarkable for long-sighted judgment as for immediate energy, will be still better understood than now.

Much else happened during his term of office; and in years afterwards as a result of his impulsion and suggestion. He initi-

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ated the main-drainage union with other towns and gave Birmingham itself a sewage system second to none. He found, as he said, "something over 100 miles of footways not fit for decent people to walk upon"; but he made them fit. Not the least typical of his doings was that he secured an assize for Birmingham "to save the time of suitors, witnesses and jurymen who now have to go to Warwick and Worcester and Stafford". Instead they soon had "justice in their own borough". The central[1] and branch libraries, the Art Gallery, collections on the South Kensington model, were enlarged and enriched. Public baths were built, new parks were opened, public gardens and recreation grounds were made. Schools multiplied, as we shall see in a parting note on that subject. "By God's help the town shall not know itself", he had said; and ceasing more and more indeed to know its former self, it grew conscious and proud of its new self.

To local purposes he subscribed large sums and gave more than any citizen in proportion to his means. He knew the advantages of money and despised cant on that subject. Had he been a magician as well as a mayor he would gladly have made every citizen rich. As that might not be, his intent in creating and adorning a great "collective estate" for the town—with every citizen a part-proprietor—was to open, even to the humblest, more and more of the civilised amenities commanded by individual wealth in intelligent hands.

VII

This is the public personage to the outward view. His more intimate confessions during his life as a mayor are found in correspondence with Jesse Collings, his closest colleague on the Council, and devotedly affectionate friend. After a breakdown in health Collings was abroad during the period covered by most of the letters. Otherwise we should not have had them.

[1] In January 1879 the Reference Library was burned down, when the number of its books had risen to nearly 50,000. Amongst the contents destroyed were irreplaceable things—the Staunton collection of manuscripts and prints, and a famous Cervantes collection. Though Chamberlain was no longer Mayor, they turned to him in emergency. "What shall we do?" "Do?" he replied; "build a bigger and a better one than before." Under his leadership, they did.

CHAMBERLAIN TO COLLINGS, 1875–1876

April 26, 1875.—I have determined to offer to the Council through you the sum of one thousand pounds to be expended by the Free Libraries Committee in the purchase of objects of industrial art for permanent exhibition in the Art Gallery . . . this branch of our work has suffered from the absence of funds.

July 3, 1875.—I send a Jug inscribed to you from me . . . as a memorial of our friendship and a recognition of your great kindness to me lately. I do not attempt nor even desire to pay my debt—I only acknowledge it.[1]

September 12, 1875.—I have been as busy as ever myself and have hardly had a moment unoccupied. So I keep my health all right which I should not do if I slackened speed for a week. In the first place I am learning my business as a Gas manufacturer and already am quite wise . . . daily more and more convinced of the immense advantage to the town of having this property. . . .

I have been very much occupied with Water too. There is a fair chance of our coming to terms without arbitration, although only by paying an exorbitant price. Whatever we pay this concern will clear itself in the first or second year, and after that the Town will reap the whole advantage. . . .

The new Street improvement is also taking shape. We have arranged, or are in process of arranging with all the chief owners of property between New Street and Bull Street, and are now indexing all the property between Lichfield Street and the back of Dale End. . . .

February 13, 1876.—It has been wretched here, fog and cold wind alternately. Fortunately I find some compensation in the increased demand for gas, which is enormous. . . . Stone as leader of the Conservative Party made a foolish speech. . . . We all knew the story of the parrot which could not talk but was a devil for thinking. . . .

March 12, 1876.—I have done two great strokes since my last—carried a resolution for immediately proceeding with the erection of Assize

[1] When Collings is ordered abroad, his own letter is a very touching memento of friendship: "In going away I shall miss certainly more than anything the pleasure I have had of feeling of some use, and some comfort to you in your private life where you need so much and have so little. . . . I have a foolish hope that you will miss me . . . good-night. I wish you could go with us." (Dated as "1875, Tuesday night".)

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Courts in spite of a feeble protest . . . and carried a stringent set of by-laws with provisions about back to back houses in the teeth of . . . the timid ones. I took the matter in hand myself, explained the position of affairs to the Council, and begged them to pass the by-laws without discussion of the details. This they did, like trumps as they are, and the whole set were printed, distributed and approved before the opposition had time to turn round.

March 24, 1876.—I am well and full of work. All public business is going on satisfactorily. Council, School Board, Politics, all move in the right direction and with no inordinate friction.

April 10, 1876.—The Improvement scheme is, I hope, safe . . . to-day I have been to London and had a private interview with Sclater Booth [1] who has promised to throw over the Commission of enquiry and give me all I want! Hooray for the Tories! I have had work as Counsel for the Corporation, having to cross-examine witnesses and reply to the legal arguments, but after all my most successful feat has been the interview to-day. If I have got the Local Government Board I can afford to snap my fingers at the Commissions and let Counsel say what they like.

May 5, 1876.—The Improvement Scheme wants the report of the Commissioners, the Gas Works are flourishing, the health of the town is improving, and my trees in Broad Street are coming into leaf.[2]

The next letter to his friend, who is still abroad, is his swan-song as the greatest of municipal administrators, for he is on the point of joining the House of Commons:

June 6, 1876.—I think I have now almost completed my municipal programme and may sing *nunc dimittis*. The Town will be parked, paved, assized, marketed, Gas-and-Watered and *improved*—all as the result of three years' active work.

VIII

It is time to glance again at his personal traits and the manner of his growth in this period. One man at the beginning of the great Mayoralty, for mingled reasons he was another man at the end of it.

[1] Mr. Sclater Booth was President of the Local Government Board in Disraeli's administration.

[2] Chamberlain jested when Mayor that "when my epitaph comes to be written I hope it will be: 'He planted trees in our streets and abolished kidney-stones in foot-pavements' ".

His fighting qualities were known, but responsibility and the necessity of managing men developed the other side of him. Often now he disconcerted those least his friends by his impartiality and consideration when presiding in debate. He was a pattern for chairmen in his art of getting the day's work done on its day; avoiding inconclusive adjournments, procrastination and arrears. Then, as later, he never was perfect in prudence. Sarcasms escaped too often and inflicted rankling wounds. Fools he did not suffer gladly, bores he cut short. But sometimes his humour left no sting. An opposition Alderman spoke of some event as occurring in "1849". He was mistaken. The majority of the Council chorused—with Athenian precedent had they known it—"1859". The Alderman insisted on his date. The contradictory chorus threatened order. The Mayor restored peace with gaiety when he remarked, "Surely, gentlemen, it is no unusual thing for a Tory to be ten years behind the times".

His supervising activity as Chief Magistrate was tireless. He knew the details of every single department and pumped initiative into every single committee. His private hospitalities were another source of influence, as well as a social attraction; he shone in private entertainment, and in civic ceremony he made them as proud of themselves as of him.

This Mayor had to appear, of course, at all manner of dinners, meetings, conferences, receptions, inaugurations, inspections, festivities and parades. Two of these ceremonial occasions are notable, and both belonged to his first twelve months of office before the shadow fell again on his private life. In August 1874 he laid the foundation-stone of the new Council House. He made the day a popular fête and the symbol of the new civic era, expressing his ardent faith in the honour and power rightly belonging to local self-government. He never admitted that parliamentary work and position were in themselves superior.

A few months later, at the beginning of November, a State visit was a theme of national interest. The Prince and Princess of Wales themselves came to Birmingham—regarded by so many staid persons throughout the country as an alarmingly Radical town under a truculent Republican mayor. Apprehensions were felt, with silly sincerity, that their Royal High-

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nesses might be affronted by disloyal bad manners or even endangered in their persons.

The event attracted the eyes of the whole nation, part of it indignant, most of it curious and amused, much of it expecting the public awkwardness and discomfiture of the Mayor.

The London newspapers sent their special correspondents. These noticed in advance that the City of London could not surpass the loyal and patriotic spirit of the preparations on the eve. The day came. It was the 3rd of November 1874. The sun came out like a courtier and the royal guests never had a better reception in their lives. The streets were gay with flags, banners, wreaths, Venetian masts and the rest. The route was kept not only by police and volunteers, but by no less than 6000 Good Templars in their bravery, marshalled by their Grand Master on horseback. The whole population turned out. Crowds flocked in from the Black Country and all neighbouring districts. There were hundreds of thousands of persons in the streets. Not only were windows and balconies full of spectators, but the special correspondents noticed that all available trees were loaded with sight-seeing democracy. At the borough boundary, over three miles from the Town Hall, the Mayor meeting the royal party was in the pink of tact, and his wife offered the bouquet. At the Town Hall the Corporation presented a loyal address in very good English. Then the Prince took the Mayoress on his arm, the Mayor took the Princess on his, and they all went to luncheon.

In brief, felicitous speeches the Mayor proposed the loyal toasts—with his usual self-possession and without a jarring note in sentiment or phrase; but with a certain unconventional frankness, a touch of free humour, and a happy chivalry in his references to the Queen and the Princess. But we had better quote the language of *The Times* correspondent, who wrote three columns about it, and wrote them very well:

> Whatever Mr. Chamberlain's views may be, his speeches have been admirably worthy of the occasion and have done the highest credit to himself. We have heard and chronicled a great many Mayors' speeches, but we do not know that we have ever heard or chronicled speeches made before Royal personages by Mayors, whether they were Tories or Whigs, or Liberals or Radicals, which were couched in such a tone

A BRUMMAGEM LION

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, November 14, 1874, by kind permission of the Proprietors

at once of courteous homage, manly independence and gentlemanly feeling—which were so perfectly becoming and so much the right thing in every way as those of Mr. Chamberlain.

Daily and weekly newspapers of every shade of opinion commented with equal approval. All his friends were rejoiced; all his critics conciliated; again the town was very proud of itself and its Mayor. *The Times* added in a leading article—and it was a caustic censor of his politics—that he had shown himself "simple, dignified and becoming" on an occasion as testing as when Pétion was presented to Marie Antoinette! The *Spectator*, equally accustomed to belabour his opinions, remarked that "Mr. Chamberlain's bearing during a few hours of ceremonial raised him more in the opinion of his countrymen—who have in a dull time been amusingly quick to catch the situation—than the most violent speech he ever made against the abuses he saw or fancied". The *Saturday Review*, on the Conservative side, wrote handsomely: "Mr. Chamberlain's speeches were just what they should have been, but it is only reasonable to suppose that this was due to his own sense of propriety and not to any sudden and magical exaltation of his moral nature under the influence of the Royal presence". *Punch* summed up average national feeling—not knowing its Chamberlain yet—in a Tenniel cartoon, showing the "Brummagem Lion" kneeling before the Princess to have his claws clipped; and added a string of brisk verses:

Like a gentleman he has comported himself in this glare of the princely sun;
Has just said what he ought to have said and done what he ought to have done;
Has put his red cap in his pocket, and sat on his *Fortnightly* article,
And of red Republican claws or teeth displayed not so much as a particle.[1]

In the circumstances of the period this affair was as good for the monarchy as for the Mayor. But the shop-windows were full of caricatures. One of them, called "A Vision of the Future", depicted the Arch-Radical on his knees receiving a title. A friend enquired on this point, and he answered: "I have expressed myself frequently against hereditary honours, and could not belie my opinions. Besides . . . I am not rich enough to make an 'eldest son' without robbing my other children,

[1] November 14, 1874.

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and I should not like to leave a baronet behind me dependent on business for the wherewithal to support the title."

Less than a week after the royal visit he was re-elected Mayor with enhanced enthusiasm, and that event was widely remarked by the country. In national opinion he stood now far higher than before. All his plans were thriving. He was the leader and soul of his city, and henceforth in Birmingham no man's influence could bear up against his own. Radicals in many constituencies were still pressing him to stand for Parliament.

IX

For nearly seven years he had known domestic happiness again, and without that he never knew any real happiness. He had almost forgotten the shadows he had strangely dreaded when he married again.

For about eight months or so since the summer of 1874 he had been radiantly happy. The vigour and power of his work on all sides, civic and national, were added to the home life he called "perfect". For Florence loved Harriet's children like her own and "made no distinction". During his August holidays, had he not asked Jesse Collings to come and "dance in the moonlight"? Released after twenty years from the imprisoning exactions of commercial success, he delighted in his freedom. There seemed not a cloud in his sky at the New Year of 1875.

Then the worst blow fell upon him.

On Tuesday, February 9, he presided at a great meeting in the Town Hall called by the Liberation Society and spoke with much applause. John Morley and Alfred Illingworth had come down to speak and stay the night at his house. When the meeting and the cheers were over he received a note from his wife, and she had taken care that it should not disturb him until the end of the proceedings. A birth was imminent, and his visitors went elsewhere. No concern was felt. On Thursday he felt free to go to London on public business, but came back the same night.

A little before midnight on Saturday their child was born, and still there seemed no cause for unusual anxiety. Sunday was St. Valentine's Day. The doctor had remained almost con-

stantly in the house. At half-past four in the afternoon he came down cheerfully to say that all was well.

At five o'clock his wife suddenly fainted and died in a moment. The child followed its mother a few hours later, and was laid in the same coffin.

This time he was crushed to the earth. After the seven years he could not begin to imagine life without her, nor knew how to face its desolation.

Early in our married life my public work began to grow upon me and from the first and throughout Florence identified herself with and took the most lively and intelligent interest in all its phases. . . . During the few years which have followed I have had in my wife a friend and counsellor, intensely interested in the objects for which I have striven, heartily rejoicing in my success and full of loving sympathy in occasional failure and disappointment. And looking back I see how the path has been smoothed for me by her unselfish affection and how much strength I have gained from the just confidence I have reposed in the judgment and devotion she has displayed in the part reserved for her. It is easy to give time and thought and labour to public work while the mind is relieved from any anxiety about home duties and all the responsibilities of life are shared by a real helpmate and companion. . . . And the result of this complete similarity and identity of interests has naturally been to knit us both together so that I can now say that there is no thought or action of my later years which my wife has not shared with me, and no place or ambition or desire formed for the future which has not been shadowed by her death.[1]

He went away for a few weeks to the Riviera, but it was of no avail. There, "what a goblin seemed the sun". His soul was broken by this second blow. He went through anguish without mitigation; for too well we know by now that his inmost nature was always far other than his schooled demeanour. Letters of sympathy showered upon him. They meant nothing. John Bright wrote to him:

I cannot bear to think of what has happened, and yet it presses every moment upon my thoughts. I have often during the last fortnight looked

[1] He wrote these words soon after her death and laid them by to be read one day by her children—Neville, Ida, Hilda and Ethel.

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back upon the pleasant picture of your home—and now I see it in gloom and sorrow.

He was past comfort human or divine. There is no doubt, and it must be said, that religion for the first time was shaken to its base in him, and that all sense and hope of joy in his personal life were extinguished.

He felt for years after that fate pursued his private soul, whatever his public career might achieve. Two letters are enough to show his mood. In the first weeks of bereavement, acknowledging Dr. Dale's words, he replies:

> You may know, what was not necessarily apparent to all—how completely identified in tastes and opinions my wife and I have been. She shared every thought and plan I had—there is not a fibre in my whole being which has not been roughly torn asunder. You can judge how desolate and solitary I feel and how dark and difficult my future life seems to me. I am thankful for your kind words—more so because you have appreciated the loving soul and the bright intelligence which brightened for a long time my life and home.[1]

In another letter acknowledging, on the same date, the condolences of the Baptist and Independent Churches of Birmingham, he adds:

> I feel deeply the kindness and sympathy of my friends and fellow-workers at this time of terrible suffering, and though I fear that any power of usefulness I may have possessed has been lessened by the loss of my dear wife and true help-mate, yet as far as in me lies I shall endeavour to continue the work to which I am pledged.

For months afterwards spiritual despair only deepened in him, while he seemed to bring a more clenched mood to his public business. Soon his own sorrow helped to shorten his mother's life. She had tried to comfort him, but knew he was beyond all comfort. She too died, in September 1875, just when all his municipal success was in harvest. He wrote to Jesse Collings:

> With her death the elder generation seems to have passed away and we recognise that we are elders in our turn. I sometimes wish—— But it is no use dwelling on this or kindred subjects. Drive on—we shall

[1] To Dr. Dale, March 25, 1875.

come to the journey's end in time, and perhaps then we shall know where we have been going and whose business we have been doing all the time.[1]

Altered for ever, while outwardly he seems only a more hardened man of action, he is possessed for a long time by an innermost temper of fatalistic pessimism like *The City of Dreadful Night*.

Chamberlain passed in December through the blackest weeks of wretchedness he had known till now. He had been elected Mayor in November for the third time. The old season of festivities and theatricals is at hand; his children are too young to be companions; amongst others all he most loved are dead. The approach of this Christmas was nigh past his bearing. When it was reported all over Birmingham that he had been killed in a carriage accident he noted, "Unfortunately it wasn't true, and the friends who came to look at my remains found me presiding at a Gas committee".

Three days after this he wrote starkly to the friend who knew most of his heart:

TO MORLEY

December 7, 1875.—I am very sorry for Leslie Stephen[2]—but it is no use—no one can help him, and whatever the future may have in store, the charm of his life is gone and can never be restored. The only thing for him to do is to work double tides—to work constantly and not to think. At least that will save him from going mad, and time will give him a certain interest in his work, though it cannot bring back the subtle pleasure due to the sense of untiring sympathy and intelligent companionship.

But does not the presence of this great grief in your household impress you with the cruelty of this life as you and I are compelled to see it?

It is a hideous business, and our conception of its end and meaning is thoroughly unsatisfactory. We may be right—I fear we are—and I refuse to try and buy comfort by forcing myself into insincere conviction—but still I thoroughly abhor the result at which I have arrived, and I think it a grievous misfortune to have been born into such a destiny.

[1] To Jesse Collings, September 12, 1875.

[2] Leslie Stephen's first wife was Thackeray's younger daughter, who had just died.

BOOK II. 1873–76.

A few months later this changed man writes savagely to Collings (May 1876) on the occasion of another death in his circle: "I am very hard to other people's misfortunes—it seems to me sometimes that no one has a right to be happy in this brutal world".

After more months, as Christmas with hopeless memories comes round again, for the second time since his loss, the saddest of all his letters is wrung from him:

TO MORLEY

Christmas Eve, 1876.— . . . My life for the past two years has not had any particular value to me. I daren't look back, I don't care to look forward and I concentrate all the force and energy I have on the immediate work and duty of the present. I spent a quarter of an hour in London looking at the house [1] where I lived ten years as a schoolboy, and came away miserable. I can't afford this kind of luxury; and I return with a grim satisfaction to my active, occupied, life, knowing that if I am not like Prometheus defying destiny, I am at least undergoing it without unmanly weakness.

On these hard terms he came to his accommodation with life, but years and years were to pass before he knew any innate happiness of heart again or could regard the torturing mysteries of existence without bitterness. Of stoicism he was capable to the extreme, but he could not forget; and it was not in his nature to be resigned. A certain mocking grimness entered into him, and the world misunderstood.

X

In the first weeks of grief he pressed the Council to let him retire, and said that he could not face in the future a Mayor's social duties. In those his wife had been everything to him.

The Council offered to relieve him of those duties and entreated him to continue. On that condition he returned to the work. He knew it was his only salvation, and in working even harder and better than ever he found self-forgetfulness and a certain stern peace in his days, whatever were his thoughts at night. He sat up later than ever and meditated alone. The

[1] Highbury Place, Islington.

temper of decision and risk became his real relief. In this way, as we have anticipated, he raised his civic statesmanship to a higher power and carried the great Mayoralty to the end.

To his simultaneous record as chairman of the School Board some words must be given. The religious difficulty adjusted itself to average feeling. When the Church majority was overthrown religious instruction became an "extra" subject left to voluntary effort; but this failed; and afterwards the Bible was read daily without note or comment.

To him all this was now secondary. As leader of the minority up to 1873 he had been controversial. As chairman for the three years afterwards his real constructive spirit had full play. He was first of all a school builder. He set himself to provide ample space indoors and large playgrounds. Following the best German and Swiss examples, Birmingham arranged for a large number of separate class-rooms. The teachers were carefully chosen and liberally paid. He was reproached for the unnecessary expense of his effort to give architectural merit to the schools. His reply is worth remembering. If churches and town halls were built with some desire for expressive dignity, why not schools and all other public edifices of every kind?

"When we are dealing with what I believe to be one of the highest functions ever imposed upon a community we are bound here also to see that buildings which are the outward and visible signs of the work going on within shall not be in evident discord with the nobility of the duty we perform. At the same time the Board knows—and our constituents should know—that the fact that our schools are ornamental has not added in any appreciable degree to their cost. If they are beautiful it is because the outline is noble, because the grouping is harmonious and pleasing, and because the general appearance is graceful; but not because they have been overladen with any superimposed ornament without meaning and without use. All ornament which is worthy of the name must be derived in part from the necessity of the construction; and it is absurd to suppose that everything ornamental may be assumed to be useless and everything graceful may be taken as extravagant." [1]

[1] *Six Years of Educational Work in Birmingham; an Address delivered to the Birmingham School Board by the Chairman, Joseph Chamberlain, Esq., M.P., Nov. 2, 1876.* We may recall that Fergusson's *History of Architecture* was

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These words may be left to stand as his best expression of the higher civic sense. Ambitious allusions to Pericles and the Medici —though applied to him by other men in the early days of the municipal revival—were not his style, nor were these his study; but who will deny that he was nearer to their ideal of the Great City than any executive citizen of his time in the English-speaking world?

XI

To Birmingham conceived as metropolis of the Midlands—in our day he would have worked to make it the greatest of our inland harbours at a junction of ship-canals—he often dreamed of giving his whole life and making the city still more powerful and exemplary. But the House of Commons was his destiny. Upon his election to Parliament, in June 1876, in the way we are now coming to, as Bright's colleague in the representation of Birmingham, he resigned his Mayoralty and the chairmanship of the School Board,[1] though he remained a member of the Town Council for some years longer, and only severed that connection perforce and with regret when he became a Cabinet Minister.

His real municipal *nunc dimittis* brought him unexpectedly the praise of *The Times*, then still edited by Delane.

In November 1876 the very useful Conservative Home Secretary, Mr. Cross, visited Birmingham, and in spite of his party politics was welcomed and entertained by the Corporation. Chamberlain liked the Disraeli Government's work for better housing, and its Artisans' Dwelling Act—and its support of his own reforming autocracy at a critical phase against the vested interests and their lawyers. For his civic swan-song on this occasion Chamberlain received in a full leading article, written with dry humour though it was, the hearty commendation of *The Times*:

> Mr. Chamberlain, in particular, is the most pronounced representative of the Birmingham School of politics and is the very type of that

a book he knew well. Though its theories are now little heeded, its descriptive passages still give pleasure, and it did great good in its day.

[1] In a letter to Dixon, the new Chairman of the School Board, dated December 4, 1876, Chamberlain, taking leave of the Board, offered £500 for founding scholarships for Board School boys to continue their education at the Midland Institute or at Mason's College. He continued to be an Alderman and member of the Town Council until 1880.

Radical Party against whom Mr. Cross on Tuesday evening warned his audience with so much earnestness. Nevertheless the Mayor and Corporation invite Mr. Cross to dinner; and . . . it is at once revealed that the two antagonists have a vast deal in common.[1]

There was good human value in his declaration that he was prouder of annexing gas and water and the improved area than any pro-consul annexing provinces. His example had stimulated municipal progress throughout Great Britain, and to a wide extent abroad. The new Birmingham under his regime was called the best-governed city in the world. None certainly was better governed. It was a long time before he felt himself as free and effective at Westminster as he had been as Chief Magistrate.

To his own community he had given night and day, without payment, abilities that if employed in his private interests after the fashion of our day in Britain and America would have made him easily, as before remarked, a multi-millionaire. No modern man has stamped a stronger personal impression on a community. Firstly in private business, then in civic creativeness, afterwards in national statesmanship, finally in Imperial affairs, he was always a striver for greater organisation. His crowning work in civics was yet to be done when, long after, he created Birmingham University.

If a better citizen never was found, no recorded city ever was more grateful and faithful. Birmingham raised its monument to him very soon. He jests to Morley about his municipal apotheosis:

> They are going to have a statue (fancy!) and a fountain and a Chamberlain Square, and the Lord knows what. All this is good for the party, and good for municipal institutions which are daily becoming of more importance and more honoured.[2]

The uncouth area of waste land at the back of the Town Hall, where the old hustings used to be pitched, was changed into a seemly *platz* bearing his name; and there, four years after he had ceased to be a local Prime Minister, was raised the Chamberlain Memorial where the fountain itself is more expressive

[1] *The Times*, November 23, 1876. [2] To Morley, September 1, 1875.

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of his spirit and work than the Gothic canopy. "Sorrow hath recompense as night shows stars." What he lost in joy he gained in character, and fighting on against his inward moods of black despair in 1875 and 1876, when the hardest battle he ever had was with himself, he came through as a person still more dynamic and still more self-controlled.

There were cross-currents, public and personal. In 1878, after he had entered Parliament, George Dixon—in the spirit of the old opposition within the Education League, after its maker had decided to dissolve and replace it—broke out at a School Board meeting, and denied in effect that "Chamberlain was Birmingham or Birmingham Chamberlain"; but with equal indignation and resolve, our man of mettle stopped this at once by a private intimation that he was prepared to fight out the question of confidence. No one cared to put him to the test. Birmingham rewarded him with unexampled fidelity. For the rest of his life after the great Mayoralty, through forty years of national and Imperial politics his electoral basis was impregnable. There, no man nor movement could shake him.

BOOK III

1874–1880

CHAPTER XII

TOWARDS THE HOUSE OF COMMONS: MEMBER FOR BIRMINGHAM

(1874–1877)

LUCK in Adversity—A National Leader—The New Radicalism and the Old Methods—"The Next Page of the Liberal Programme"—Attack and Outcry—Letters to John Morley—A Vacancy in Birmingham—Chamberlain Elected—Ironies of Success—Dark Days and the Gout—A Marked Debut in Parliament—Drink and the Gothenburg System—A New Crusade.

I

THE Sheffield defeat at the General Election brought luck in the end. But for that he might never have represented his own city.

Singular to say, the chance that he might sit for Birmingham looked remote. Its three members—Bright, Dixon, Muntz—seemed seated for years. Indisposed to take any blow tamely, he glanced about him and had many invitations; for during the next two years before he entered Parliament his repute ascended amongst Radical working men all over the country. He thought of putting up for Northampton at a by-election,[1] but there Bradlaugh, grim fighter, quite as little given to stomach defeat as Chamberlain himself, had no intention of leaving the field. Norwich, seriously considered, was not safe enough. Several times he returned to Sheffield amidst ovations, but the sullen minority was still bent to split the party if he stood. He abandoned the place with regret but with good reason.

Next, it becomes plain enough, however unpalatable, that

[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, March 17, 1874.

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to make his Mayoralty what he designs he must postpone parliamentary ambitions. More deeply involved in the affairs of the town than he had expected, he has as much involved others, and is the last man to desert.

Pleading with him against standing for Norwich, Jesse Collings urges that they are committed up to the eyes.

> Your position in Birmingham is very exceptional and must be considered. We are now in the midst of the Gas and Water bills and other schemes involving liabilities to the town of above two millions of money. These undertakings have been originated and conducted to the present by yourself personally; and the Council no doubt adopted your policy so freely under the feeling that you would carry it through, and it would be an awkward position if you should leave the work now as there is no-one but yourself who holds the threads.[1]

It was severe counsel, but he digested it, at once owning his duty. For a signal example of duty rewarded he had not very long to wait.

II

If he might not yet enter the House, he could extend his political action in other ways. Determined to strengthen his hold on national Radicalism, as a realist he saw more and more clearly that Nonconformity by itself, though powerful, up to a point, could not hope to prevail.

The future depended upon consolidating the forces of democracy and dissent; and equipping that alliance with a new kind of fighting organisation. As early as March 1874 he said to Dilke: "I don't think the League will do; it must be a new organisation". Dilke enquired, March 15, 1874: "What about your idea of widening the basis of the League? If it were done now I could get all the Trades Unions into a joint movement—with you for its head." The Arch-Mayor—and Arch-Machinist as some call him—opens himself to his other friend:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

March 13, 1874.—Free Church and Free Land are the best available wedges for forcing the gates of Conservative obstruction. I doubt if the

[1] Collings to Chamberlain, May 31, 1875.

country is prepared for their use as yet; but this preparation is your special province, and whenever the present prosperous state of trade gives way to commercial distress the seed you have sown will spring up. These two points of our Charter are the base of reunion between the dissenters and the working class; and we must have both.[1]

September 11, 1874.—Will you accept another rabid political article for the October *Fortnightly*, if I can prepare it in time? I want to do what in me lies to knock on the head all this cant about the country being tired of progress. . . . Of course I have no idea of securing general assent to my propositions, but it seems to me that we Radicals are allowing the moderates to have it all their own way, and it is surely undesirable that the country should think we are content not to have any voice in the settlement of the future programme. If you have no room. . . .

But the editor made room. In the October number of the *Fortnightly Review* appeared the manifesto called "The Next Page of the Liberal Programme". It detonated with still more force than the attack on Whiggism and official Liberalism in the autumn before; and there were leading articles and comments upon it in nearly every newspaper in the kingdom. A few passages must be quoted to remind modern readers how Chamberlain could lay about him and how much attention he could command when he had not yet entered Parliament.

It is highly improbable that the opposition will cross the floor of the House for some years to come. . . . The advanced Liberals . . . form an important element in the Liberal Party. . . . Without them it would be difficult to distinguish the party of the moderate Tories who do not practise their principles from the party of the moderate Liberals who have no principles to practise. . . . If it is really the desire of the country that nothing more should be done, the Conservatives are the proper persons to carry out its wishes. . . .

The Liberal Party will never regain power on terms like these. Much as Mr. Gladstone is honoured and respected it is not for his credit or for ours that we should take him back as we recover a stolen watch—on the condition that no questions are asked. . . . Anything would have been better than the course actually followed. At a moment's notice the dissolution was resolved on, and Mr. Gladstone promulgated through

[1] Chamberlain's forecast of the prospects of trade proved keen-sighted.

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the country the meanest public document that has ever, in like circumstances, proceeded from a statesman of the first rank.[1]

From persons, Chamberlain turned to his own programme:

> We are compelled occasionally to turn aside from the contemplation of our virtues and intelligence and wealth, to recognise the fact that we have in our midst a vast population more ignorant than the barbarians whom we profess to convert, more miserable than the most wretched in other countries to whom we attempt from time to time to carry succour and relief. . . .

In sombre colours he depicts the "condition of the people":

> Notwithstanding all that has been done in the way of education, it is probable that at least one-third of the adult population is still unable to read and write with common ease and fluency. . . . The condition of the agricultural labourer remains extremely unsatisfactory. . . . The continued existence and enormous extent of pauperism is another discreditable feature of our so-called civilisation. . . . If our middle class, and the press which panders to their prejudices, cannot reconcile themselves to the altered situation and devise some better means of settling trade disputes than the rough arbitrament of strikes and lock-outs, they may wake some day to find their terrors realised, and themselves in face of an organisation whose numbers will be irresistible and whose settled principles will be hostility to capital and distrust of the monied class.

After half a century, this again proves prescient. Chamberlain goes on to examine possible ways of advance; and means to set open some ways. Electoral Reform, Free Land, Free Schools are all urgently desirable in Radical opinion, he agrees, and must come in their time, but for practical reasons none of these can be put in the forefront. So he insists through many pages—with undeniable loss, though not for long, of his insight into

[1] "The Next Page of the Liberal Programme," *Fortnightly Review*, October 1874. *The Times*, condemning Gladstone's dissolution manifesto (dated January 23), without sparing his rival Disraeli, wrote: "The last purpose to which the surplus ought to have been applied was the purchase of a majority for the Government. . . . The precedent of including a Budget in an Election Address will assuredly not be repeated. But for the defeat which ensued, Mr. Gladstone's innovation might readily have degenerated into the worst form of political corruption. His manifesto was simply an appeal to the selfishness of the middle class."

the realities of coming politics—that the first thing required to unite Liberalism and bring it back to power for further purposes is Disestablishment with Disendowment. This in spite of Gladstone's notorious repugnance to that policy. In any case, continues Chamberlain, Radicals must cease once for all to be hewers of wood and drawers of water to the Whigs, and must bring their official leaders to terms.

The method lacked amenity. His defect at that time was untempered aggressiveness in public controversy. He learned to prune that vice, but it was never wholly eradicated. His contemptuous allusions to Mr. Gladstone were not easy for the Hawarden circle to forgive. He had discussed Hartington, Forster and Goschen with disesteem.

He made enemies rashly and earned the full penalty. But he was uncivil for a decent reason. He felt about drink, pauperism, housing, the forlornness of the agricultural labourers excluded from the franchise, as he felt about the abuses he was grappling with in Birmingham. On the social side his vehemence was honourable and his instinct profoundly true.

On the other hand, perhaps nothing that he ever wrote or spoke was in the circumstances less judicious in tone than the *Fortnightly* manifesto of October 1874. Outraging the Whigs, scandalising genuine Liberals, he was flayed by the *Daily News*, yet mocked by the Tories.

III

For all that, the article left a wide impression that there was something in it; and it made its author stronger than ever with the Radical working men. Evidently the Arch-Mayor had two saving virtues, whatever his verbal excesses. His sincerity was absolute; and above all, in Radical eyes, here was a man who said what he meant and, if his chance came, would do what he said. He longed for the foundation of a great daily newspaper in the advanced interest, but remarked to a faithful correspondent: "I do not know where we could look for a man with time and brains for such a work".

In the following months his scornful mood was unchastened. When Gladstone resigned the Liberal leadership in January 1875, Chamberlain in a letter to the *Examiner* wrote of the

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ex-Premier without remorse; and without reverence of all the claimants to the succession: "The advanced Liberals will probably receive with comparative equanimity the announcement of Mr. Gladstone's resignation of the leadership of his party". The late leader and his anti-papal pamphlets? "An ex-Minister of the first rank who devotes his leisure to a critical examination of the querulousness of an aged priest is hardly in sympathy with the robust commonsense of English Liberalism." The succession? "If the army is to be permanently laid up in winter-quarters it matters little who holds the Field-Marshal's staff." The Conservatives might well advocate Mr. Forster's claims, but at no price would Nonconformists accept him. "Sir William Harcourt had also entered himself for the stakes but at present he has found no backer. There can be no doubt that he will have a high place in the next Whig Ministry, if he does not accept office under Mr. Disraeli in the meantime, or put himself at the head of the irreconcileable Radicals just before the next reaction." The working classes were not interested in any of the claimants. "The Liberal Party has fallen on bad times. In discomfiture and defeat . . . its members may learn the value of Liberal principles from experience of the folly and danger of deserting them." [1]

The least objectionable candidate was Lord Hartington. "At one moment", wrote Dilke, ". . . it had looked as though Forster might win, in spite of Chamberlain and the Nonconformists." [2] But with them was Bright, and his moral influence was like a casting vote. He took the chair at the Reform Club when the party elected Hartington. So the League at last had squared accounts in an unexpected way with Forster, and Chamberlain felt better for that, though otherwise his blistering invective had done him no good. The new Whig leader owed him no thanks for his semi-contemptuous support. With Forster he would have to reopen accounts in another connection. And when Gladstone reappeared he might be courteous towards Chamberlain, even benevolent at whiles; but would never understand nor forgive, nor appreciate until too late.

[1] The *Examiner*, Saturday, January 23, 1875.

[2] Gwynn and Tuckwell, *Life of Dilke*, vol. i. p. 186.

IV

Immediately after this, domestic grief silences him for a season. When he begins to recover he absorbs himself in completing his civic work, and makes no incursion into national politics for many months.

Some letters to Morley—now his dearest confidant—show the working of his mind. Oddly they bring out the latent Imperialism that, with some coming intervals of revulsion, would work in closely with his democratic sympathies:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

November 27, 1875.—The Tories have done a clever thing about the Suez Canal, and even *The Times* admits that it is unlikely that the Liberals would have been as wise or as plucky. Why then attempt to recall them to power? Up to the present time it would clearly have been a change for the worse.

December 19, 1875.—The indirect result of the purchase has been already shown in the interference to prevent Abyssinian war. It may or may not be desirable that we should have a finger in the Egyptian pie. But we have got it, and that is the point of view from which the purchase ought to be regarded.

He thinks his friend criticises too hardly British rule in the East:

Christmas Day, 1875.—I am doubtful about the allusions to the Prince of Wales's sport in India and the conduct of the English in Malay. . . . Our position in India and in other half-civilised communities is an awfully difficult one. There *must* be many errors made by Government and many wrongs done by subordinates. We want to impress on the thought of the country some definite principles of conduct, and we may take advantage of isolated faults to preach our doctrines.

But he goes beyond Morley in denouncing the Fugitive Slave Circular.[1] By that mistake, he maintains, Disraeli's Govern-

[1] The Circular, issued by the Admiralty on July 31, 1875, at the prompting of the Foreign Office, subjected to large exceptions the historic principle that any escaping slave became free on reaching a British ship. At this the country was indignant; the lustre acquired by Disraeli from the purchase of the Suez Canal Shares was dimmed. The Circular was withdrawn.

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ment has chilled the generous tradition of sanctuary and emancipation characteristic of England for a century:

January 30, 1876.— . . . The sentiment which prompts the universal and growing indignation . . . and which has now found expression in every large town, is wholly good and sound. . . . It is prompted by hatred of injustice and cruelty—it is absolutely disinterested and unselfish. Grant that it does not, as no popular movement ever can, take note of all the practical difficulties which may arise or have arisen—the principle is not less defensible or admirable because there may be some exceptions to its application in practice; known to the initiated in diplomacy.

But in reply to Morley's suggestion that some day the Mayor of Birmingham might be Secretary for India, Chamberlain demurs with shrewd sense though not with false modesty:

January 10, 1876.—I don't think I should like India. I am not cosmopolitan, and should prefer to try my hand on England.

A few days after the date of this letter an anonymous writer published in a Sheffield newspaper a study of living value seldom found in old journalism. The Mayor of Birmingham in this friendly but scrutinising article was marked out as unquestionably the successor of John Bright in the leadership of the common people. Mr. Chamberlain is portrayed as "sudden and quick in quarrel". Upon the smallest provocation he "glares withal" and "draws his political blade in his own defence". He is soon annoyed and troubles himself so much with his critics that "his torment has become his element". But

we find him at his best when this fit is on him; when he is facing his assailants he fights like Hereward. He has succeeded in establishing an important position for himself, and he has done so boldly and on his own merits. It has been said that a true man may be estimated by the number of his enemies. This is not true of all, but it is of some—it is true as applied to Mr. Chamberlain, who has been fearless and consistent.

About the same time Chamberlain sets down one of his own rare autobiographical reflections:

If I had lived in London entirely in the society of those whose time

is spent in dressing up and then worshipping all the stupid prejudices of the hour, I am afraid I should have followed the stream.[1]

V

At this juncture, when to try his organising hand "on England" is his steady dream and no vague one, the prospect opens suddenly of change in the parliamentary representation of Birmingham.

By the irony of life the black fit of mental depression is upon him again and will hag-ride him more and more until he finds out the cause still unsuspected—the approach of a distinguished malady soon to companion him for life. In the early spring of 1876 he sighs: "I am often dull and depressed . . . but somehow or another I shall fight my life through and then—then it won't much matter".[2]

At the beginning of 1876 George Dixon, who had rendered long service, and always polled more votes in Birmingham than Bright, seemed disposed to retire from the House of Commons. He was still president of the Education League, and for some time relations between his supporters on the Executive and Chamberlain's controlling group were more careful than harmonious. The condition of Liberalism in Parliament was still dreary; the illness of Dixon's wife inclined him the more to quit the thorn-brake of politics for a while.

The vacancy was no sooner rumoured than the succession was determined. No other claim entered into serious competition with the Arch-Mayor's. But Dixon, very excusably, was in two minds: he would and he would not. First, the vacancy was expected in early spring. But months passed and the session seemed likely to close without the foreshadowed retirement. The Mayor's friends felt that they were unfairly dealt with; Dixon's group considered that their hands were being forced; cordiality ceased.[3]

[1] To Morley, December 7, 1875.

[2] To Jesse Collings, February 1876.

[3] The two men drew more apart. Dixon returned to the House for another constituency, while remaining in local affairs. In 1878, as already mentioned in passing, he denied that "Chamberlain is Birmingham or Birmingham Chamberlain". The latter wrote fiercely to Collings (May 1878) after this "unprovoked and gratuitous attack" that "Birmingham must choose between Dixon and me". If necessary, he would summon the 600 and abide the issue. But the trouble passed of itself. No test of Chamberlain's ascendancy was attempted.

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At the beginning of May, Chamberlain made what up to that date was by much his most important appearance in London. "I have agreed", he wrote, "to take the Chair in Spurgeon's Tabernacle—Ye gods, think of a Unitarian in the seat of the prophet!—for the Liberation Society."[1] To a gathering of between seven and eight thousand persons in the Tabernacle he spoke for an hour with enthusiastic "acceptance", as the word then went. He was entreated to stand for Portsmouth and for Stoke.

But in the third week of May, Dixon announced after all that he would take the Chiltern Hundreds in June. To Chamberlain had come one of the political windfalls of all his life in politics.

VI

Yet not only did he meet the call with divided feeling; he fairly jibbed. How different—to recall again Stendhal's favourite theme as a novelist—was the inward man from his outer seeming. Clouded by mental and physical malaise he was never less sure of himself nor of his decision. This lucky moment found him neither well nor happy; but deranged, irritable, unstrung, dejected. For several weeks still he did not find out what was the matter with himself.

> What a fool I am to be willing to go to Parliament and give up the opportunity of influencing the only constructive legislation in the country for the sake of tacking M.P. to my name. Upon my word I think sometimes that both Birmingham and I will have cause to regret this step.[2]

He dreads the wrench of leaving the Birmingham position, dreads losing executive and constructive power, so much more to him than speaking; dreads a dull barren novitiate in the House of Commons as then composed. John Morley's friendship is his chief stay. "I like him more every time I see him . . . a splendid fellow." And in Morley's own private troubles Chamberlain is true and tender; just as he is solicitous when Jesse Collings

[1] To Collings, February 13, 1876; and to Morley on the same day, Chamberlain says: "I value your friendship very much and am the better and stronger for it. I am sorry you have so much cause for anxiety in your own household. It is very hard to work under this kind of pressure, and yet if one did not work, the pressure would become unbearable."

[2] To Jesse Collings, May 26, 1876.

is ill and abroad, and sits up late at night to write reams of affectionate letters. Few were his inmost friends, but cherished to the core.

By now he feels his civic work so far fulfilled that he may honourably hand over; and he knows in his inmost heart that he is bound to cast the die for Westminster. For all that, Chamberlain is nervous still and without his usual possession of himself. No one knew how ill he was. As he only felt himself indefinitely wretched without knowing why, he refused to give in.

In this worried state of body and mind he made a garish blunder. On the very day of his selection as candidate for Birmingham, in a few sudden and hot sentences, provoked by a girding opponent at a School Board meeting, he publicly described Disraeli as "a man who never told the truth except by accident; a man who went down to the House of Commons and flung at the British Parliament the first lie that entered his head". This frantic vituperation of the Prime Minister was an execrable outrage no sooner committed than repented—he was furious with himself and with his frayed condition. Tory and Liberal journals vied in condemnation. He hurried his apology to the press:

> I hope it may be accepted as an extenuation of an unwitting offence that I have been greatly overworked lately, and that I was speaking without preparation under considerable mental strain and in face of somewhat irritating interruptions.

No one, not even himself, understood that he was suffering from suppressed illness. Disraeli, stung to the quick, thought the attack "one of the coarsest, and stupidest assaults I well remember. No intellect, or sarcasm, or satire, or even invective; coarse and commonplace abuse, such as you might expect from the cad of an omnibus." He thought almost worse of the apology; but harder still was it to bear, indeed unbearable, when of all women Lady Bradford, beside whom the Prime Minister found himself at Buckingham Palace, admired the letter of apology and called Chamberlain "a great man".[1] The outraged Prime Minister would have been partly placated had he known the self-torture of his assailant.

[1] Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, vol. v. pp. 480, 481.

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The offender had no comfort, but condemned himself more than he is known to have deplored any other thing he ever did. This incident

> increased my nervous irritation and depression to such a degree that I could neither sleep nor eat properly, and felt I was going into a fever. At last Arthur [his brother] proposed that we should go to Wales for a few days, and I jumped at his offer and went off fishing to Llangollen where I recovered my tone a little.[1]

Mended "a little", on June 17 amidst rejoicings he was returned for Birmingham unopposed; and for the rest of his active life was "Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.". Next on June 28, an evening of a hot summer, his first address to his constituents had to be delivered in Bingley Hall to over 20,000 persons, hailing him mightily. We have his own description:

> I . . . funked my speech in Bingley Hall more than I have feared anything for a long time past. I found great difficulty in preparing it but got ready at last.[2]

But no one saw the inward constraint, or by what effort his will asserted itself. His address, and it did not disappoint, rephrased with a whetted edge his familiar opinions on electoral reform, licensing reform, education, disestablishment. Those who were amongst "the sea of faces" best remembered one sentence: "England is said to be the paradise of the rich; we have to take care that it is not suffered to become the purgatory of the poor".

By forcing himself he had got through the Bingley Hall ordeal with credit. When he reached home in pain the doctors had to be summoned. They solved the mystery of all his "nervous disturbances and aberrations", as he termed it, for months past. His worst enemy for the rest of his life was discovered and never removed.

Of all unexpected things he had the gout—caused, as he was told, by the profuse hospitalities of his civic career, though neither to himself nor his circle had his custom ever seemed immoderate. Perhaps it was a heritage from his mother's stock, the genial Harbens.

[1] To Collings, June 30, 1876.

[2] *Ibid.*, June 30, 1876.

This episode counts for a good deal in his personal existence, and is best told in his own words:

On the morning of the meeting I was a little lame and thought I had sprained my foot—in the evening it was worse, and on Wednesday the secret of my past suffering came out in a sharp fit of gout which the doctors say is always preceded by great nervous disturbance and depression. . . . It is not a very severe fit and on the whole it seems to me a good joke. Harris says it is a shameful plagiary on William Pitt. . . . In any case, it is a highly respectable disease, and must tend to raise me in the eyes of the Tories.[1]

The same day he varies the quip:

June 30, 1876.—What is most characteristic of a statesman? *The Gout.* Chatham had it, so had Palmerston and so has Disraeli. I have therefore got the gout, and am now swathed in flannels and tied to my arm-chair. It came out on Tuesday night after my oration at Bingley Hall, and will prevent me from taking my seat for a few days. It is very painful, but will no doubt endear me to the Tories to gain whose affection is now the chief object of my life.[2]

But these jests disguised his real mood only known to two or three. Racked with pain and tied to his chair, this long dark mood became blacker before it cleared. His mind went backward. It is odd to remember that he feared failure in the House of Commons from entering it too late in life and had made up his mind that if he did not get into Parliament before he was forty he would never go there at all. It was a rash resolution, but he might have kept it, had he not been elected in the nick of time. His fortieth birthday came just three weeks later and it was misery. Ravaged by loneliness, reacting against everything, all to him seemed dust and ashes. Success, success—and no one left to share it with. The new Member for Birmingham is weary of his private lot:

June 30, 1876.—I used to say I would not go into Parliament after forty. I shall be forty to-morrow week, so it's a near touch.

I can't say I look forward to my new life with pleasure, for all change is painful to me, and for some time past my only pleasure has been in work. But it is another step towards the fulfilment of my destiny—

[1] To Collings, June 30, 1876.

[2] To Henry Peyton.

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another chapter of my life, and while I do not greatly care how soon the last one comes I like the story to keep moving.[1]

July 8, 1876.—I am not well, that's a fact. I feel so terribly depressed that I catch myself continually wishing this wretched business of life were over once for all. . . . It is a hard thing when one cannot find any hope in the future, for after all it is hope which constitutes the real enjoyment of life.[2]

July 9, 1876.—You are quite right in thinking that the reaction would come. It has come, and I have been thoroughly wretched and depressed. I have broken with my old life, and have as yet no interest in, nor hope of, my future—everything reminds me of what might have been and recalls my present loneliness. I can neither look back nor forward with any satisfaction, and I have lost the dogged endurance which has sustained me so long. This life is a d—d bad business for me, and I wish I were out of it.[3]

Instructive as a psychological study are these hauntings of the mind in a man who to nearly all the world seems compact of sanguine self-assurance. A little while more, and no further groan will be wrested from him for many a year; but to the end of his days, and sometimes when his fighting and ruling powers are at their height, the contrast of his inward thoughts will defy public scrutiny in the same way; baffle nearly all contemporary criticism; and make it seem a poor thing in the long, long judgment when all is disclosed.

VII

John Bright and Joseph Cowen introduced him to the House of Commons on Thursday, July 13. Waiting on a cross-bench he was seen to profane the mystic ritual of the hat, keeping on his own in the face of the Speaker, unwitting that he must not cover himself like a hidalgo before taking the oath.

In the sight of some staid members here was the Republican revealed, flouting the Serjeant-at-Arms. Captain Gosset failed to mark it, but the chief doorkeeper, a grey man, stepped up in alarm and whispered instruction. It was noticed that the

[1] To Collings. [2] To John Morley. [3] To Collings.

cool novice uncovered, but not confusedly and not at once. Next he walked up the floor between his sponsors, was duly sworn, took his seat below the gangway; and could now wear his hat with impunity.

But his reception had been chilling, and, as that acute eye takes in the scene, he feels in a moment that he is not popular in this House. How could he be? He had flagellated or disparaged all the Liberal leaders and the majority of their following; while to the Ministerial side, not guessing the absurd explanation, his recent abuse of Disraeli might well seem a wanton and flagrant outrage. Few new members have entered the House of Commons in equal circumstances of moral disadvantage. Strengthened, not weakened, by that impression, he wrote almost at once: "The atmosphere is strange, unsympathetic, almost hostile," though he "was very kindly received by the Radicals and many other members whom I knew".[1] He resolves to test this new ground carefully—to wait, watch, enquire. Fearing lest his mood may betray him into recklessness, if he takes any premature action, he fully intends to be little seen until the next session and not at all heard.

In a fortnight, however, he finds himself; enjoys seeing more of Morley and Dilke; dines placably with Forster and Lowe; and jests that he has already created a new "party of six". Many held that Dilke was surer of a great parliamentary future; some that "Cowen of Newcastle", after his admired philippic against the Empress of India Bill, was the real rising man. A very shrewd witness wrote in an American newspaper:

> I think that Mr. Chamberlain has not his equal just now in the English Parliament in the elements which go to make a successful leader. He is the very opposite in appearance and manner of the professional demagogue . . . perhaps hardly quite free of what the House of Commons most abhors, a persuasion that he is a superior person. . . . Mr. Chamberlain is terse, polished and brilliant, and the House of Commons, which loves an epigram more than an argument, will get both from him when he is fairly roused and well in harness.

Contrary to the first vow of silence for six months, he was drawn into debate in spite of himself. He considered, rightly

[1] To Collings, July 16, 1876.

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as it proved, that with Lord Sandon's mild but useful Bill encouraging the full attendance of children at both kinds of schools, the education controversy was dead for years to come.

But in the last few days of the debate on the Bill a sudden parliamentary hurricane blew up; and on "Clause 25" of all things, his old notorious subject. As it stood up to now, Chamberlain was its unchanged enemy. But the Government accepted an amendment making the clause compulsory instead of optional; school boards must pay the fee for poor parents even if these sent their children to denominational schools. United for once, the Liberal benches assailed the change; the House was kept up half the night. Next afternoon, August 4, it met in a cooler temper. But Birmingham and its School Board were again pilloried by the Conservatives.

The new member felt bound to intervene, and at short notice he made his maiden speech, rising from the third bench below the Opposition gangway "in the midst of Irish Members and English irreconcileables".[1] It was a critical moment. No matter what reputation a man may have outside—it is worse if he has reputation—he is nothing to the House until he makes his position within it.

There was a moment's interruption. Another legislator was competing for the Speaker's eye, but amidst good-natured cries of "New Member!" Chamberlain had precedence. It was a full House, and from a crowded Treasury Bench Disraeli, frail and cadaverous, looked across and lifted his eye-glass, notes a witness, to scrutinise the new man so unlike the coarse demagogue he had recent reason to suppose.

The new man also wore an eye-glass. He was slim, trim, exact in person, possessed and agreeable in elocution, and easy at once in the best parliamentary manner. As one of his hearers remarked, "he struck the conversational key and tone of argument which characterises the present House of Commons". That style was to play a large part in changing the tradition of the House and superseding the grand manner. "If an old representative well acquainted with St. Stephen's had entered the House he would never have supposed he was listening to a new mem-

[1] *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 5, 1876.

ber."[1] He was no sooner up than, as he said after, he "felt as cool as if at the Town Council";[2] and he fixed the attention of the House while with ease and force he defended Birmingham and condemned the policy of "Clause 25". And more. He firmly maintained that religion was better taught in Birmingham since it had been separated from secular instruction.

To complete his success, in twenty minutes he sat down—amidst loud Liberal cheers. He "was clear, concise and practical", adds the auditor already quoted. It was an efficient though not at all a brilliant debut, and he received many congratulations, including a marked compliment from Forster.

Even the fairer of the Tories took naturally a more qualified view. They thought Chamberlain's maiden speech quite good, exceptionally good in an ordinary way, but an anti-climax by comparison with his celebrity outside. An acute parliamentary correspondent of the Conservative *Birmingham Gazette* noted indeed his "easy confidence and well-pitched tone distinctly heard in every part of the Chamber", and allowed that he spoke neatly and well. Not more than that. The same commentator, however, feels that there is something behind the unambitious manner of the maiden speech.

> There was a decidedly war-like ring about the utterance, and the quidnuncs are already speculating as to the position which Mr. Chamberlain is likely to take among the rump of a Radical party. At present the lead is practically in the hands of Mr. Cowen, the Member for Newcastle-on-Tyne, but he has the reputation of acting too much on impulse and too little upon expediency. Mr. Chamberlain is credited with more of head than of heart [we know how far out is this first of many scribes who will say the same]; and I should not be surprised to see him before long take high rank in the Falstaffian army that now harasses in guerilla fashion the flanks and outposts of the Liberal party.

After this Chamberlain's black fit passed, and again he felt confident of his future. It may be remarked that he made his maiden speech just a week before Benjamin Disraeli made his last speech in that House, none suspecting that the Prime Minister was never again to address the Commons.

[1] *Birmingham Daily Post*, August 5, 1876.

[2] In a hasty note to Bunce of the *Birmingham Daily Post*; adding "I have since acted as teller and am now 'free' of the House".

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Chamberlain missed that event. He was back in Birmingham and preparing for a long-needed holiday. It was a holiday with a purpose. For long he had meant to take up licensing reform on lines of public control, and to study on the spot a foreign object-lesson. Collings joined him at Cologne, and with inquisitive enjoyment they went through Sweden to Lapland. Chamberlain described this journey in the most cheerful letters he had written for a long time.

> We have been to Quickjock in the heart of Lapland, and back, proceeding either in carts without springs or in little cockleshells of row boats across the great lakes which occupy a large space in this country. We have lived on hermit's fare—milk, rusks, black bread, fish, etc., but no intoxicating drink, and no meat except some potted beef we had with us to season our frugal repasts. However, black care which pursues the horseman could not follow us in our Swedish carts and frail barks . . . and so we have fattened on our hard food and gained health and strength in the absence of luxury.[1]

He was rejoiced to find education in Sweden "compulsory and free". His research into what was called the Gothenburg system, providing for municipal control of the sale of strong spirits, filled him with zeal and alacrity in that new cause. It proved to be only one of the by-ways of his career, but his action was full of character.

When Parliament reassembled for the session of 1877 Chamberlain quickly spoke on the Prisons Bill. He was friendly towards good Mr. Cross, a Conservative Minister, whose social legislation was generally after his own heart—not long since he had welcomed this Home Secretary in Birmingham. But he protested against the proposed restriction of municipal powers, and bantered the Conservative Government on its "Radical and revolutionary proceedings".[2] This confirmed the success of his maiden speech. Walter Barttelot, typical of Tory squiredom in those days, turned with sublime condescension to the new man regarded hitherto by squires as a coming Robespierre: "If the Hon. Member for Birmingham will always address the House with the same quietness and the same intelligence displayed on this occa-

[1] To J. T. Bunce, from Lulea, Gulf of Bothnia, September 9, 1876.
[2] February 15, 1877.

sion, I can assure him the House of Commons will always be ready to listen to him!"

VIII

It did listen to him when he made his first big parliamentary effort four weeks later.[1] On the licensing question he held the House for nearly an hour, rising with applause from his own party and sitting down amidst loud and continued cheering from all benches.

For several months since returning from Sweden he had been wholly bent on control of the liquor trade. Ever since his defeat by the publicans and the "long pull" at Sheffield, the political influence of "the trade" had seemed to him a virulent public evil. By speeches, letters, conversation and another *Fortnightly* article,[2] he had tried to beat up support.

He had addressed the Liberal Six Hundred in Birmingham on his new crusade. His propositions were four. The drink traffic as then conducted was intolerable in its social and political evils; its absolute suppression was impossible; better regulation was imperative; the only practical solution was to take the trade out of private hands on terms of full compensation and hand it over to municipal authority. This would abolish the very root of the evil—pushing the sale of alcohol for private profit. He would reduce the number of public-houses; encourage the sale of food and non-intoxicating liquors in the rest; and make them orderly and decent places, but plain and unadorned.

He was convinced that the Town Council could manage the business as well as gas or water, and without loss, though avoiding profit to relieve rates; that by this means a social reform of immense benefit could be accomplished; and his zeal suggested comic images to the cartoonists: "I say if I could save half the drunkards in Birmingham—if I could relieve them from the consequences of the vice to which they are a prey—if I could increase to that extent the happiness and prosperity of the community by turning publican, I would put on an apron and serve behind a bar to-morrow".[3]

[1] March 13, 1877. [2] *Fortnightly Review*, December 1876.
[3] November 24, 1876.

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With the same missionary fervour he carries his crusade into other quarters, and reports, elated:

TO MORLEY

January 13, 1877.—I had a most tremendous reception at Leeds which surprised and pleased me very much. The hall crammed to suffocation each night and the audience most attentive and sympathetic. . . . Now I have only got Bristol to do and then ten days' holyday.[1] . . . I hear there is to be an organised row, but hope for the best. I have had seven invitations to public meetings this week, including most pressing ones from Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough. Not for Joseph! Alas! that the flesh should be so weak. I should like to go to them all.

His motion in the House of Commons on these lines was supported by only fifty votes in the lobby, but his speech was consummate exposition. Nor was it only the work of a born parliamentary adept. It raised him in all men's respect. A clever commentator, writing as an "independent member" in the *Birmingham Post*, describes the effect.

Mr. Gladstone leaned forward eagerly so as to see as well as hear. . . . One man, and only one, went to sleep. He was the First Lord of the Admiralty [Ward Hunt] oppressed with the somnolence of twenty stone. . . . Of course, the central excellence of the speech was its earnestness, and this was all the more noticeable because by Sir Wilfrid Lawson's treatment of the subject it has been most unfortunately made the theme for continuous jokes and laughter. Here at last was one more human being in the House who was not a mask but a man—somebody who was solid to the touch. . . . Mr. Chamberlain has now made his mark.

Robert Lowe, strongly dissenting from the whole scheme, particularly recognised "the marked ability and business-like vigour" of its advocate; and when these two crossed swords on the subject in the *Fortnightly Review*, the veteran found his skill tested by the new man's wrist. Again about this time, before a special Committee of the House of Lords on intemperance, Chamberlain's opinion was expressed, and with a clearness showing that his constructive mind was all of one piece;

[1] All his life he preferred this spelling.

for he applied to municipal licensing the fundamental principle whereon he had based all his Birmingham reforms—"all monopolies granted by the State should be managed by local representative authorities for the advantage of the community, and no individual shall derive profit from the sales".

The Temperance party itself lacked commonsense to support the Gothenburg movement. So it faded out. While there seemed any chance, it was very near his heart. He never changed his own opinion that abolition of private profit by public ownership after fair compensation was the key of practical licensing reform. He thought the Temperance party, insisting on things unattainable, would waste indefinite years on the Chinese effort to draw up in a bucket the bright moon from the well. Half a century since then has not proved him wrong.

CHAPTER XIII

DISRAELI'S LAST TRIUMPH AND LIBERAL DISSENSIONS

(1876–1878)

THE Eastern Crisis—War or Peace?—Domestic Questions Swept Aside—Chamberlain supports Mr. Gladstone—The "Radical Group" breaks up—Chamberlain in Paris—Impressions of the Party Struggle —"Isolation" and Disappointment in the House of Commons—A Rising Power in the Country.

I

BOOK III. 1876–78.

CHAMBERLAIN'S single-handed campaign for public control of the liquor traffic, like every other matter of domestic policy, became suddenly irrelevant to practical affairs. The Radical leader's whole scheme of things on entering Parliament was swept down the wind by the Eastern Question.

In April Russia declared war on Turkey, with results fateful for European destinies and our own from that day to this. Those results were to count amongst the chief causes of a world catastrophe in a future then far beyond discerning. The general history of the military and diplomatic struggle in 1877–78 must be passed over here, but at home the effect on parties and on Chamberlain's own career was profound.

Within a week after his election for Birmingham in the summer before, the tale of the Bulgarian atrocities reached England, and with the rising of Serbia and Montenegro the Balkan peninsula was alight. Liberals had been gaining at by-elections. Trade, past its former best long since, was now seriously declining. The fortunes of the Conservative Government and its man of destiny seemed past meridian. On the other hand, Mr. Gladstone's personal fortunes were at lowest ebb. Possessed in retirement by a sprite of unrest, he gave most

of his former followers an impression that he had ceased to be a powerful statesman and become a lay ecclesiastic. The new Radical group hardly took him into further account as a factor in their calculations, though they thought Hartington's leadership soporific.

But three weeks after the session of 1876 ended and Disraeli became a peer, Gladstone's conscience exploded with a violence that shook the State. His passionate pamphlet on the Bulgarian horrors sold like a sensational novel. The effect, though prodigious, was not temporary, but started the crusade for ousting the Turk bag-and-baggage—more easily demanded than done. Gladstone's giant strength was to be foiled once again by Beaconsfield's cooler genius. Just at this beginning of one of the greatest duels in political annals, it looked as though the challenger might carry all before him.

At this distance we can admire the powers of both but the methods of neither. One of them hardened Turkey. The other encouraged Russia. Each helped to make war inevitable—and not only that war.

II

On one point Chamberlain's mind changes at once. Up to this, his only particular link with foreign policy was an admiration for Gambetta—to whom he had been introduced by Morley in Paris. Clemenceau as well became a friend of Chamberlain's, as he already was of Maxse especially, but also of Morley and Dilke. These significant French acquaintanceships were made on continental holidays in Paris, from the autumn of 1875. In the spring before, Chamberlain suggests a jaunt together. "Are you game for a trip to the Moon?" Morley is tied, but soon proposes a "month's stroll". His friend at first thinks it impossible to find time, but happily found it. Unfortunately, he has left no impressions of Parisian politics at that moment.

Our Radical now sees well that Gladstone is no exhausted volcano, but capable of useful eruption for some time to come. If there is to be a Liberal revival, the hermit of Hawarden and none other must be its prophet—Chamberlain little divining for how long; or to what purpose in the long run. Exulting, he thinks Gladstone's "last letter is first-rate", and continues to Morley:

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"We are going to see what we can do with Liberal Associations and Nonconformist Committees, and the League's saloon carriage is on the line" (August 10, 1876).

Dilke rather demurred. His responsible mind in foreign policy was offended by Gladstonian methods; he thought them demagogic and dangerous. On the "bag-and-baggage" movement occurred this colloquy:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

Cap Brun, October 5, 1876.—*Dilke.*—When I see Gambetta I will tell him your message. He will probably come over in May. Pray keep me informed of anything you think important. I am not at all Gladstonian but, short of bowing the knee in that quarter, I will do anything possible to act with you.

October 10, 1876.—*Chamberlain.*—I don't believe I am more Gladstonian than you, but at this time I can't help thinking he is our best card. You see Forster's speech—trimming as usual and trying to dish the Radicals by bidding for the Whigs and moderates. Gladstone is the best answer to this sort of thing, and if he were to come back for a few years (he can't continue in public life for very much longer) he would probably do much for us and pave the way for more. Lord Hartington . . . is away and silent—besides he is pro-Turk, is he not? If G. could be induced formally to resume the reins, it would be almost equivalent to a victory, and would stir what Bright calls "the masses of my countrymen" to the depths. John Morley is going for a month to Italy, and I have arranged to meet him at Paris or Brussels on 11th November for a fortnight's trip together. Shall we look you up for a day about the 18th November?

Touching persons and parties, there is more than a spice of cynicism in this letter, but its writer's hatred of physical cruelty, Turkish or other, was extreme; and he was acquiring an idealising ardour for Greece. As events developed, he became stronger and stronger for Gladstone, while the moderate Liberals drew away.[1]

[1] An unexpected and amusing discovery amongst Chamberlain's papers relating to the close of 1876 is that he received from Lady Dorothy Nevill a copy of one of Lord Beaconsfield's letters not printed in the great Monypenny-Buckle biography. As used to be said of Chatham: "It is the man!"—"2 *Whitehall Gardens, S.W., Dec.* 28, 1876. MY DEAREST ORFORD—A little line to thank you for remembering me. One likes to be remembered by those

III

When the session of 1877 opened he was constantly with Dilke, at whose table and elsewhere he met many distinguished contemporaries. More than once the Prince of Wales asked him to dinner, and he formed a lively friendship with Randolph Churchill, a kindred spirit in venturesome innovation. CHAP. XIII. ÆT. 40–42.

But in the House the little independent Radical group was soon broken up by the Eastern dissensions. Only five or six of them counted. There were nearly as many differences as members. Joseph Cowen of Newcastle was soon wholly estranged. Friend of Kossuth and the Poles as well as Mazzini, he had hated Russia and Tsarism since 1848. He now came to detest Gladstone, who had stayed at his father's house and owed much in the North to their political support for years, but showed little recollection—his deficiency always as a leader by comparison with Disraeli's faithful mind for services; swift, fatherly eye for young talent; and general mastery of human management. Cowen was a great journalist, and a capable man of business as well as a resplendently elaborate orator; but all the high hopes that the new Radicals had built on him began to vanish into thin air. Hardly any Liberals surviving understood his persistence in the anti-Tsarist passion of his youth. His lifelong antagonism after this to Gladstone and Chamberlain alike in all their subsequent phases turned his parliamentary career to failure, though of a kind that made him better and better as a masculine writer in his independent newspaper, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle.*

whom one never forgets. I am here alone at this dreary season. . . . I was going to pass my Xmas at Weston with our friends the Bradfords and then to Trentham for a few days—when my Sovereign Lady appealed to me not to leave her at this moment and declared it an act of high imprudence for myself and Derby to leave town at this conjunction. Our friends the Turks are better diplomatists than Europeans in general, and the affair will probably be longer than the common mind imagines. It requires one's wits about one. I feel as if sailing on a sea full of torpedoes. My profound conviction is, that the Russians dread war, and never contemplated it except with a crowd of allies. When the pinch comes, they find themselves quite isolated and Mephistopheles Bismarck scarcely suppresses his laughter when he beholds that gentle Faust, the emperor of Russia, struggling in his toils. But to get them out of the scrape with honour *hic labor, hoc opus est.* There must be a golden bridge and if necessary it must even be gilt: every possible facility—perfume on the violet. I hope you are well and tolerably happy. Remember sometimes your affectionate BEACONSFIELD."

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Presently Chamberlain and Dilke were reduced to becoming each other's leaders.[1] There were occasions even when, their own disagreement deepening on the Eastern Question, the New Party ceased to be numerically equal to the Siamese twins.

All this was no longer important when Liberalism as a whole threatened to go to pieces like a storm-broken ship. For one wild week it was expected to split to the keel, and drift in fragments. Gladstone at the end of April, immediately after Russia went to war, gave notice of his five high Resolutions. They demanded in effect that neither "the material nor the moral" support of the British Government should be given to Turkey, but that the strongest moral support should be extended to Russia by including in an address to Her Majesty a declaration in favour of "local liberty and practical self-government in the disturbed provinces of Turkey". This really meant encouraging the Tsar to coerce the Porte. Chamberlain welcomed the Resolutions; Dilke endured them, and wrote in his Diary:

20th April 1877.—Took Chamberlain to a party at Lord Houghton's where Lord and Lady Salisbury were leading figures, and where was Harcourt boiling over with rage at Mr. Gladstone whose Resolutions had just been heard of. Gladstone will very probably split the Liberal party into two, but I do not see that he could have avoided doing as he has done. Chamberlain and I and Fawcett must vote with him.[2]

Hartington and his followers now felt that they must openly resist their elemental ex-Premier. Their determination averted a Liberal catastrophe by inducing Gladstone to confine himself to the proposition that Turkey had forfeited all claim to British support.

Chamberlain's rises and falls of temperature in those feverish days are shown in his correspondence with various persons:

April 30, 1877.— . . . Gladstone's Resolutions will force the Whigs to move—"the cat is among the pigeons" with a vengeance.

May 2.— . . . Great excitement about Gladstone.

[1] As we may remember—from a well-known passage in Grote's Diary—in the year when Chamberlain was born, 1836, the mutual parliamentary function of Buller and Molesworth was reduced to telling each other (Mrs. Grote, *Personal Life of G. Grote*, 1873, p. 111).

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 220.

May 8.— . . . Gladstone has been induced to "cave in".[1]

May 10, 1877.— . . . I have written particularly of the conspiracy, which led to Gladstone's withdrawal, to Schnadhorst and asked him to shew it to you and others who are interested. Gladstone has lost a splendid opportunity which unfortunately was ours as well as his. We must accept what we cannot avoid and wait quietly for our next chance.[2]

At this phase our Radical was morally indignant whenever the Whigs showed any symptoms of continued breathing. The "conspiracy" in this case was only their inability to concur. None the less, in the great five days' debate when Gladstone under difficulties rose to magnificence, he found his best supporter in the youngest Member for Birmingham[3]—Bright being for non-intervention. Chamberlain's wholehearted advocacy of the original spirit of all the Resolutions was the better because he spoke with control and suppressed all intemperate expression.

IV

Still more effectual—we might fairly call it invaluable—was his work of organisation on Gladstone's behalf outside Parliament. For the rest of 1877, while Russia was stubbornly held by Ghazi Osman at Plevna, Chamberlain chiefly occupied himself with the construction and operation of that celebrated machine the Caucus. That story will come into the next chapter.

This summer, meeting the Prince of Wales again at dinner, he jests that he has tried to persuade the heir to the Throne of the sweet reasonableness of Radical opinions. Dilke and himself try to make a recruit of Lord Rosebery, just then coming to be talked about as another man of the future, but found him elusive. The two friends, though closer than ever in heart, had to dissolve their political partnership for a short but cheerless period. Dilke notes: "In the autumn of '77 I was isolated, for Chamberlain went, although with moderation, with Mr. Gladstone's agitation".

Chamberlain was equally isolated in consequence, and felt it more. His fatalistic feeling of loneliness threatens to return.

[1] To J. T. Bunce, *Birmingham Daily Post*.

[2] To Collings.

[3] As one historian notes—Herbert Paul, *Modern England*, vol. iv. p. 26.

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Through this session, and part of the next, he longs to have a few Birmingham Ironsides with him at Westminster. He utters himself to Collings: "This place awfully dull. . . . I prefer the Council"; to Bunce: "I wish to Heaven I had a few of you fellows in the House"; and, above all, to Dr. Dale, to whom he exclaims later: "I would give almost anything to have you by my side here. As it is I stand quite alone—in complete sympathy with no one."[1]

None the less, during this trying period he is strong in action, and his advance in the constituencies exceeds his progress at Westminster. Upon returning at the end of September from an unusually long holiday, he finds nineteen invitations to speak in all parts of the country, and there is a "waggonload of papers and letters", to be grappled with. His secretaries feared these occasions, for he could not bear arrears; and when arrears met him in a mass after absence he fell upon them at once and stuck to it for all hours until he had made clean dispatch. A hundred letters written and dictated in one day were not beyond him.

The six weeks' holiday mentioned above was a rare enjoyment. First he sets out with John Morley as far as Salzburg, where they separate, his friend not being at that moment a "hard traveller", nor having the same appetite for activity. Chamberlain goes on alone by Innsbruck and Cortina to Venice and returns by the Italian lakes, Verona and Milan, to Paris. With his sort of suppressed aesthetic sense he was excited and awed by the fantastic Dolomites, and, as for Venice, found it better than all his expectations, and could not "get over the strange charm of it" by day and night. One letter throws a side-light on Gambetta's struggle with MacMahon.

TO MORLEY

October 3, 1877.—I called on Louis Blanc and Waddington but did not see them—also on Gambetta, with whom I had an interesting *quart d'heure*. He was very confident—certain of success—still sure that he would have 400 votes. The Marshal was *furieux* but must *soumettre ou s'en aller*. He was not afraid of force, "*ils en ont bien l'envie mais ils n'oseront pas ; ils ne peuvent compter sur l'armée*". Unless he is absurdly

[1] To Dr. Dale, February 4, 1879.

sanguine, all will go well in the end. He spoke very highly of Grévy; said it was a pity Thiers had not lived three months longer, but after all it was not of great importance for he had already done all the service possible to his party.

He did not accept all the nineteen invitations to different platforms confronting him on his return, but in November and early December, when he spoke at Rochdale, Bradford, West Bromwich, Leicester and Sheffield, his four weeks' campaign was big enough, and in the country raised him by another steady degree.

TO MORLEY

November 3, 1877.—I am full of Free land, Free Church and Liberal organisation. For the first time in my life with fear and trembling, I have at the urgent request of the reporters (who say they fear a breakdown in telegraphic arrangements as Lord Hartington is speaking the same night) prepared an abstract of what I am going to say for the country and possibly for the London papers. Bright has written to know what my subject is to be. I reply: "Your plan of Land Reform". There appears to be great local interest in the meeting [Rochdale] and six times the number of seats to be allotted have been applied for. Heaven help us all.

V

Plevna fell. The Russians, by a thrilling effort, forced the southward passes, and arrived within reach of Constantinople. In Great Britain warlike excitement neared fever-heat. Half the electors remembered the Crimean War like yesterday. Apart from Jingoism and its fires of straw, there was the dangerous glow of a more solid temper. Again, the stars in their courses seemed to fight for Lord Beaconsfield and to decree Gladstone's discomfiture.

On an unforgettable day in February 1878, the House of Commons was stampeded by a false report that the Russians had occupied Constantinople. Lord Beaconsfield had already asked a vote of credit for £6,000,000. The British fleet had been ordered to the Dardanelles and had then been retracted to Besika Bay. But the country seemed to stand on the brink of war. Lord Derby resigned the Foreign Office, Lord Carnarvon

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the Colonial Office. The reserves were called out, Indian troops ordered to Malta. Then suddenly the shadow passed, when Bismarck as arbiter waved his wand of gilded iron and Russia was constrained to submit her terms of peace to revision by a Council of Europe.

We have quick views of Chamberlain's revulsions of feeling amidst all the agitations ending in the Treaty of Berlin and profound Liberal depression.

TO MORLEY AND COLLINGS

January 13, 1878.—*To John Morley.*—A splendid meeting last night. Bright's speech in my judgment and that of everyone I have yet seen a very inferior one—peace at any price—Crimean war *ad nauseam* and nothing to the point and to the present occasion.

January 15.—*To the Same.*—When I see you I may convince you that the Greek is the only hopeful and ultimate solution.

January 31.—*To the Same.*—I am afraid war is nearer than it has been—and what a War! Unjust, unnecessary, dishonourable and very probably disastrous.

February 16.—*To Collings.*—The Government having passed the fleet through the Dardanelles are now compelled to provide for its safety . . . no Minister would dare to leave the Forts at the entrance of the Straits in the hands of Russia while the fleet is inside. Thus one blunder after another complicates the situation; and the Government and the nation may be drifted into war without any real reason or definite principle.

You will have seen a report that a number of members below the gangway have constituted themselves a sort of vigilance committee. This is true, and I am one of the number but it is undesirable to talk about it, as past experience makes me very little sanguine of any real strength or union being secured.

February 18.—*To Collings.*— . . . There are many rumours with respect to the leadership of the Liberal Party, and Lord Hartington is no doubt half inclined to throw up his position. Lady Waldegrave, who represents the Whig element, spoke to me about it on Friday night, and it is clear that the question is under consideration.

If Gladstone were younger there would be no doubt what to do. As it is, I fear nothing but confusion would result. For myself, I shall take my own course, admitting no loyalty to Hartington which would be

inconsistent with my own opinions and the pledges I have given to the country. On the other hand, I would not join an agitation for the purpose of displacing him, as I really think he keeps the place out of worse hands. Except Gladstone, there is no other possible leader; and Gladstone, as you know, is erratic, and cannot be relied on with absolute confidence.

VI

Through March and April, while Bismarck's attitude convinced experts in foreign affairs that the issue would be peace, Lord Beaconsfield's Government made more demonstrative preparations for war, in order to strengthen their hands in diplomacy. The Prime Minister wrote to his Secretary for War, March 27:

Rest assured that the critical time has arrived when we must declare the emergency. We are drifting into War. If we are bold and determined, we shall secure peace and dictate its conditions to Europe.[1]

At the beginning of April the country as a whole thought war quite certain. Public alarm continued for weeks after the peril had been quietly dispelled. If Lord Beaconsfield rightly insisted that the Treaty of San Stefano must be subjected to European revision, Prince Bismarck, as rightly, urged that Britain and Russia in advance must come to private agreement. They did. At the end of May negotiations between London and St. Petersburg were completed by Lord Salisbury and Count Schuvaloff. There was a Congress instead of a wider war. The brilliant diplomatic assembly at Berlin met in the main as a registration agency.

Through these vicissitudes Chamberlain's impressions fluctuate:

TO J. T. BUNCE

March 30, 1878.—Things look black everywhere, though I do not give up my hope of peace. But it is clear that Dizzy will stick at nothing, and he is now sole master.

The next letter throws a flood of light on the chaos of Liberalism in mid-crisis:

[1] Gathorne Hardy, *Earl of Cranbrook*, vol. ii. p. 56.

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TO COLLINGS

April 2, 1878.—I must have failed to make you understand the position of affairs up here or you would hardly write as you do. The fact is, there are not half a dozen people who could be absolutely relied upon even for a single opposition to the Government, much less for anything like a general obstructive policy. . . . The almost certainty that a General Election would at this moment involve a complete rout of the Liberal Party has a most depressing effect. Besides this, the difficulties of the situation are really very great. Rightly or wrongly, all our leaders, including Gladstone and Bright, believe that although the Government sometimes use warlike language, they really mean peace. . . .

It is the vulgar policy of the bully, but as I have said most of our own friends think that it will probably be successful. . . . I am going to dine with Gladstone to-night and hope to get from him a definite suggestion as to what form our opposition may reasonably take. . . . I am told that even in Scotland the anti-Russian feeling is gaining ground rapidly.

Yesterday Albert Bright was in London, and appears to have told a number of members that in spite of appearances there was a dangerous war feeling existing in Birmingham and that the music-hall songs were cheered in the places of public entertainment and sung generally in the workshops. . . .

Speaking for myself alone I am quite clear. I do not mean to support, and intend to oppose all action of the Government which makes war possible or even probable, but I cannot conceal from myself that the position is absolutely a hopeless one, so far as any practical good or effect upon public opinion is concerned.

It will give you some idea of the feeling here when I tell you that Henry Richard, the secretary of the Peace Society, actually said to me in private yesterday that he hoped the Russians would refuse to give way even if it led to war, because he felt that, if they yielded, a tremendous advantage would be given to the Government and to the policy of brag which they have carried out. . . .

The situation is a bad one, and at present I can see no rift in the clouds.

April 5, 1878.—*To the Same.*—Yesterday I saw Gladstone, Forster, Bright, Lord Hartington and had long conversations with each. The feeling in the House of Commons gets worse every minute. I do not believe that at the present moment there is one single person besides

myself who thoroughly desires that any amendment to the address should be moved . . . it is impossible for the leaders to take any move without being deserted by the greater part of their followers. . . .

It is almost impossible for one solitary man to push his opinion against such a mass of opposing testimony. Gladstone himself is much exercised and evidently fears that a debate upon an amendment would be a poor affair and show the nakedness of the land. He thought that having made a protest it was not so necessary for us to clear ourselves again by vote as well as by speech. . . .

I write this at great length that you may as far as possible be penetrated with the situation here and the difficulties under which I labour.

Another letter shows the awe and terror created by Disraeli's personality amongst Liberals at that moment. Chamberlain's judgment deserts him:

TO MORLEY

April 12.—I have seen a private letter of Lord Derby in which he says that he fears war will not be averted, as "the interests of some and the passions of others are against peace", or words to that effect. I begin at last to believe that the Jew has really meant war all along, and if so *actum est de republica*, for he is all-powerful.

But this momentary attack of nerves was prompted by the temporary Liberal belief in Lord Derby, whose reputation for strong cold commonsense was suggested by a façade of appearance and manner. Chamberlain quickly recovered his own shrewd instinct that the weird "Jew" saw his way and—like Palmerston repeatedly—meant to obtain a peaceable solution by making clear that in default of a tolerable agreement he would face the last resort without shrinking. Though as utterly mistaken as his rival in his conceptions of the future of the Eastern Question—for he as little realised the rising strength of the Christian nationalities in the Balkans as did Gladstone the virulence of their coming feuds—Lord Beaconsfield's policy at the core was a thing of fibre and not of bluff. And he was a very great "Jew" and Englishman, and more, as all the world sees now. By the middle of April 1878, Chamberlain knew that the Congress was effectual, and peace secured.

VII

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The unwonted spate of Chamberlain's personal correspondence in this crisis runs down like a southern river, and the stones are dry for months.

On Saturday, July 13, the Treaty of Berlin was signed at the Radziwill Palace. On the following Tuesday Lord Beaconsfield made his triumphant progress from Charing Cross to Downing Street. His Queen offered him a dukedom as well as the Garter. No hollow phrase altogether was "peace with honour". It was not such a peace with wisdom—perhaps beyond mortal power at that moment—as might have averted the crash of all Europe nearly forty years after; but for the majority of the nation it was peace with pride. The marvellous career of Benjamin Disraeli mounted its summit.

While the Eastern Question dominated, Chamberlain, having no pre-eminent qualifications on that subject, was overshadowed in parliamentary debate, well as he sometimes did. He made way, but more slowly than he and his friends had expected when he appeared at Westminster. He pleaded generously for a greater Greece—a "Greek Empire", as he sometimes called it, not yet knowing in the grain Balkan and Anatolian realities. But another trait was indicative and might have suggested surprising possibilities of the future. Now as in his young days when he applauded Palmerston, his spirit in foreign policy was very different from Bright's. In his fine argument, much applauded on his own side, against calling out the Reserves, he dwelt thus on the general question of war and peace:

"I think I have said enough to show that I at all events am not an advocate of 'peace at any price'. I think there are two cases where a country is justified and even called upon to go to war—one in which I believe all are agreed, namely, when its interest or its security is really in danger from attack; and the other in which there might be greater differences of opinion. I hold that great nations have duties and responsibilities like individuals, and there are times in which they are bound to fight, not for selfish British interests, but for great causes which are in danger or great principles which are imperilled, in order to succour the oppressed and do justice to the weak." [1]

[1] April 9, 1878.

CHAP. XIII. ÆT. 40–42.

By contrast with his sense of disappointment during his first two years at Westminster, his speeches and activities in the country were of evident power. Outside Parliament, like no other coming man, he went forward from strength to strength without a check. The reasons appear in the next connection.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAUCUS AND THE WHIGS—TROUBLES AND TRIUMPH OF LIBERALISM

(1877–1880)

ORIGIN and Working of the Birmingham Machine—The System spreads—Plan of National Organisation—Chamberlain's "New Model"—Securing Mr. Gladstone—The Bingley Hall Baptism—Inner Methods of the Caucus—Its Power and Limits—The Fight against Flogging—Chamberlain and Parnell—Lord Beaconsfield's Disasters and Prescience—The Elections of 1880—Claims of the Caucus and its Leaders.

I

BOOK III. 1877–80.

BEFORE "Peace with Honour" and Disraeli's apotheosis Chamberlain had become what he remained through the closing years of that regime—the methodical reorganiser of Liberalism in the country.

The engineer of the Caucus was denounced by his opponents as an Americaniser of British institutions. In the fantasies of elderly Conservatives and Whigs he was now an ogre. He was a conspirator, they said, in his secret machinations, and yet flagrant in his open insolence.

The facts about the Caucus are not fully understood, despite the mass of publications devoted to it. M. Ostrogorski's well-known work,[1] a massive feat of research and arrangement, is not unprejudiced but pervaded by preconceived hostility. The industry is minute but not so searching are the historical reflections. Upon the present writer that work leaves a singular impression as of mathematics tinged with melodrama. Though M. Ostrogorski's investigation enforces respect, he misses some

[1] *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (2 vols. London and New York, 1902).

vital connections; and he sees elaborate artifice or partisan conspiracy in motives and actions exceedingly simple in real origin, and developed in a natural relation to other democratic tendencies.

In our day we have learned that no such tree grows into the sky, and we can examine the subject without alarm or eulogy. "Tory" and "Whig" themselves, like *Les Gueux* and many other sobriquets of parties and factions, were nicknames devised by opponents, flung out in derision and adopted with pride. From Lord Beaconsfield, and then from *The Times*, Conservatives, Whigs and some independents borrowed an American name meant to be opprobrious. With his usual irony Chamberlain delighted in the name, but the Caucus system as organised by him in this country owed nothing whatever to American example.[1]

II

It is essential to remember that Birmingham had been a strong centre of Unions and Clubs and of plans of national action since before the Reform Bill of 1832, a time recollected like yesterday by a good many citizens still living at the date we have reached in this narrative. The announced object of Attwood's Political Union formed at the end of 1829 was "to collect and organise the peaceful expression of public opinion so as to bring it to act upon the legislative functions in a just, legal and effectual way". The Caucus fifty years later claimed that its aims were just the same.

For a generation after the Reform Bill the organising tradition weakened, but its memory never died out. A Conservative challenge revived its vigour. By the Household Franchise Bill, Birmingham received three members, but by the Minority Clause each citizen had only two votes, and this was intended to ensure the return of one Conservative. Advanced Liberals, Bright at their head, regarded this as annulling part of their due

[1] In one of its paragraphs on the word the great *Oxford Dictionary* observes: "In English newspapers since 1878, generally misused, and applied opprobriously to a committee or organization charged with seeking to manage the elections and dictate to the constituencies. . . . Such organizations have since been in one form or another adopted by all parties; and *caucus* is now a term which partizans fling at the organizations of their opponents and disclaim for their own."

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representation, and they determined by contrivance to beat the Statute.

The Birmingham Liberal Association had been founded three years before, Chamberlain being a member from the first, though not yet prominent. It was now, in 1868, remodelled on the plan of its then secretary, that prompting man William Harris; architect, surveyor, journalist, author—his *History of the Radical Party*, as we noted, is still worth attention—and a competent wire-puller in support of conviction. Without the gift of speaking up to his ability in public, he was for years an intent thinker behind the scenes—the Abbé Sieyès of Birmingham, and in some ways more effective in his smaller orbit. Probably Harris was the very first person to discover, towards the close of the 'sixties, Chamberlain's political aptitudes.

The new scheme brought all the active Liberalism of the town into ordered array. Each of the municipal wards elected its own committee in public meeting. Each ward committee, thus elected, sent delegates to the Central Committee, known first as the Four Hundred, then as the Six Hundred.[1] This Committee sent a smaller number of delegates to the Central Executive, composed of over a hundred persons. The actual Management Committee —a sort of "Council of Ten" (eleven to be exact)—was the real brain and will of the whole organisation.

Thus regimented, Birmingham Liberalism set about to nullify the Minority Clause in view of the great Election of 1868. The wards were canvassed to the last man. Large enough was the Liberal preponderance to elect all three members could a scientific distribution of votes be contrived. It was done. In some wards, electors were asked to vote for Bright and Dixon; in others for Bright and Muntz; in others again for Dixon and Muntz. Zeal and arithmetic went together. The thing worked like a clock. All three Liberal candidates were returned as follows: Dixon 15,198 votes, Muntz 14,614, Bright 14,601; while the Conservatives in total voting were beaten by nearly three to one.

This was a victory of offended intelligence. The method was labelled a "Vote-as-you're-told" system. But electors could only be advised, not compelled. From the Liberal standpoint the injunction was rather, "Vote as you ought"; and a vast majority

[1] Long afterwards the Two Thousand.

was aided to vote as it wished. This experience was the germ of all later Caucus ideas. As Tory wits jested presently, Birmingham was the original region of the "Caucussian" race in English politics.

In the same way, Birmingham's next and more drastic assertion of absolute majority rule was caused by a stronger legislative effort to restrict it. The Education Act of 1870 instituted the cumulative vote. In Birmingham, for instance, each elector had fifteen votes and could either distribute them or plump them for one candidate. This was a more complex affair. Liberals at the outset were not up to it. At the first School Board election, as we saw, the incautious majority of the citizens was soundly beaten by the minority. Nothing did so much to rouse the ingenuity of the Liberals.

III

Joseph Chamberlain was born to this sort of work. His long business practice, in scope and detail, had equipped him perfectly for it.

Francis Schnadhorst, we recall, was made secretary of the Liberal Association in 1873. That body took in hand all local contests. So, at the end of that year, the School Board was captured—like the Town Council—and the minority overwhelmed despite its cumulative vote. Drilled was each ward to give its vote to a particular portion of the whole group of Liberal candidates. With fifteen votes at the disposal of each elector this, at first tackling, seemed an involved affair; solved, however, with a thoroughness looking like simplicity.

After that, the majority was master of all things in Birmingham, as it desired. For how many years the huge squalid town had waited for redress of infesting evils. "New Caucus" though writ large was better than "Old Clique" in "Easy Row", who had settled things in the lazy and jobbing spirit of the unreformed corporation despite the national law of municipal freedom.

Chamberlain's was the animating will. The library at Southbourne, not nominally headquarters, was the real seat of influence. Schnadhorst never was a primary force; though on receiving instructions, consummate in detail. A few weeks after

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the local elections the full power of the Birmingham system appeared at the General Election of 1874. In the midst of Conservative triumphs elsewhere, that party did not care to face a contest in this almost Fascist citadel of Radicalism—as to-day we might say without paradox or exaggeration. Bright, Dixon, Muntz were returned unopposed.

IV.

From that time, on Chamberlain's initiative, Birmingham took the lead in remodelling Liberal methods everywhere. Writers have overlooked the fact that by him the National Caucus was deliberately, though gradually, developed out of the National Education League. We have seen from his letters to Dilke and Morley that, before the fall of Gladstone's administration, he had emerged from the narrower bounds of dissent and was resolved upon a Radical appeal to democracy.[1]

For the next three years, warily at first, but with rapidity from the autumn of 1876—his own seat in the House of Commons secured—he planned to supersede the League altogether despite an honest amount of sullen resistance and evasion within that body. Instead of it, he meant to create on a national basis the complete Liberal Caucus.[2] The League had served him as an admirable "short model". It had enabled him to furnish himself with his registers of political facts about all the industrial constituencies. Already he knew the names of all their local lights, and was in touch with agents and adherents in every one of them. The electoral map of democracy, plainly demarcated and minutely lettered, was alive in his mind. Thus

[1] Dilke's recollection is a little at fault when he writes, long after the events (*Life*, vol. i. p. 172): "I had indeed invented a caucus in Chelsea before the first Birmingham Election Association was started". The Birmingham system, as evolved from 1865 to 1868, owed nothing to the example of Chelsea, and Dilke played no part in founding the National Liberal Federation.

[2] Amongst the earliest alarmed was that sharp observer, Frederic Rogers, who had long been permanent head of the Colonial Office, and was now Lord Blachford. To Gladstone he writes on January 11, 1877: "I ought to tell you that I feel these Birmingham meetings as a shake to my politics . . . my feeling of something like alarm at the great organisation of which Birmingham and Mr. Chamberlain are the centre may be dissipated by events. But I feel more strongly the opposite possibility that this rising power may take a place in politics which may force me to reconsider a good deal; and feeling this I think myself bound to tell you so . . ." (*Letters of Frederic, Lord Blachford*, ed. G. E. Marindin (1896), p. 374).

equipped, he and his Birmingham men made themselves missionaries and guides to other Liberals in a hundred places. In some localities good Liberal Associations had sprung up independently, but they all saw that they had much to learn from the Birmingham system.

Much mistaken is Ostrogorski in suggesting that glib and furtive professionals played any considerable part in this crusade.[1] Elsewhere, as in the Radical city itself, the men of the machine were the men in earnest. Their whole souls were in their cause. They followed an old precedent; Chamberlain's new model, like Cromwell's, started from his own troop and grew into regiments and an army. Schnadhorst was an agent indefatigable. Travelling widely to spread the Birmingham plan, the sedulous expert well knew how to prepare public action by private diplomacy. Schnadhorst was no German "free import", as multitudes of honest Conservatives imputed and assumed; but though his Nonconformist stock had been settled in this country since the eighteenth century, yet he did preserve, as we have already seen, the German thoroughness of method. Quiet, persuasive, tireless, his touch was on all the threads.

Though he did so much of the spinning and weaving, Chamberlain drew the pattern and watched the web. Pioneer of large-scale organisation in business, he was pioneer of similar methods in national politics as ultimately in his idea of a rationalised Empire.

V

But he never thought, he always denied, that machines can either create great movements or arrest them. He based himself on commonsense in his lifelong assertion that the best movements require the best organisation. Before setting himself to construct a new national machine he waited for new motive-power.

The spirit he wants begins to rise in the autumn of 1876 with Gladstone's reappearance and the Eastern crusade. Chamberlain seizes this chance to carry out his long-formed plan of superseding the Education League by a much wider electoral army—and an army, if possible, under his own hand.

[1] Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties*, vol. i. p. 172.

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The idea was to form the Liberal Associations throughout the country into a National Federation, with its centre not in London but in Birmingham. Any study of him must note his grip of the practical difference between metropolitan and provincial head-quarters. Grasping the significance of that alternative for him and his purposes, he forces things in his own favour. It was the most ambitious stroke of his political life up to then, but he succeeded with humorous smoothness.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

November 25, 1876.—The Liberal Association which organises this vast majority [in Birmingham] is actually the whole Liberal constituency, every Liberal having right of membership on expressing his readiness to accept decision of majority after fair discussion. No subscription is required, and it happens that three-quarters of the great committee of the 600 are working-men.

The whole genius of Conservatism is opposed to such a democratic organisation as this and they can never hope to emulate its popularity, power and success. . . . In Birmingham, by their own confession, they have neither men, money, nor leaders.

February 6, 1877.—We are just going to issue the League dissolution circular, announcing at same time the formation of a Federation of Liberal Associations with headquarters at Birmingham and the League officers as chief cooks. I think this may become a very powerful organisation, and proportionately detested by all Whigs and Whips.

The resolve to close the Education League and to "transfer its remaining work to the Liberal Associations of the country as part of the policy of the Liberal party" was taken at a meeting of the Executive Committee just after New Year, 1877, and was carried into effect in March. Chamberlain and his bodyguard, as we may call them, then announced that measures were afoot to democratise and federate all the Liberal Associations in the country. He knew what he was doing, and he wanted the new instrument to put Radical pressure on his own leaders even more than to fight the Tories. But he warns his lieutenants that centralisation at Birmingham is essential:

TO COLLINGS

March 2, 1877.—I think it is a great mistake to ask Manchester and Leeds to join Birmingham in starting the Federation, and I earnestly hope that at least the decision may be delayed until I can be present to represent my views in the matter, which will not be until to-morrow week.

If these two Associations are joined with us they will seriously hamper our action and they will claim equal representation on all the Committees of the Federation, and this would render prompt and united action an impossibility in the future. Please urge Harris very strongly to secure a postponement.[1] . . .

This saved the issue for Birmingham's ascendancy and his own. There had not been an hour to spare. The next thing was to hook the biggest fish possible—Mr. Gladstone himself. It was good angling, though Leviathan was skittish. Conversationally, Chamberlain opened the subject in the House of Commons amidst the European alarms of April 1877. Gladstone—and he would—desired embodiment in writing. Alluringly drafted was the invitation to the great man to address a Bingley Hall multitude upon the occasion of an important conference of Liberal Associations formed on the model of Birmingham. The prophet is assured that "it has been very unusual in Birmingham to invite any public man not directly connected with the borough to take part in our meetings, but the desire is universal, in the present instance to have your presence" (April 16, 1877). For a little "Mr. G." seems to hang in the wind with doubt of his physical capacity for Bingley Hall, and with other scruples; but what really he wants is assurance on the Eastern Question of full scope and full support.

Chamberlain, after consulting his friends, vouches that there will be no embarrassment moral or physical.

I do not think that you will find it difficult to speak in the building in spite of its size. Mr. Bright spoke there on three occasions, and was heard all over the Hall without great effort to himself. He prefers it to the Town Hall, which does not hold one-half the number.[2]

[1] His sardonic pleasure comes out in the near sequel when, to Collings again (Sunday, September 30, 1877), he notifies: "I have seen Schnadhorst —everything is very satisfactory. The Tories will be smashed, d—— them!"

[2] Chamberlain to Gladstone, May 19, 1877.

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Bracing himself for the boldest vocal adventure of his long career so far, the orator further consents to be Chamberlain's guest at Southbourne.

When sure of him, they hurry out the Birmingham circular inviting all existing Liberal Associations to meet in conference on May 31, with the almost armipotent attraction of Mr. Gladstone's eloquence in the evening.

Nearly a hundred Associations sent delegates. Chamberlain took the chair at the conference, and bade it look forward to "a real Liberal Parliament outside the Imperial Legislature, and unlike it, elected by universal suffrage".[1] He spoke in his persuasive vein, well seconded by his lieutenants. The Federation was founded indeed, and in entire accordance with his will.

Not London, but Birmingham—immune from "Whigs and Whips"—was chosen as the national centre of reorganised Liberalism. There would be the seat of the inner executive, and there the meetings of the general committee would be held. Chamberlain was elected first President; his own staff, Collings, Harris, Powell Williams, were appointed to the inner executive; while a few weeks later Schnadhorst became Secretary.[2] But securing pontifical consecration of the Caucus was the masterstroke.

VI

When Gladstone arrived in the afternoon he had a king's reception all along the way to Chamberlain's house. The evening meeting of the Federation was its baptism. Bingley Hall presented what veterans called an almost terrifying scene. Gladstone, we noticed, had expressed some trepidation when first told that his hearers would be at least 10,000. They proved to be nearer 30,000, "said to be the largest audience ever gathered together to hear one man speak"—that is, under a roof—a dense mass, sweltering in heat, thronging the inter-barricaded pens on the floor, loading the galleries, climbing to the roof. The crush was daunting, but disaster was escaped. The multitude for once were impatient even with Dr. Dale. That night they wanted to hear a mightier man.

[1] May 31, 1877.

[2] Robert Spence Watson, *The National Liberal Federation* (*1907*), p. 7.

They were rewarded. They felt to the full what no one living can hope to explain to posterity—the physical spell of Gladstone's presence and utterance. As a prelude to his rolling thunders against the Turks, he briefly blessed the national "New Model" in religious terms. Hitherto, he declared, in effect, political organisation had been swayed by the "power of the purse"; but "it is in my opinion to the honour of Birmingham that she has held up the banner of a higher and holier principle".

In proposing the second resolution Chamberlain dared to repeat his watchword, "Free Church, Free Schools, and Free Land"—an invocation not apt to kindle faith or pleasure in the great visitor. Owing to this occasion as much as he gave, Gladstone, with all his august courtesy as Chamberlain's guest at Southbourne, was inwardly aloof. Nor afterwards did he improve acquaintance. There was no affinity.

Henceforth the Birmingham directorate planted more associations and demonstrations; it sowed broadcast. When war with Russia seemed imminent, Schnadhorst and his colleagues got up at about a week's notice nearly one hundred and thirty meetings of protest in all parts of the nation.[1]

Chamberlain not only was the prime mover of this renowned machine; he was far more master of it than he allowed to appear. But a distinction must be made. He no more designed the construction of the Caucus than a fighting admiral designs the battleships of his fleet; nor was he of the kind to purloin other men's credit. As regards design, the "father" of the national Caucus, as he had been of the local one, ten years before, was William Harris, who had insisted half a decade before that Nonconformist politics alone—"a theological party"—never would succeed and that Radicalism must be the future purpose. Chamberlain said frankly: "The whole credit of having initiated and carried out this new machinery belongs to my friend Mr. Harris, Vice-President of the Federation".[2] Let us note yet again for how much the ideas of William Harris counted behind the scenes. None the less the relations between him and his chief were those

[1] Watson, *The National Liberal Federation*, p. 13. (In this book, completed in 1906, the account of the early years 1877–85 is unfortunately coloured by subsequent hostility to Chamberlain's later phase.)

[2] Chamberlain's speech at Darlington, February 3, 1880.

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of designer and operator. Harris suggested the Caucus: Chamberlain created it.

It is said that the National Liberal Federation in its archives has some interesting evidence upon the working of the machine in its early years. To that source the present writer has not had access. The deposited archives did not count very much. It is certain that, as commonly under the Birmingham regime, Chamberlain's communications with Schnadhorst were by word of mouth in nine cases out of ten. When the ruling spirit was at home, his own house—Southbourne first and Highbury later—was headquarters. During the parliamentary sessions either he came home often for week-ends, or Schnadhorst ran up to London; or "the chief" sent confidential suggestions from Westminster. As, more and more, they found his captain's eye quicker and keener than theirs, what he wished was what they did, though very seldom indeed was his prompting audible to the pit.

Several, who knew him longest and best, said in almost the same words that he managed by persuasion, not dictation; and while agreement lasted, he knew, none better, how to keep friendship in repair.

VII

When the Caucus was widely execrated as a work of darkness,[1] Morley pressed his friend to defend it in the *Fortnightly*. The friend thinks aloud in successive letters:

TO MORLEY

September 29, 1878.—The opponents of the Caucus are not to be convinced—they hate it for its virtues—because it puts aside and utterly confounds all that club management and Pall Mall selection which has been going on for so long and which has made of the Liberal Party the molluscous, boneless, nerveless thing it is. The Caucus is force, enthusiasm, zeal, activity, movement, popular will and the rule of the majority—the Seven Deadly Sins in fact. Send me the attacks which you have collected, and I will do my best, but I shall preach to a crooked and perverse generation.

[1] *The Times* had written in July 1878, "The policy of the Midland capital will bring upon us the 'Caucus' with all its evils". The *Saturday Review* some years afterwards feared the day when it might be "impossible for any man to obtain a seat in Parliament except by dint of the Caucus".

October 1.—As to the line I shall take, I am afraid you will not think it very persuasive, but I feel that the time for anything like apology is past. . . . The case of our opponents rests on three assumptions—1st, that the system of local and national Government in America is corrupt and degraded; 2nd, that this is due to the Caucus; 3rd, that the Birmingham system is the same as the American and will lead to the same alleged results. All these assumptions I dispute. . . .

October 11.—As usual I find myself totally incapacitated from judging of my own work when it is fresh. If I were to follow my present impression I would say my paper was good for nothing. . . .

October 22.—I know that you are a partial critic, but still if you are satisfied I cannot be very far wrong. I do not know how it is, but in re-reading what I have just written I always find that my production appears commonplace and *fade*.

The article was better than he thought. If it expressed his trenchant mind with maturing restraint, by that it lost nothing. His keynotes were these:

The Caucus does not make opinion, it only expresses it. . . . All the machinery in the world will not rouse enthusiasm in England unless there is a solid foundation of genuine and earnest feeling to work upon. . . . "*The men in earnest*"—to use Mr. Gladstone's phrase—will not accept inglorious ease.[1]

About this time Sir William Harcourt remarked to a well-known Trade Union leader, "Chamberlain is the clearest exponent of the principles of the workers, and the most determined man I ever knew to put them into practice".[2]

VIII

We have seen that the Liberal Caucus at every stage owed its strongest traits in a very English way to a spirit of resistance. It arose when new forms of combination were a general social tendency. It was as natural as Trades Unionism. All organisation—though the purpose be the highest, as in religion—brings

[1] The *Fortnightly Review*, November 1878.

[2] W. J. Davis of the Brassworkers in the *Searchlight*, special number, Birmingham, November 13, 1913.

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its penalties. "When spirit seeks to master flesh gross flesh invades it." The Birmingham system, as nationally and locally applied, had its episodes of intrigue and vendetta. Sometimes, perhaps often, wire-pulling did manufacture appearances of popular feeling not in fact corresponding to the true balance of public opinion.

Adopted by every party in Great Britain and Ireland, this system was more and more used by all of them to deter or crush personal independence. Forster in Bradford, Cowen in Newcastle—and by the humour of fate, Chamberlain himself long afterwards—had to fight for their political lives because they could not conform to official policy. By a combination of Liberal and Conservative support all these heretics baffled the Caucus. If independent men who can beat the machine are few, that is not because of the machine but because of the majority with its herd-mind habits. Under democracy, the mass of every party follows conventional and standardised opinions until these are changed by the exceptional force of courageous individuals. The bulk of every party in every constituency is prone to make members of Parliament after its own image. But it has no real enjoyment of what it ordinarily does, and for really outstanding vigour and ability of individual independence there is always a good chance.

But this again is nothing new. Long before the machine system was known, men who went habitually against their nominal party or strongly against the feeling of the majority of their constituents at the moment, were usually thrown out as a matter of course; Burke, Macaulay, Bright, Gladstone, to name no others; just as the most brilliant member for a pocket-borough was dismissed when he differed seriously from his patron.

In our day, nearly sixty years after the controversy on the Caucus in the closing years of Lord Beaconsfield's Government, the question has lost its importance with its novelty. Imitation of Birmingham made the machine system general. Rival efforts cancel out so far as the routine of political organisation is concerned. By paradox all depends, as in Chamberlain's case, not upon the machine itself but upon the man who runs it. The power of electors to think for themselves would not be increased by the abolition of party machines. The Caucuses can no more

control the wide political movements than can Trades Unions the wide economic movements. They can only mitigate an adverse situation—when they are truly efficient, which is seldom—or use a favourable one to the fullest advantage.

That this might mean much or little, according to the balance of the circumstances, Chamberlain foresaw. In his hands the thing had all the power of novelty, efficiency and a long start ahead of rivals. In its fresh years the national organisation of Liberalism on the Birmingham plan—"an honest attempt at democratic Government" he called it—was full of faith, discipline and resource under a leader not rivalled before or since in his specific type of actuating genius. He made it a great public power, and it made him a great personal power in his turn.

There is a final reflection, and it is the best. If Chamberlain could make political machines he could defy them on his own ground. Burke had to leave Bristol, Bright to leave Manchester, Morley to leave Newcastle. Not so Chamberlain. When a day of disruption comes; when Gladstone who blessed the birth, and Schnadhorst who nourished the growth, of the original Caucus, hope to use it against its author, Chamberlain will be too much for it and them.

IX

As often happens, opportunity came with a sweep not long after the means to make the most of it had been created. The banquets of honour followed the return from Berlin, and for weeks it rained roses.

Lord Beaconsfield, as every tyro can now assert, ought to have gone to the country, but he refrained, presuming on the fidelity of fortune, instead of remembering, as he used to do, that fortune in politics may jilt men at their highest hour. He little surmised that he had missed the last great chance of his career and sentenced his Government.

Some views of Chamberlain in the House of Commons during these mutations we already have had. While Parliament is about to adjourn he is by no means displeased with himself:

> Dilke and I together have had the real triumphs of the session. . . . The House of Commons is an awful place to speak in, but I am beginning

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to feel more at home; and whenever the reaction so long expected does set in, I hope I may do good work and not discredit Birmingham.[1]

In the middle of August the long session closed with Ministerial glory. In three or four short weeks after, the first messengers of misfortune began to arrive. Disraeli, as all men and nations now prefer again to call him, never had luck again. The genius or imp of Oriental affairs crowned him in Europe only to betray him in Asia. Russia replied to the dispatch of Indian troops to Malta by a temporary mission to Cabul. The old Prime Minister was settling this affair by quiet negotiation, when Lord Lytton tried to force a British mission upon an unfriendly Amir. Shere Ali's refusal was an affront rashly courted, but not meekly to be endured. The Viceroy's policy dragged the uneasy Cabinet into war with Afghanistan. At the same time, Sir Bartle Frere's policy dragged them into a Zulu war, certain to react evilly on our first mismanaged occupation of the Transvaal.

A winter session had to be held. The depression of trade made a black winter. Hitherto, the secret of Disraeli's success had been the same as Palmerston's. By plainly refusing to flinch from war he had kept the country out of it (as might have been done in July 1914). Now there were to be little wars with much tragedy. Within six short months the days of peace with honour seemed far away. By odd reversal the country became as surfeited with Beaconsfield's Imperialism as it had been with Gladstone's Liberalism half a decade before.

While Gladstone declaimed against public sin, Chamberlain quickly fastened upon public blunders. The Caucus kept agitation in full blast. On the Afghan business he writes:

TO MORLEY

September 29, 1878.—I agree with you entirely about the Afghan War [2] (Are there two f's, by the way?) . . . injustice and impolicy of casting the expense on India. . . . If we are to pose as a *great nation*, we must be content to pay for our own grandeur.

October 15, 1878.—You ought to slang the policy in the strongest terms—it is really infamous. We have rushed headlong on a sea of

[1] Chamberlain to J. T. Bunce, August 8, 1878.

[2] It was often spelt with two "f's" in the journals just then.

troubles—infinite in extent; dangerous, possibly fatal. . . . It is certainly no use to urge that we should quietly stomach the affront. Neither the Government nor the people would accept this, and we might only weaken our strong case against the Ministry for getting us into such a scrape. . . .

What is especially desirable to make clear is that this infernal Afghan business is the natural consequence of Jingoism, Imperialism, "British interests" and all the other phrasing of this mountebank Government. It is in perfect harmony with the acquisition of Cyprus and the protectorate of Asia Minor; and it is perhaps fortunate that before going further in the latter bargain we should have a practical specimen of the sort of work we have so lightly undertaken.

This was early perception of both sides of the case and contains a hint as well of the latent Imperialist he always showed himself when real danger, however brought about, had to be met. During the brief December session he "slanged the policy" with gusto, and a few weeks later thinks the Caucus sure of its Tory prey. "We want to din into the constituencies that the Government policy is one of *continual*, petty, fruitless, unnecessary and inglorious squabbles."[1]

Next he had a disagreeable encounter with his official leader, Lord Hartington. It was not to be the last game of bowls between two oddly-matched players, the "alert" and the stolid, but, though Chamberlain in the end was well "on the jack", the rubbers were not his choosing. He had invited Lord Hartington to address at Leeds the first annual meeting of the Liberal Federation. Hartington demurred for two reasons; he did not like any Caucus; and saw that this one must strengthen the Radicals in the party.

Correspondence, protracted for weeks, came to a controversy amusingly dogged on one side, on the other astutely entreating. Hartington at length suggests plainly that the Birmingham organisation is much distrusted in the country and that he abhors what he supposes to be the American machine system. Just before Christmas, Chamberlain, in a conciliatory but firm letter, disclaims any intention to push his own Radical convictions imprudently, much less to drive out moderates. He asserts that the new basis is the broadest ever laid for the Liberal party

[1] To Dilke, February 9, 1879.

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—that in any case the Caucus is a great and established fact; and has been "voluntarily adopted in more than 100 constituencies". Still unwilling, Hartington replies in effect that the Caucus is identified with the Radical section; he does not think the system can be applied to the whole party; and he will not go to Leeds.[1]

The official Liberals at this time were still dreaming vaguely and in vain of "some kind of organization" superior to the Caucus.

In spite of Hartington's absence—a serious mistake in this temporary leader's personal interests—the Leeds gathering, the very first "Annual Meeting" of the National Liberal Federation, was a resounding success and all the honours fell to Chamberlain as the principal speaker. Opening a New Year eventful for him and most fateful for the nation (1879), he brought his audience to its feet with a storm of cheers when, in a rough hint to the Whigs, he declared, "We have to take care that we do not, as the result of our operations, substitute one clique for another"; but he went on to plead earnestly for union: "Our first object is to make a unanimous protest against the way in which this country has recently been governed. We are marched from one surprise to another; we know not what a day may bring forth; our first duty ought to be, and our first object will be, to remove this constant source of apprehension and danger."[2]

The very day of this speech was the day of Isandhlwana. Surprised by the Zulus, one of the British columns of invasion was destroyed. Three weeks later, just before Parliament met again, the news fell on Disraeli and the country. The sense of horror and ignominy was deeper than our generation can realise. This was an ominous shadow, and shadows thickened.

X

Amidst the struggles and distractions of this last full session of the Conservative Parliament Chamberlain, with new frequency and rising effect in debate, spoke as an uncompromising

[1] Correspondence between Chamberlain and Hartington during November and December 1878. See Bernard Holland in *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. pp. 245-248.

[2] Leeds, January 22, 1879.

assailant. He felt when on his feet surer of himself than in former sessions. Ready at any moment, he intervened on a variety of occasions. He supported an equal extension of the franchise to the Irish boroughs and arraigned "the monstrous injustice under which the Irish people lived". When demanding, in fairness to working men, the extension of the hours of polling in British boroughs, he was but narrowly beaten.

He attacked the whole spirit of the Government's South African policy. The Zulu War itself he called "as iniquitous and unjust as any in which this country had ever been engaged", but only one example of Conservative crimes—"bad fruit of a bad tree". The denunciation of "injustice" whether at home or abroad—that was his note from beginning to end through the last year of the 'seventies. Next year will see him a Cabinet Minister. Not expecting this leap so soon, and rather intending to play a bigger part out of office than he could expect to fill in it, he "finds himself" fully as a very exceptional private member.

The great fight was on the Army Discipline Bill. To understand this we must recall that abhorrence of physical cruelty was in his blood and could rouse him to white heat. His father, however sedate and mild in most ways, had a combustible hatred of corporal punishment, nor would he send his children to any school where it was allowed.

The son was the same, and his best parliamentary struggle so far followed upon an incident in his own family.

The sight of his orphaned children had harrowed him, and he mentions them very little for years in his letters, but about this time it becomes different. "I am much pleased with Austen's success, and have a letter from him in high spirits. He has a good start now and I have no doubt will do well".[1] "I am very glad to have my little ones back again—the house is the livelier for their prattle".[2] Already he cherished hopes of his elder boy, then fifteen and at Rugby.

In the spring of 1879 he learns that Austen is to be flogged—for the peccadillo of jumping over a paling. The sentence is not executed owing to the offices of Austen's tutor, Mr. Lee-Warner, but to him the father blazes with anger:

[1] To Morley, September 29, 1878. [2] To the same, October 11, 1878.

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CHAMBERLAIN AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

April 8, 1879.—I knew that this brutal punishment was still in vogue at our Public Schools, after having almost disappeared from the Army and Navy, and being reserved in our jails for outrages of a particularly savage character, but it never entered my head that it could be applied for any but the worst offences as for lying, stealing and indecency. Accordingly as I believed my boy would not be guilty of such things, I did not suppose that he incurred any liability to a punishment against which my blood revolts.

It is this kind of treatment which destroys all sense of proportion in a boy's notion of offences, making gross immorality no worse than some slight breach of discipline; while the ready appeal to physical force is a natural preparation for the rowdy jingoism which is the characteristic of many educated middle-class Englishmen.

Immediately after this he found that flogging of soldiers was not so obsolete as he had supposed.

XI

The Army Bill was the chief Ministerial measure of the session. It covered 110 pages and occupied twenty-three nights. As a whole it was a useful revision of military law, and made easy progress through many clauses until the use of the lash became the question. Up to then the Opposition had helped the Government against the Parnellites. Them, so far, Chamberlain had not at all esteemed as a body though liking a few, but now he joined the Irish party in dogged resistance, holding obstruction justified in this case by the grossness of an abuse.

His speech on June 17 stirred the conscience of the House and fairly shook the Treasury Bench. He execrated flogging as "degrading, brutal, cruel and unworthy of our civilisation; injurious to every interest of the army in effect on recruiting and otherwise". Under the Bill the lash might be plied for a hundred different offences. The Sir Robert Peel of that day said truly that Chamberlain's exposure had "entirely upset the calculations of the Government and impressed every listener". The Secretary for War promised to meet his demand to limit by a

schedule the offences exposing troops to be triced up and scourged.

The concession was something, but not enough. Speaking again and again, always dangerously to the point—never in the mood of obstruction for its own sake—Chamberlain nourished the obstinacy of the struggle. At one time the Government was compelled to make a gruesome exhibition in an inner room of the House of Commons where various patterns of "cats" were deposited. With frequent "scenes" the battle raged into mid-summer.

It brought our Radical to loggerheads with his Whig leader, Hartington. This collision re-echoed on all platforms and in all newspapers. Fair journals like the *Spectator*—it did not love him at this time, but discerned his pith—acknowledged that he was not in fault. This conspicuous affair, nearly always inaccurately narrated since, deserves notice here, for it caused him to be anathematised as a "pinchbeck Hotspur" aiming at a crown.

The "row with Chamberlain and the Radicals", as Hartington called it, came in this way. Protesting against the disappointing feebleness of the Government's concessions, Chamberlain at the beginning of Committee protested by moving to report progress. This was July 7. The interim leader, not in the least understanding the advanced forces of Liberalism, said that Chamberlain should withdraw his motion and have more patience with the Government. Then he left the House, not realising that something significant had happened and that the heavily aristocratic tone of Whig instruction would never again prevail in the Liberal party. That night the new man from Birmingham broke the link with eighteenth-century tradition.

Hartington's advice was ignored not only by his party in general, but by his colleagues on the Front Bench—Bright, Forster and Trevelyan. As the night went on, Hopwood, member for Stockport, in a hot speech for the Radical group, referred to Lord Hartington as his leader. That nobleman, returning after characteristic absence, and misconceiving what had happened, repudiated being the leader of the member for Stockport or "those connected with him".

A blow to himself from anyone Chamberlain always countered with both hands. His retort now was corrosive. Scornfully re-

pudiating Lord Hartington's "constitutional lecture", he added, with a wicked turning of the provocative words: "It is rather inconvenient that we should have so little of the presence of the noble Lord lately the leader of the Opposition; but now the leader of a section only".[1] The frigid deliberation of the Radical's tone startled the House; each syllable fell like an icicle.[2]

Stung out of his lethargy, the honest victim on the Opposition Front Bench now looked more carefully into the question, and found himself in the wrong; helped to this conclusion no doubt by Adams, the wise old Whip bent to make peace. Coming up to Chamberlain, the shy, manly Whig muttered his anxiety that "the incident should have no further results", and was assured that the Radical insurgent had neither courted the quarrel nor wished to continue it.

A few days later the leader consented to be led. On July 17, Lord Hartington himself moved to abolish corporal punishment for military offences; and Chamberlain responded to this concession by handsome assurances of respect and obedience. We know that he had tried hard to work with Hartington, whom at this time he described as "able, honourable and straightforward", though "too often absent from the House"; and presently he moralises:

TO MORLEY

July 22, 1879.—Lord Hartington, whom I have not seen since our late difference, came to me and said he hoped there was no feeling remaining after our little quarrel. With this introduction we had some conversation on things in general and especially about obstruction. I endeavoured to put my view, and he agreed there was a good deal in it. I am sure we are making a great mistake by helping to create a feeling against the Irish, which will all tell in favour of the Tories. They will pose as the friends of order, and get all the advantage of our denunciations of obstruction.

During this sound-hearted campaign against flogging Chamberlain more than once had seen the Conservative majority

[1] House of Commons, July 7, 1879.

[2] The best account of this affair—significant for all historical students as regards the dying out of the Whig power once so great—is to be found in the *Spectator*, July 12, 1879. That organ was no friend to the Radical leader, but now pronounced that "it was Lord Hartington who gave the first provocation".

reduced to small margins. When, after all, the lash was retained in the army by a Ministerial rally, his final words invoked a time to come when flogging would be abolished by a united Liberal party. That time came even sooner than he thought.

It must be added that on a very different question, in the last days of this session, he signalised himself in attacking the Public Works Loan Bill for restricting the borrowing powers of municipal bodies. This touched a very tender point. Almost single-handed he withstood the big battalions across the floor and kept them up all night.

XII

Here occurs an episode concerning the rest of his life. He tries contact with Parnell, a man ten years younger than himself. Prepared for "Home Rule" in a limited and subordinate sense, but totally opposed to the idea of separation, formal or virtual,[1] Chamberlain as a new member was far from loving the Irish benches and their ways. More than a year before the point we now touch, he made a wonderful prophecy about the effect of the Irish Question upon the House of Commons as an institution:

TO MORLEY

October 3, 1877.—I fear you have a half-kindness for these rascally Irishmen who are bound to give us a great deal of trouble yet, and perhaps to force on the English Parliament that "Iron Hand" or system of clôture which has been found necessary in almost every other deliberative assembly.

By now he feels friendlier to "the rascals", and with Dilke he essayed to found an alliance between the Irishmen and Radicalism. Of a private meeting for this purpose at the very opening of the session he has left a memorandum in his own hand:

CHAMBERLAIN AND PARNELL

February 15, 1879.—Dined with Dilke, Major Nolan and Parnell to talk over Irish affairs. Nolan was kindly to the idea of more cordial understanding between English Radicals and the Irish National Party,

[1] He had repudiated it in private, as we have seen since 1870, and publicly during the Sheffield election campaign early in 1874.

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and admitted the possibility of finding common ground which must include some small measure of endowment for an Irish Catholic University and an Irish Land Bill.

Parnell was less opportunist and more irreconcileable than Nolan. He insisted on the importance of the Home Rule question, and was opposed to any arrangement which would prevent or hinder the prosecution of the national movement by the Irish party. He admitted, inferentially at all events, that a good Land Bill was the key of the Irish question and seemed to fear that with some such Bill the Irish people would not allow Home Rule sentiment to interfere.

He was inclined to press for more than Nolan . . . but evidently thought, though he was not willing to trouble himself to bring it about, that if the Liberals brought in a good Bill they would assure the support of the Irish people and party for some years at least and might deal a fatal blow to the Home Rule movement. He spoke bitterly of the character of the present Irish representatives and of their willingness to seek favours from the party in the ascendant.

Chamberlain had no inkling of the measure of Parnell nor of the far-reaching strategy masked by impassive manners. We see from this memorandum that, in a way worthy of Bismarck, Parnell meant steadily to draw the Liberals from one question to another, and drive them as far as might be. As little did Parnell penetrate Chamberlain, apt to reveal his inner mind with the most reckless frankness in private talk, but deadly both in will and method when awakened to mistrust. Ingenuous on the Irish Question at this phase, he was full of good will.

For the present as debate wrangles on in 1879 these two men—in their innermost, incommunicably alien to each other, as we shall see—fight shoulder to shoulder on South Africa and flogging. The Radical admired the Irish leader's obdurate doggedness. Towards the end of the session a communication in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, anonymous but written by Chamberlain, said of Parnell: "It is impossible to exaggerate the industry of this gentleman—not to admire his unflinching determination in what he believes to be right—his courage, his coolness". In his reserved heart of hearts, Parnell, subject of that eulogy—but, alas! seldom given to the over-appreciation of other men, except when sure of their entire devotion to himself—was less generous and

less prescient. But also, to be fair, he may have felt with his uncanny simplicity of intuition and judgment that he and this Englishman incarnate were bound in the end to clash.

XIII

Outside Parliament the influence of the Radical leader spread as the new system of Liberal Federation extended; he was its recognised spokesman. His men, working the Central Office in Birmingham, saw to that! Wherever his edge and point were exerted at meetings of Caucus delegates they carried his praise into all parts when they dispersed.

In this way he addressed widely representative conferences at Gloucester, Glasgow and Leicester, to his now customary accompaniment of "loud and continued cheers".

Perhaps better proof is that his opponents, not at all confined to the Conservative party, thought him more and more worthy of odium. Next to Beaconsfield by one party, and Gladstone by the other, he was already the most reviled of public men. One day he will be more loaded with execration than either of these seniors, more perhaps than any man of the nineteenth century. He will be a mark for every "Junius" and "Juniper".[1] At present *The Times* is ashamed of his "Billingsgate", because, with undoubted impropriety, he has likened the Beaconsfield Ministry in its closing phase to a "long firm". Cheerfully he comments:

> It is a curious commentary on *The Times* article that next day it published without a word of disapproval Lord Cranbrook's speech in which he compares the whole Liberal party to a *detected card sharper*—and yet "long firm" is too strong for them.[2]

A few sentences must show how he responded at his meetings to the high feeling of popular Liberalism and redoubled it. "'Peace with honour' is really peace with humbug"—a favourite phrase of his. He describes Lord Beaconsfield's Imperialism as in effect not constructive but incendiary, and asks Liberalism

[1] This amusing signature occurs in Woodfall's "Junius", 1850, vol. ii. p. 390.
[2] To Morley, June 8, 1879.

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to unite as a Fire Brigade. "I do not stop to ask whether a man is a Whig or a Radical, but whether he is ready and willing to lend a hand at the pumps. Let us one and all determine to put out the fire. If it is allowed to go on and spread we do not know what havoc and devastation it may wreak."[1]

From the autumn of 1879 the twilight of the Conservative Government darkened. "Light fails and the crows make wing to the rooky wood". Much seemed retrieved in South Africa when the Zulu power was subjugated. But at Kabul the massacre of Cavagnari and his suite made for Disraeli's undoing—more fatal, oddly enough, than Gordon's tragedy would be for Gladstone in a few years to come. The Afghan War began all over again. The country's stomach would not bear more.

The year 1879 had been in national records an historic year in the worse sense. The most damaging misfortunes of the Conservative Government were economic and not of their making. There was bitter distress in the industrial centres; while the long-famous prosperity of British agriculture—recently as much a model for the world as British manufacture and commerce—collapsed at last; a primary fact in our social annals. Agrarian misery and revolt were spreading in Ireland.

The Conservatives were overmatched alike in oratory and organisation. Against Gladstone's thundering assaults in his first Midlothian campaign, the Ministerialists had no array. In physical terms their man of destiny was now but a dauntless shadow. A few months before, the Liberals were still full of doubt. Hardly dared they believe that the spell of the "Vizir" was broken. Their Chief Whip, Adams, a steady judge, had despaired of the counties. Now, he expected a majority and a big one.

Chamberlain and his Central Office were very confident of a triumphant majority, no matter when the election came or how. Harcourt, at the top of his platform powers, was a speaker then second to none in popular request; his gay vigour a delight to Liberals high and low. A few months before the dissolution he signals to Birmingham. He has consulted all the managers. Liberal victory is sure. On the very lowest calculation there will be a majority of 30 over the Tories without counting a single

[1] National Liberal Federation; Gloucester, June 4, 1879.

Home Ruler. And after? "I shall like very much to pay you a *private*, not a *public* visit." [1]

In this winter of 1879 Chamberlain went with Jesse Collings on a tour to the south of Spain. From Cordova, Granada, Malaga they went to Gibraltar and then to Tangier, returning at the end of December. Crossing the Straits of Gibraltar in a steamer with scant accommodation, the skipper said to Collings—afterwards it was his favourite anecdote—"You can have the bed and the youngster can knock it out on the sofa". At forty-three Chamberlain looked half his age.

XIV

When would the General Election come? On what plea? As 1880 opened, some of the Liberal leaders surmise dissolution at any moment. Others have the best "confidential information" that Dizzy, as they call him, means to put it off for six months or longer and to risk another full session. Sir Henry James, an expert gossip, thinks he "knows" this "on the most direct authority". Towards the end of January 1880, Chamberlain records a hint that was surer than he guessed: "I heard indirectly yesterday from a man who saw the Duke of Marlborough that the Government seriously contemplate dissolution at Easter and expect Liberals will get a working majority".[2]

On February 5 the Queen in person opened Parliament, and with pageantry. Since 1832 no other Conservative Government had lived into a seventh session. Did Disraeli in his secret mind meditate a surprise for its own sake? The recent exceptional victory in the by-election at Southwark was anything but a safe index. Was the Prime Minister persuaded against his instinct by his colleagues? We do not surely know. There was no sign of an impending dissolution.

The keenest Liberals like Chamberlain were lulled again. Writing to Collings for the benefit of Birmingham headquarters, and thus of the Liberal Federation in general, Chamberlain thinks it very necessary to keep prepared for any emergency; but remarks, "There is a general change in the feeling of the

[1] Harcourt to Chamberlain, November 3, 1879.
[2] To Harcourt, January 25, 1880.

BOOK III. 1877–80.

House, and people who thought the dissolution was coming immediately now think that it will not come before July".

This impression was dated February 27. Ten days later, March 8, on a very dull afternoon, the Government dropped the bombshell as suddenly as Gladstone at the beginning of 1874 had dropped his. After its six years and more—partly fantastic and hazardous, partly sound and prescient—Disraeli's Parliament was dead.

The Prime Minister chose to make Ireland the issue. More prophetic than his opponents could apprehend or himself know was his instinct that the Irish question, whatever the contending views about it, would be the revolutionising question in the years ahead. But gone was his old literary genius in political statement; his manifesto exhibited a style in decay inviting more ridicule than belief. His muffled grandiloquence failed to convey his insight. The great Conservative journal of that time, the *Standard*, sniffed: "There was rather too much sonorousness for the fastidious ear in the manifesto of the Premier". By contrast Gladstone's answer for once was a recognised masterpiece of terse, plain power: "The true purpose of these terrifying insinuations is to hide from view the acts of the Ministry".

XV

Without waiting for an "unimportant budget"—to reverse Cowper's word—most members posted to their constituencies, Chamberlain foremost. "We are in for it now," he wrote on Wednesday, March 10, "and from next Monday I shall begin speaking and shall give myself up to the work from that time to the end."[1]

He met more trouble than he expected. For over a fortnight he had to confront an onslaught of furious bitterness. The Conservatives cherished high hopes of capturing one of the three Birmingham seats. Their principal candidate was an idol of Conservative crowds—gallant Burnaby of the ride to Khiva. Chamberlain jested that "the ride to Khiva would be nothing to the ride from Birmingham". Those who worked to put Burnaby in staked all their hopes on knocking Chamberlain

[1] To Collings.

out? Not Bright nor Muntz, but Chamberlain. "Nothing", he wrote towards the end of the contest, "can exceed the virulence with which the Tories have attacked me. No slander has been too gross—no calumny too improbable." [1]

It may be mentioned as an electioneering curiosity that on the day of the election, March 31, the following unscrupulous fabrication was published as a placard:

ESTIMATED STATE OF THE POLL
BY THE CONSERVATIVE COMMITTEE

Twelve o'clock

MUNTZ	10,500
BURNABY	10,000
CALTHORPE	9,600
BRIGHT	9,500
CHAMBERLAIN	8,500

Clearly the wicked Caucus did not know all the tricks nor the worst. It was not discovered till later that this twelve o'clock news had left the printer's hands at ten o'clock. Even Chamberlain was alarmed by this example, amongst others, of the solid brass of bluff. During the poll he wrote, "Would it were night and all were well".

At night all was pretty well. The real poll was declared thus:

MUNTZ, P. H. (L.)	22,969	Elected
BRIGHT, JOHN (L.)	20,079	
CHAMBERLAIN, J. (L.)	19,544	
BURNABY, MAJOR FRED. (C.)	15,735	Not elected
CALTHORPE, HON. A. C. G. (C.)	14,308	

Considering what he had done for Birmingham, it was for the moment gall to him to be lowest on the Liberal list. He forgot that Bright in nearly thirty years never was at the top of the poll in undivided Birmingham; and at the very height of his power in 1868 found himself placed—just like Chamberlain in 1880—in the third position under the household franchise he had done more than any man to win. These are the usual ironies of democracy. But Chamberlain was not again to experience any similar mortification in his city; and Bright sends him a kind, cheering letter:

[1] To Collings, March 28, 1880.

JOHN BRIGHT TO CHAMBERLAIN

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Rochdale, April 1880.— . . . Don't give yourself a moment's annoyance about it. In this world men often suffer for their virtues as well, and as much, as from their vices. . . . Give a kind message from me to your sister and to your nice boy [1] and to those charming little girls who made so pleasant a picture in your house. I do not forget Charley [the dog] and his sweet temper, and whose companionship I quite envy. My dogs are wearing a red tie round their necks—the Liberal colour.

During the struggle two amongst Chamberlain's utterances are interesting to history. He calls for the redress of every Irish grievance subject only to the maintenance of a united empire. Fearing the result of the new military alliance between the empires of Germany and Austria, he declares that he would a hundred times rather go with France if this country had to choose. Gambetta, whom he admired more than Gladstone or anyone then living, seemed to Radicals the European man of the future, and none could foresee his premature fate. Relations with France were not yet envenomed by the British occupation of Egypt.

This General Election as a whole was of far-reaching significance for Chamberlain's future. Between March 31, the first day of the polling, and April 3—from Wednesday to Saturday—the boroughs in four days destroyed Disraeli's last majority. Then, as few had expected, the counties swelled the wave. When the polls were over, the Liberals had the greatest working majority yet known in the Queen's reign. Their nominal majority indeed, counting all Home Rulers, was 176. Their true preponderance over Conservatives and thorough Parnellites put together would be about 110.

XVI

A new weapon of reform was shaped. Who should wield it? The Liberal masses had no doubt; they wanted their Gladstone and none other. But their Queen regarded the result of this General Election as national apostasy and a personal grief; and division amongst their leaders was deeper than they could apprehend.

[1] Austen Chamberlain.

Gladstone had been returned after a second Midlothian crusade; but Hartington's friends maintained that in fact he had spoken more than anyone and with a solid excellence. Sir William Harcourt's friends asserted that it was he who had spoken more than Gladstone or Hartington or any other Liberal statesman, and more brilliantly.

Our Radical leader, writing to *The Times*, claimed that in the 67 boroughs where the Caucus had been well established the Liberals had gained or retained 60 seats; and in every one of ten county constituencies where the new organisation operated victory was its fruit despite a rural franchise still excluding the labourers. There was much in the claim. The Caucus, gathering in new workers and improving all former arrangements, polled Liberal voters to the last available man, and undoubtedly turned the scale in many constituencies where Liberals won by a narrow margin.

Chamberlain resolved to make himself considered like no one yet, standing outside the official hierarchies. Was it possible for the new man to break into the inner sanctuaries? Disraeli had served the official hierarchies for thirty years before events made him master. Of two other great outsiders Cobden felt bound to refrain from joining Palmerston's last Cabinet, while on Bright office had the effect, almost, of an extinguisher. The new man meant to cope with "Whigs and Whips".

BOOK IV

1880–1883

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CABINET—A FORCED ENTRY

(1880)

"THE Carnot of the Moment"—Whig Hopes and Radical Claims—Chamberlain's Daring: "All or Nothing"—Gladstone's Triumph and his Ideas of Exclusion—Chamberlain comes to Town—His Ultimatum—A Surprising *Dénouement*—Dilke out: Chamberlain in—President of the Board of Trade—The Cabinet of Incompatibles—The Chamberlain-Dilke Alliance and its Power—Glimpses at Windsor—Highbury and the "Birmingham Base".

I

THE singular fortunes of Mr. Gladstone's second Government deeply influence to this day the affairs of Great Britain and those of the British Empire. When Lord Beaconsfield was beaten by the largest nominal majority since 1832, the rank and file of Liberalism might well exult, but its inner circles were disturbed by personal emotions requiring a Greville to describe. Might not Hartington after all become Prime Minister? Whether he or Gladstone, now the popular idol as never before, formed a Government, what faces would be seen in what places? Not the usual question for Taper and Tadpole, but involving new issues, some of them fateful beyond conjecture then in domestic and foreign policy alike. Whether one man or another went to the Irish Office, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the India Office, the War Office, the Board of Trade, was to matter deeply this time.

To few men it falls to become Cabinet Ministers literally unawares. Chamberlain discovered himself in that position to his own great astonishment. Yet it was the direct result of his own active efforts honestly made for Dilke; and of his resolve to

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compel the recognition of Radicalism, whether Gladstone or Hartington became Prime Minister. The true story of how the new man entered with far-reaching consequences the Cabinet of 1880 is very instructive—there is no real parallel to it—and it has never yet been told.

The Times, after the polls, described the leader of the victorious Caucus as "the Carnot of the moment". But Chamberlain's position, and his determination at the pinch, cannot be understood without giving some account of the *pourparlers* and intrigues during the three months before, when a tolerable Liberal majority was expected indeed, but not the extent of Gladstone's personal triumph. The Radicals had a firm attitude towards one question now absorbing the public mind. Whether Gladstone heading the majority in fact though not in title would be summoned by Queen Victoria or not? Her Majesty lamented the aberrations of her people, and was desolated by the prospect of Mr. Gladstone. In these sentiments the sovereign received the confidential encouragement of Disraeli,[1] ignoring nice regards to the spirit of the Constitution. In the very hour of his disaster, despite his age and infirmities, he set himself indomitably to sow dissension amongst his conquerors and prepare their ruin if he might. Through Lord Beaconsfield the Whigs of the powerful Hartingtonian group made a final effort in an eighteenth-century temper to recover the aristocratic supremacy threatened by plebeian forces and their tribunes.

The Mercury of the Whig interest was Harcourt—recently Chamberlain's guest at Birmingham, and a charmer.

Here Sir William enters intimately into our theme. It was a sunny April. Harcourt, large and volatile, ranged gaily through Mayfair and Pall Mall somewhat like a butterfly in Brobdingnag. Popular and communicative amongst leaders of all sections in both parties, from Disraeli to Chamberlain, he enabled the former to tell the Queen that the Whigs reckoned the number of their adherents in the new House of Commons at no less than 237, a solid basis for a Hartington Government. On this imaginary solution Harcourt's notions were bent.[2] During the polling and

[1] See Mem. by Queen Victoria of conversation with Lord Beaconsfield, April 18, 1880. Buckle's *Life of Disraeli*, vol. vi. p. 534.

[2] Disraeli's *Life*, vol. vi. pp. 535-536—*Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. pp. 271-272—Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 303, p. 305.

just after, he worked with sanguine fancy to put Hartington in, and to keep Gladstone out. As late as April 18—when the scheme was a castle of cards—he adjures the Whig leader to grasp the Premiership (as the sovereign and Disraeli desired), "I feel sure that you have only to face the obstacles in your path in order easily to overcome them". Mercury was of the same mind until his mission became evidently hopeless. Then, having no rigid prudery in these matters, he became thoroughly serviceable in the practicable arrangements. It is agreeable to note the absence of rancour in any quarter against Sir William's well-known versatilities in negotiation at this time. They diminished his weight, but through all the usual vicissitudes of personal relationship in public life, he remained, despite gusts of hot temper and combustible language, the really good-natured man of politics—more indulgent even than irascible until the balance changed at last, and his implacable antagonism proved fatal to Lord Rosebery.

II

These were the evanescent chasings of April shine and shade, before the Queen and the Whigs yielded together and Gladstone kissed hands.

Where, asked Chamberlain, did the New Radicalism and its leaders come into the calculations of Taper and Tadpole? As yet there was no sign of recognition. Chamberlain resolved to extort it; or otherwise from the outset to make his independence a counter-power to the new Cabinet whoever might create it.

His ideas had been raised high by suggested visions of what Hartington, if he became Premier, would do for the Left Wing. Harcourt, a couple of months or so before the General Election, had visited Birmingham and stayed with Chamberlain. At the top of his form, he delighted his meeting and captivated his host.

CHAMBERLAIN AND HARCOURT

January 15, 1880.—*Harcourt to Chamberlain.*—May I bring my Eton boy (who is being brought up a good Whig) to you next week? He will not take up much room, and I think it is good for youth to learn early the working of political life, so I take him about with me as much as I can.

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January 24, 1880.—*Same to the same.*—I have come back from Birmingham in great spirits. My conversations with you gave me a hope and a confidence in the unity of the party which I have not felt before. . . . I saw Hartington yesterday and told him my conviction (derived from my visit to Birmingham) of the solid prospects of co-operation between the two wings of the party. I hear Gladstone talks more than ever of retreat and thoughts of the other world since his sister's death.

January 25, 1880.—*Chamberlain to Harcourt.*—Your kind letter makes me ashamed: it's I who ought to have written first. . . . Your visit here was as I knew it would be, a great success in every way. There is only one opinion of your speech, the wit of which only set off its wisdom. . . . It has done good service in promoting the union you so much desire.

Yes. But the private conversations at Highbury, and we may quite safely assume that midnight found them in full flow, were much more romantic than this correspondence suggests. The Radical leader, disarmed and rejoicing, reports at once to his closest intimate as yet:

TO MORLEY

January 25, 1880.—We have had an eventful and exciting week, and I wish you could have been here to discuss all that has passed. Of course you will have seized the point of the situation—the enormous advances made to the Radicals by the Whigs in the person of Harcourt. This was emphasized in our private conversation, which, by the way, has immensely increased my personal liking for Harcourt. . . . We discussed the possible Liberal Government of the future—the great difficulty is of course Gladstone. . . . I told him (and Dale afterwards still more strongly) that I had no doubt the balance of advantage would be greatly in favour of Gladstone's lead—though I did not conceal my own personal feeling that he would be King Stork, and that some of us frogs would have a hard time of it under him. . . . As to Radicals only this—when I was speaking of "You", H. interrupted, "Why don't you say, 'We'?—I have never concealed from myself that a Liberal Government is impossible unless the Radicals are fully represented, and it is absurd to suppose that we could carry anything without your cordial assistance." My reply was—"Give us a policy we like, and you may be certain of our assistance in or out of the Government."

The intimate wrote back:

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

January 26, 1880.—I always rather liked the idea of W. H. coming down to the lion's den. The more that men of his quality and position see of you and your folk, the better for everybody. . . . It is thoroughly satisfactory that the Front Bench understands its own interests *vis-à-vis* the Birmingham section. I only hope that nothing passed to let him (H.) think that a small offer will content the Chief of said group when time comes. Your foes would laugh if they overheard me, but I sometimes think you are over-modest.

They all, like Morley, thought him a little ingenuous, and in truth he was. That touch of ingenuousness he somehow kept to the end as a trait of temperament, though it did not in the least diminish his shrewdness in face of a particular situation. Harcourt's temptations in January seemed too reasonable to be scouted. A Whig Premier more than another would be dependent on Radical colleagues and Radical measures.

But this was before the polls.

No sooner were the elections complete than Chamberlain felt far surer of his ground. On April 6 he congratulates Gladstone "on your glorious victory of Midlothian", and calls attention to the triumphs of the Caucus in the boroughs where it was efficiently established.

In the same strain, several days later, he sends his letter to *The Times*[1] exalting the achievements of the National Liberal machine. Lord Beaconsfield assured Queen Victoria that the Liberals had worked on "that American system called Caucus, originated by the great Radical Mr. Chamberlain."[2] The "Carnot of the moment" had a substantial claim to recognition by the coming Liberal Government and to influence on Liberal policy. His whole object was to promote wide measures of reform for England and Ireland alike. Radicalism must have real power either within the Government or outside it—he cared little which.

[1] Dated April 10. A few days after the dissolution of Parliament, it had been said that the elections would "test the efficiency of the new democratic machinery of which Birmingham is the capital".

[2] *Life of Disraeli*, vol. vi. p. 535.

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Through doubtful weeks he kept his encampment in the Midlands, and maintained armed observance towards politicians in the metropolis. His chief informant about the more intimate political talk of London was John Morley.

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

April 1, 1880.— . . . It is clear that the Tory bandits are doomed. I only now begin to realise what a horrid and dismal time we have had for the last four years. . . .

April 7.— . . . Gladstone has written me a mighty civil letter of condolence. He says the victory in the country "*stuns*" him! . . .

April 9.— . . . Last night I met Alfred Lyttelton, and he told me that it is quite understood in the family circle that Gladstone (his uncle) will come back for a couple of years as Prime Minister just to set the ship well on her voyage and will then give it all up.[1] Judging from the gossip of Pall Mall, Dilke's "real difficulty" will be likely to arise: *i.e.* he will be put into the Cabinet, and you will have Local Government Board outside. *Could* you refuse such an arrangement? . . .

April 12.—I wonder if it would not be worth while for you to take Harcourt's hint and come up to have a talk with him. You might say something to him which would tell with decisive effect on the inner council. . . . Now that the business comes close to me I intensely dislike the idea of your putting yourself outside of the official running. . . . Your admission to the Cabinet could not be very long delayed. . . . If, on the contrary, you decline office, what happens? You either support the Government—which means a very tame, *manqué* sort of position— . . . or else you turn frondeur and chief of a group of frondeurs of second-rate quality. . . . If you *left* the Government after a time, and then turned critic upon them, the case would be quite different. In short I am much for your taking any *serious* and decent post. . . . I suppose that if Gladstone is premier he will do what he likes, without consulting anybody.

This counsel did not smile on Chamberlain. It seemed like surrender. He was further hardened by signs of his possible

[1] The idea that Gladstone would retire in a couple of years was shared not only by his intimates, but by the Queen, and by everyone in the inner circles—probably at first by Gladstone himself. This delusion had a deep influence in subsequent years—especially on Radical expectations of early ascendancy.

isolation; and refused to make any hasty appearance as an applicant in London. Harcourt seemed to have cooled off and said nothing more about the glowing visions conjured up without invitation in January. Instead, separately approaching Dilke, Harcourt had effected a momentary loss of contact between the Castor and Pollux of rising Radicalism.

III

Chamberlain's mind struck at once to the quick of a practical problem. What were to be his future relations with Dilke? That was the question.

All his plans had assumed as a pivot the fixity of their alliance. At first it seemed that his characteristic confidence was premature and that total difference of temperaments might defeat a general identity of minds. On Saturday, April 3, after four days of electoral suspense, the borough returns ensured a good Liberal majority before another week of county voting completed a victory beyond dreams. On Sunday, April 4, Chamberlain made up his own mind without the least regard to anything intended in London. He proposed to Sir Charles Dilke a treaty offensive and defensive in the following decisive letter:

BIRMINGHAM,
Sunday (April 4), 1880.

MY DEAR DILKE—I find the same fault with your letters that the Scotch laird found with the dictionary—"the stories are varra pretty but they are unco short".

The time has come when we must have full and frank explanation.

What I should like—what I hope for with you—is a thorough offensive and defensive alliance and in this case our position will be immensely strong.

I am prepared to refuse all offices until and unless *both of us are satisfied.*

Can you accept this position with perfect satisfaction? If you think I am asking more than I can give I rely on your saying so—and in this case you may depend on my loyalty and friendship. I shall support your claims cordially and just as warmly as if I were personally interested.

But my own feeling is that if you are stronger than I am in the House,

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my influence is greater than yours out of it—and, therefore, that, together, we are much more powerful than separated; and that in a short time—if not now—we may make our own terms.

To join a Government as subordinate members—to be silenced and to have no real influence on the policy—would be fatal to both of us. If we both remain outside, any Government will have to reckon with us and on the whole this would be the position which on many grounds I should prefer.

I am ready to make all allowances for the difficulties in the way of giving to both of us the only kind of place which it would be worth our while to accept. If these are insuperable, I will give a hearty support to any Government which is thoroughly liberal in its measures; but I am not going to play the part of a radical minnow among Whig Tritons.

The victory which has just been won is the victory of the Radicals—Gladstone and the Caucus have triumphed all along the line, and it is the strong, definite, decided policy which has commended itself and not the halting half-hearted arm-chair business. *The Times* sees this and said it yesterday—the country feels it—and we should be mad to efface ourselves and disappoint the expectations of all our strongest supporters.

You will see that my proposed condition is—both of us to be satisfied.

As to what *ought* to satisfy us, if you agree to the principle, we will consult when the time comes, but my present impression is—All or nothing. *Tout arrive à qui sait attendre.* Write me fully your views and tell me whether and when you will pay me a visit.—Yours ever,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

Dilke replied immediately, but in an unwonted way pours water in the wine:

76 SLOANE STREET,
Monday (*April* 5).

MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—I leave for Toulon on Wednesday night. I shall stay there for about a fortnight. I quite agree generally to the position that we should continue to work together and that each should see that the other is satisfied. My first enquiry when I hear anything will be—what about you? I also think that we are far more powerful together than separated and that we are in a position to make our own terms. I am convinced that the county franchise must be done at once and that this makes it difficult for Lowe and Goschen to remain in. If Lord G. [Granville] is Premier his personal affection will make him cling

to Lowe, and if they keep Lowe—I don't see how they can offer the Cabinet at once to both of us. If Hartington is Premier—I don't see why they should not offer the Cabinet to *both* of us. The real difficulty will arise if they offer the Cabinet to one of us, and high office outside it with a promise of the first vacancy in it to the other. . . . Ever yours,

CHARLES W. DILKE.

In other words, Dilke was not ready for the "all or nothing" policy, and instead of coming to Birmingham he removed himself from an embarrassing scene without further interview with Chamberlain. His reasons were clear and entirely just. Despite his former Republican ebullitions and censures on the Civil List, he moved with ease in what was still called the highest Whig society. Far better than Morley he is acquainted with the confidences of the innermost circles.

He is already aware that Queen Victoria in her "George the Third" moods longs to have a Whig Prime Minister, "whether Gladstone liked it or not". Accordingly, Dilke assumes that either Granville or Hartington will form a Government, and his own inclusion in such a Cabinet is certain. His own view of Gladstone is anything but hero-worship; nor is he yet under any obligation to Chamberlain nor bound by any pact. Instead, Dilke dines with persuasive Harcourt—himself playing for a choice of high stakes, the Exchequer or the Woolsack—and intimates his readiness to take Cabinet rank if offered to him, preferring the Admiralty.[1] Not enamoured of Gladstone, he is not unwilling to play the part of Radical pace-maker in a Whig Ministry.

Dilke then left for Toulon without making any hard and fast stipulation for "Carnot", whose full calibre they all were now to learn.

IV

Left to himself, disagreeably checked, not weakened, the stronger man is convinced that the feeling of the country will topple Whig hopes. The old order is reckoning without the people. On receiving Dilke's qualified answer to the "all or nothing" proposal, Chamberlain sent his emphatic letter of con-

[1] *Dilke*, vol. i. p. 303.

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gratulation to Gladstone. Though declining his other nearest friend's view of the wisdom of taking "any decent post", he soliloquises frankly:

TO MORLEY

April 16.—The more I think of the situation the more I am confirmed in my original view of my own duty and policy. If the New Government does not frankly accept the Radicals, my place is outside—and if I am free I can play no small part. . . . I wish Dilke were at home. . . . I doubt if it is worth his while to go in alone, and if we are both outside we should be very strong. If, however, the temptation is too strong for him, I should not press him to stay outside for me, but should let him follow his own inclination. . . . Behind all this is the fact that I have a real horror of office with its new responsibilities and the necessity of living in London for the greater part of the year. I will take it, if it comes my way in a form in which it presents the opportunity of doing something considerable for my opinions—but if not I will let it go without regret. What is the use of having means and tastes and occupations and decided opinions if I am to be as eager to snap at the first bone the Whigs throw me as Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen or Mr. Mundella?

Next comes an enlightening letter from John Bright—who has been to Hawarden.

Llandudno, April 18, 1880.— . . . I spent a few hours with Mr. Gladstone on Friday at Hawarden. I thought him looking rather thin and worn after his late labours. My own idea is that it is not likely he will take any office in a Government under that which he held before. If he resumes the office of Chief of the Administration it will only be a submission to the great pressure put upon him. Whether that will be sufficient to overcome his reluctance remains to be seen.

I think the power and success of the new Government will be greater in his hands than in any other. I think the country will rejoice if he accepts his old place—altho' no-one undervalues the services or the character of Lord Granville or Lord Hartington.

To-morrow or on Tuesday, we shall hear something of the mind of the Queen—and of what is likely to be done.[1]

Through these last few days of uncertainty about the Queen

[1] The Queen had returned from Baden the day before, and was consulting chiefly Lord Beaconsfield.

and the Premiership, we can feel still the living pulse of politics as it beat then: CHAP. XV. ÆT. 44.

CHAMBERLAIN, DILKE, MORLEY

April 19.—*J. C. to Dilke.*— . . . I have heard nothing of future arrangements except (from Bright and others) that Gladstone will take Premiership, if pressed. . . . I am glad to see that all the papers speak of you as a certainty for the Cabinet. . . . I feel you may have rather a difficult question to decide, viz., whether you can safely take the *sole* representation of the Radical element in the Government. . . . For myself I am absolutely indifferent to office, and the only thing on which I am clear is that I will take no responsibility which does not carry with it some real power. Another point on which I have made up my mind is that I will not play second to Fawcett—or to anyone of the same standing except yourself.

April 21.—*Morley to J. C.*— . . . I met Grant Duff yesterday. . . . He asked about you, and said he hoped they would make you Secretary of Treasury with understanding about a vacancy in the Cabinet. In that post, he says, a man has all the business of a government in his hands; he learns more valuable knowledge than anywhere else . . . he is brought into constant contact with the Premier. . . .

April 22.—*J. C. to Morley.*— . . . It seems clear that Gladstone is to be Premier in spite of the Queen. As for myself, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, I don't feel called upon to decide till the occasion actually arises.

April 23.—*Morley to J. C.*—I met Gladstone at dinner last night. Both he and Mrs. G. were in a curious state. He was pale, preoccupied, forced —not at all like himself. It seems that the Queen had positively refused to Hartington to send for Gladstone—and insisted on his reconsidering his own refusal. Mrs. G. says it is all Dizzy. I don't believe it. It is the obstinacy of the grand-daughter of George the Third. Would you believe that until H's [Hartington's] return from Windsor, Gladstone and he, though they had met, said not a word to one another about the crisis, but only about the weather? Such is Lord Granville's story. . . .

Now, so far as concerns the subject of these pages, the movement of affairs comes brusquely to a head. Persisting in his armed observance and in no pliable mood, Chamberlain is still

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in no mind to rush to London as a suitor or to make indirect approaches. But he now finds himself caught up by the crisis; and it whirls him through the three most exciting days of his political life up to now.

The Queen's suggestion to the Whigs proving fruitless, Gladstone became Prime Minister for the second time on April 23. It was a Friday. Dilke reached home the same night. The next day he realised that the basis of his reasonable expectations had collapsed. In a first interview with Harcourt on Saturday he learns that Gladstone has no intention of putting into the Cabinet anyone who has not held office before. Dilke at once hurries a note to Birmingham, where it arrives in a few hours:

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Saturday, April 24, 1880, *afternoon.*—I'm going to overcome my hatred of letter-writing, and send you such a one as Mr. Gladstone used to write to the Queen, and will now again begin inflicting on *Her*. I'm just back. I've seen Hill [1] and Harcourt, and from them and my own stupidity, I gather: That Gladstone is in the hands of Lord Wolverton, his bad adviser of 1870–74. . . . That Gladstone disapproves of people being put straight into the Cabinet who've not held office. That they are likely to offer office to both of us, Fawcett and Courtney, but to the former three, important non-Cabinet office—Fawcett standing first, you second, and I third in rank—but none of us in the Cabinet. Under these circumstances I should feel disposed to decline taking anything. I hope to get a telegram from you to say you'll come and stay here to-morrow.

But Chamberlain was a little dour. This proposition to the Radicals he thought not worth discussing, and telegraphed refusing to come. Dilke meanwhile, on Saturday evening, had a second interview with Harcourt, who dwelt gravely on the error of refusing distinguished though subordinate office and suggested that acceptance would be a stepping-stone "naturally to the first vacancy in the Cabinet".[2] Dilke, now shaken again, sent another letter post-haste to Birmingham:

[1] Frank Hill, a friend of Dilke's, and well known as editor of the *Daily News*.
[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 307.

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Saturday night, April 24.—I have your telegram refusing to come to-morrow. If I were not so tired with my journey I'd come down. You see you talk of consultation, but I can't consult you by telegraph, and in Gladstone's stand and deliver kind of business there is no time for exchange of letters. My telegram of this evening was intended to mean that it was certain that Gladstone would not offer either of us the Cabinet, and to ask you to come up to talk over whether it was clear that we ought to refuse all else. I dare not telegraph at length or openly as all telegrams get out to the other side.

Harcourt urges acceptance of minor office on the statement that Gladstone is resolved not to give office [Cabinet] to those who have not held minor office before, and that to refuse now is to be out for ten years certain. I am quite ready to be out for ten years, but I rather wanted to talk things over—as it is a grave decision—and we may be blamed by others besides the new Cabinet. Also I thought that when asked to take minor office, as you will be on Monday—you would probably have to come up and say No in more haste than if you came up to consult to-morrow. Harcourt urges that it is of special importance for me to take office to get over the Court hitch now and for ever—once and for all—but there are strong considerations the other way on that point which apply more to me than to you—but apply to both of us in turn.

When Chamberlain got this letter on Sunday morning he was moved at last to come to town, and telegraphed that he would arrive at five o'clock the same day. When the two friends met, the April cloud or mist that had been between them cleared away, and Chamberlain was the man of daring. In view of Gladstone's stiffness he no longer insisted on "all or nothing" for both; but he was bent on the Cabinet for one of them. If Dilke were chosen, Chamberlain would "accept subordinate office or give a cordial support to the Government without office".[1] Fortunately we have his own words set down within forty-eight hours: "Dilke was undecided till he saw me, but I was quite clear that *one* of us *must* be in the Cabinet, and as Dilke is of longer standing than myself, it will be he if anyone".[2]

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum of Events, 1880–1892". It was dictated by him chiefly in 1891, and completed the year after.

[2] Chamberlain to Jesse Collings, April 27, 1880.

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For in fact Chamberlain had already taken the situation by the throat. On Monday, when he encountered Harcourt, the battle began, and it was decisive:

> Harcourt is entirely with us, and has done all he can. There is little doubt that if Hartington had been Prime Minister he would have offered the Cabinet to both Dilke and myself. Gladstone up to Saturday last positively refused to offer Cabinet office to anyone who had not served an apprenticeship.
>
> I told Harcourt that personally I did not care a damn, and would rather be out, in which case I would endeavour to organise a "pure Left" party in the House and the country, which should support the Government if they brought in Radical measures and oppose them everywhere if they did not. The result would be the running of Radical candidates in all borough elections.
>
> Finally I said that, out of friendship for Dilke, I would if he were in the Cabinet take the Secretaryship of the Treasury—but, of course, an arrangement of the kind would not be so satisfactory as a frank recognition of the Radical wing with two at least in the Cabinet. . . .
>
> Harcourt asked if this was ultimatum as he had thought Dilke would not absolutely refuse subordinate office. . . .
>
> I told Harcourt this was final decision—one in the Cabinet was the least we could take, and if Gladstone would not yield he must take the consequences.
>
> Harcourt said that of course my willingness to take less than Cabinet office made it easier for Gladstone to concede—he might give one place when he would refuse two, and the demand was altogether so reasonable that it ought to be granted and he would press it to the utmost of his power. . . .
>
> Lord Granville has just sent a note asking Dilke to call on him. What this means I shall not know till too late for post.
>
> If Dilke is in the Cabinet I shall have the satisfaction of having helped most materially to place him there.
>
> I am still almost inclined to hope that we may all be out and independent.[1]

That afternoon the Prime Minister still seemed inexorable on the point of not promoting to the Cabinet men who had not

[1] Chamberlain to Collings, April 27, 1880.

held minor office. But earnestly he enjoined acceptance of the Under-Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs on Dilke, who declined unless there was "one in the Cabinet" and stressed his ally's claims. Gladstone replied in effect that Chamberlain was a very young member of the House; he might be a suitable Financial Secretary to the Treasury, but to put him straight into the Cabinet was impossible. Dilke stood his ground.[1]

It seemed that nothing could be done. In face of this frowardness of the Radical twins, Gladstone's surprise and displeasure were extreme. John Bright in his fatherly way entreated the recalcitrants to relent; they were immovable. It was pretty clear that Gladstone, modifying his ideas of constitutional precedent and etiquette, would have to reckon with the new men and new times.

V

Already Chamberlain's interview with Harcourt had shaken the old Olympians. The threat from a man who meant it of Radical revolt at the outset in the House and of separate candidates in the constituencies—this was not to be faced. Even Jupiter changed his mind over-night—but changed it to most unexpected purpose. For Bright, who himself accepted the Duchy, earnestly persuaded the Prime Minister to cut the knot by bringing "my colleague Chamberlain" into the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade.[2]

Accordingly on the day of decision, Tuesday, April 27, Dilke was sent for again; and at one o'clock was met by Gladstone with the unlooked-for information that a letter had been sent offering Chamberlain Cabinet rank. Dilke loyally accepted the Under-Secretaryship for Foreign Affairs and came back to his friend with news indeed.

For Chamberlain knew nothing about it.

Waiting at the Reform Club, he had not yet received Gladstone's letter sent by hand to Sloane Street. Here was a man formally invited a few hours before to enter a Cabinet, but ignorant that the offer had been made.

[1] *Dilke*, vol. i. p. 309.

[2] Chamberlain "will be good for advice and for administration. I wish his coming in would let me out" (*Diaries of John Bright*, p. 439).

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This *dénouement* had "never entered my head".[1] He was concerned and disturbed. In forty-eight hours he had forced indeed the doors of the Cabinet for Radicalism, but had meant to force them for his friend, not for himself. For fifty years and more it has been whispered that he took advantage of Dilke. The truth is now open. Without fear and without flaw in this business was Chamberlain's comradeship.

It was like him that in a moment of revulsion he determined to waive his ultimatum and to accept subordinate office with Dilke rather than take precedence.

I went immediately to Mr. Gladstone. . . . I had assumed that, if either of us were asked to join the sacred circle, Dilke's claims, owing to the greater length of his parliamentary services and to his undoubted position in the House of Commons, would be pre-eminent. . . . I felt so strongly the difficulties in which I should be placed and the jealousies which I should be likely to excite that towards the close of the conversation I told Mr. Gladstone that although . . . we thought we ought not to accept office which would close our mouths without giving us any influence in maintaining our Radical views, yet that under the circumstances I would, if he desired it, accept the secretaryship of the Treasury and endeavour to persuade Dilke to agree to this and to join the Government with me as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.[2]

Gladstone thanked him, but repeated his offer of the Cabinet and the Board of Trade. There never was a more gracious moment between the two men. The Radical leader, still perturbed about Dilke, begged for an hour or so to think, as he states in the following attractive passage of a quick dispatch to Birmingham:

Gladstone was very kind; read a copy of his letter which I had not then received; and made the offer in handsome terms. . . . Under all the circumstances having regard to the kindness with which he had treated me and the difficulties in his way, I now offered, if it would help him, to accept a subordinate place, and give up any personal claim to the Cabinet. Gladstone thanked me but said No—he maintained his original offer. Then I asked for time to consult Bright.[3]

[1] Chamberlain to J. T. Bunce, April 29, 1880.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum of Events". [3] To J. T. Bunce, April 29.

Chamberlain found Bright in a benevolent mood at the Reform Club and explained his state of feeling. They had a long talk. The result was that when he returned to the Prime Minister at Lord Granville's, in Carlton House Terrace, the short colloquy was in effect as follows:

J. C. I place myself entirely in your hands.

Mr. G. Then I understand you will accept my offer if I repeat it, or, if I think the public service will be forwarded by some other arrangement, you will take a minor appointment?

J. C. Yes, that was my meaning.

Mr. G. Very well, Mr. Chamberlain, I shall not offer you anything less, and I shall inform the Queen that you have accepted my first proposal.[1]

When the new President of the Board of Trade went "home", as he says, in his softened way at that moment—"home" was Dilke's house in Sloane Street—he found waiting for him Gladstone's stately letter, too important a document in these pages not to be given in full:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

73 Harley Street,
April 27, 1880.

Secret.

Dear Mr. Chamberlain—I have made progress since yesterday afternoon; and I may add that there is a small addition to my liberty of choice beyond what I had expected. Accordingly, looking as I seek to do all along to the selection of the fittest, I have real pleasure in proposing to you that you should allow me to submit your name to Her Majesty as President of the Board of Trade in the new Administration with a seat in the Cabinet to which you will be glad to know your friend and colleague Mr. Bright already belongs.

Your political opinions may on some points go rather beyond what I may call the general measure of the Government; but I hope and believe there can be no practical impediment on this score to your acceptance of my proposal.

I will, however, pray you specially to observe the word inscribed at the head of this note: for I see with dismay that the scope of my intercepted

[1] Chamberlain to J. T. Bunce, April 29.

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conversation with Sir Charles Dilke yesterday is in the papers of this morning.[1]

The rule is, of course, to observe the strictest secrecy until Her Majesty's pleasure has been taken.

If you desire to see me, I shall be at Lord Granville's house at and after twelve o'clock.—Yours very faithfully, W. E. GLADSTONE.

In this unexampled way did Joseph Chamberlain become a Cabinet Minister in spite of himself, having, when he awakened that morning, anticipated nothing less than what a few hours brought forth. No man since the younger Pitt had risen to the Cabinet after so short a time in Parliament. After not quite four years in the House of Commons and not having held any office before, this political ascent by comparison with usage in that period was shining. There was no precedent at all for it in the case of a man entering the House when nearly forty, and equally without great family connection or academic honours. Not long before, inadequate Dukes, difficult otherwise to provide for in a Ministry, might be made Postmasters-General in a commercial nation. The Whigs had never admitted Burke or Sheridan to the Cabinet. Disraeli waited for years. Bright admitted when his greatest days were over, though a legend in the country, was not effective in Cabinet or in a department.

The Radical leader intended to count in both capacities. Sprung from the dissenting and manufacturing classes; the soul of practical energy and aptitude; only in his forty-fourth year but looking "like a youngster", having behind him already an administrative and organising record unique of its kind, he meant to take his full part in the ruling of England, and to set his stamp upon it. To Dr. Dale he wrote: "There is no reason now why in the future men without connection or rank may not run on even terms with the 'governing' families. It is a hard pill for the Whigs."[2] He felt he had shown a path-breaking power.

Of all the congratulations Morley's were far the best.

I am delighted beyond measure. It is one of the very splendidest things that ever happened. I dreaded your being left to head a group of

[1] Whether this helped to influence Gladstone's choice has been asked. Probably not. The Queen objected to all Radical Ministers major and minor, but most to Dilke rather on account of his criticism of the Civil List than of his past Republican expressions.

[2] Chamberlain to Dr. Dale, May 18, 1880.

Frondeurs. Now, all your strength will have a chance. It is really a glorious opening and well deserved. As you know, nobody in the world exults more than I do over it—not even your own kith and kin. I am as pleased as if I had just come into a fortune.[1]

At the same time two misgivings chequered the elation he could not help but feel. One on personal grounds, the other on public. Going into the Cabinet over Dilke's head was repugnant.

> As I expected, the announcement . . . excited a good deal of discontent and ill-feeling. Dilke himself, although he must have been disappointed at not receiving the offer of a higher office, behaved admirably; but there were many other Radicals who thought that their claims were as good or better than any that I could put forward, and were inclined to resent the quick promotion which I had, however unwillingly, secured.[2]

There was another thing. As his most private comments at the time show, he was not sure that he had done the best, whether for his Radicalism or his own career. For his future power and his purpose, might it not have been better to stand out of this almost wholly Whig Government; to act on the left flank as a compelling force; and to wait a few years for higher office than he had then received?

There was a deep instinct in his doubts. Had he remained an independent force through the events to follow in the next two or three years, he might well have had a better chance of becoming Gladstone's successor.

VI

For what was this Government he had joined? Half his colleagues were peers.

Three-fourths of the Ministers were hostile to his conceptions of social reform and national organisation. Gladstone on social questions as on ecclesiastical was an august conservative. For Bright, support of Gladstone was now a reverential and almost religious principle except on the issue of war. With Hartington and Forster—as with his chief—Chamberlain had been

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, April 29, 1880.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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engaged in a kind of controversy apt to leave latent feeling however civilly suppressed. At this time he was not welcome to his sovereign—none but Dilke less so. Beaconsfield wrote to Lady Bradford:

> Without the slightest preparation for the catastrophe, she [the Queen] will be told that she must take this morning an avowed Republican for a Cabinet Minister, quite inexperienced in official life and little known in parliament. It would have been better to have permitted Dilke to be one of her counsellors.[1]

Far better had both been included, and had Dilke become Foreign Secretary instead of Lord Granville. Lord Selborne, on a first inspection of his novel colleague from Birmingham, remarked, "Chamberlain is a personally agreeable man of good countenance, manners and address; but not, I think, inclined to any compromise of his opinions".[2]

At heart most of his colleagues, though less trenchant in methods and manners than he, were little inclined to be dragged along with him and by him. Rather they dug their heels in when he was most urgent; their innermost instinct reacted against him. He has left his own comment:

> The composition of the Cabinet was almost wholly Whig or moderate Liberal. Mr. Gladstone himself was indeed often more Liberal than the majority of his colleagues. On these occasions he could only count on the support of Mr. Bright and myself.[3]

That is, until Dilke was admitted to the Cabinet nearly three years after its formation.

The other members of this Government were his natural opposites in temperament, and nearly all of them were marked personalities. If not an administration of "all the talents", it was a Cabinet of characters with a giant at its head; but like none other for generations it was also a Cabinet of incompatibles; and by that inherent evil as much as by crass circumstance stood fated to become a Government of discord and misfortunes.

A quizzing veteran, Lord Blachford, read the signs at once and wrote to his old friend of the Colonial Office, Sir Henry Taylor:

[1] *Life of Disraeli*, vol. vi. p. 540.
[2] Roundell Palmer, Earl of Selborne, *Memorials*, part ii. vol. i. p. 488.
[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

Well, what do you say to it all? Lord Ripon seems rather weak for India, Lord Cowper rather shy for Ireland. Chamberlain tolerably well muzzled by the Board of Trade. Forster an odd master for the Irishmen. Dilke prudently harnessed with Granville. . . .[1]

VII

The Radical leader's isolated presence in this sort of combination was likely to be either impotent or fugitive or both, unless he could preserve and consolidate advantages not usually possessed by a Cabinet Minister. But of these exceptional resources he had an uncommon array.

The first thing was to make the alliance with Dilke an absolute agreement to maintain complete mutual confidence and to stand or fall together. Chamberlain had warned his friend of the danger of going in alone; and now he had to reck his own rede.

Without regard to etiquette, Dilke was kept minutely informed by his ally of all the proceedings of the Cabinet while debarred from it; his early inclusion was steadily advocated by his friend. A subordinate in name, really one of the principals, Dilke could amply reciprocate, for he knew more of foreign and colonial affairs than all the members of the Cabinet put together. The resignation of both at once was a contingency not to be lightly faced by the head of the Government or by the Whig Ministers. Repeated attempts to divide the two were made, and made in vain.[2]

The partnership founded and cemented in this way endured for five years with increasing effect as the strongest collaboration of its kind known in modern politics. Had fate allowed it to endure for twenty or thirty years, as these two hoped, there is little conceivable that it might not have achieved for the reorganisation of Britain and the Empire.

In will, in action, above all in the dynamics of democratic agitation and in power on the platform, Chamberlain was by far the stronger spirit.

In that part of power which is knowledge—knowledge,

[1] *Letters of Lord Blachford*, May 4, 1880.

[2] Typical is Dilke's entry in his diary that he was sounded in the Whig interest "whether the offer of Chamberlain's place would tempt me to sell him" (Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 348). Chamberlain's staunchness will reveal itself.

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immense, precise, continually increased by a devouring appetite —Dilke was as much superior. And no less so in social influence and in a perfect parliamentary manner both weighty and persuasive, acquired during a dozen years' experience in the House as against Chamberlain's four years. No one who does not remember distinctly the days before a dreadful fall can realise what was Dilke's rising prestige—to use in its just sense a spoiled word. Enormous as was his general information, his style was not yet dully overweighted. He could speak like a lucid blue-book, or write a vivacious political fantasy like *Prince Florestan*. Author of a work solid and fascinating and not yet surpassed in its kind, *Greater Britain*, he had studied hard for a "History of the Nineteenth Century", never to be written but well within his powers. A favourite of the Prince of Wales, and a friend of Gambetta, Dilke had travelled all over the Empire; had visited the United States, Japan and China; he was widely acquainted with European statesmen; and with foreign journals and journalists from Paris to Vienna. His personal connections with literature were numerous and intimate, his artistic tastes accomplished, his physical skill versatile as in sculling and fencing. The legend ran that by his father he had been more deliberately and efficiently trained to become Prime Minister than any man since the wits jested of the younger Pitt that he had been taught "by his dad on a stool".

Dilke felt bitterly his period of exclusion from the Cabinet, and at first among his friends there was some ignorant indignation at Chamberlain's expense. But between this considerable pair themselves there were no jealousies and few jars; instead alternating proof of impregnable loyalties. John Morley, loving Chamberlain and not much loving Dilke—who felt the same disaffinity—writes of the one he preferred:

> His fidelity to a political ally was incomparable, but for a man who was more to him than a political ally his solicitude was always alive and anxious, and I have known more than one instance where it was even singularly chivalrous.[1]

[1] Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 154. As though Chamberlain had not enough on his hands, he was working hard in these days, though vainly, to get Morley adopted as candidate for Nottingham, where a vacancy occurred just after the General Election. Once more "agnosticism" was a bar. Morley felt "thoroughly savage at the pious Non-Cons".

We shall meet the evidences.

The two Radicals possessed yet more resources than those already indicated. They had an unusual leverage upon the press. Through Escott, Chamberlain of all men could secure convenient publicities in the *Standard* of all journals—the Conservative organ, a very great newspaper then—though in its editorial columns, as a Whig remarked, it was anything but "Chamberlain's Journal". The *Birmingham Daily Post* was well able on occasion to vaticinate from the tripod. Dilke, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, was in close intercourse with Frank Hill of the *Daily News*, who in political writing was amongst the foremost of able editors in his time, though he leaves no trace in ours. A few days after the Cabinet was formed, John Morley became editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and kept in confidential touch with both Ministers.[1] He dined with them on the first night when their official positions were established; and he saw their first red boxes brought in.

These newspaper connections, obnoxious to Mr. Gladstone and reprobated by the Whigs, were the repeated cause of scandal and sometimes of disadvantages; but they gave more *gusto* to public life. The Radical Ministers enjoyed their semi-occult resorts, and met reproaches by protesting that Forster was as active in communication with Chenery of *The Times*; with Mudford, the consummate—though almost invisible—editor of the *Standard*; and with Wemyss Reid of the *Leeds Mercury*, a Forsterite who became one of Chamberlain's sedulous enemies. The repeated disputes about "leakage" in this Cabinet began immediately after its first meeting. Gladstone before it met complained of illicit intimacy with the press. Is it possible that the Victorian age in some respects was less conventional than ours?

Nor did all this exhaust the stock of weapons in the Radical arsenal. In the House of Commons itself an advanced group was always ready to manœuvre in support of their two allied leaders,

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, May 10, 1880: "Things are very contrary. I much and very much want to see you. Such strong pressure was brought upon me about the *P.M.G.* [*Pall Mall Gazette*] that to-day at four o'clock I agreed to become editor-in-chief. God knows what will become of it. To-morrow I go to Mentmore [Lord Rosebery's] for the night to meet your Chief."

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and to form a bodyguard against the Whigs. Above all, when Chamberlain wished to bring pressure upon the Cabinet from outside, and when sure of his ground of appeal to the mass of Liberal opinion, he had means to set the machinery of the Caucus in motion while not seeming to press the button. For half a decade this unexampled command of auxiliary forces enabled Chamberlain and Dilke to pull with skill and sinew against the majority of the Cabinet and repeatedly to prevail over them. In effective strength, especially for resistance, they were more like a quadrilateral than a pair. "You are keen, my lord", says Ophelia, and uncomfortably keen were they for the rest. In this narrative one is sometimes more sorry for the Whigs.

VIII

On the last Sunday of April 1880—a month so signal for him—Chamberlain took possession of the Board of Trade after a good talk with his predecessor, Lord Sandon, about men in that department and about measures in view.

Three days later—on Monday, May 3—he kissed hands. Curious to say, he had never seen Windsor and the castle before; nor ever forgot how its massive and towering range shone in the sunlight of a fair sky, how fit a seat of majesty it looked, and how enchanting from the high terraces were the views that stretched away. These moments alter men so susceptible in assimilation, as he was, and so vital in continued growth. Did he feel more than before that the British realm and dominion, like Windsor Castle, were also the work and fabric of centuries and that his share in responsibility for them was prouder and graver than he had yet discerned? It is one thing to dream of entering a party Cabinet; another to feel oneself indeed a Minister of the Crown. He wrote to his sister:[1]

BOARD OF TRADE,
May 4th, 1880.

. . . We . . . waited till the ex-Ministers had been disposed of. Afterwards we were marched into a long corridor with carved oak ceiling and some very beautiful china, Chelsea, Sèvres . . . and here we waited for

[1] Clara Chamberlain, afterwards Mrs. Ryland. She was then in charge of his family and household.

some time outside the room in which the Queen was. When all was ready, five of us were marched into a little square room, about the size of our breakfast room, and there was the Queen standing behind a table. . . . We bowed on entrance, then knelt on one knee before the table, and took the oath of allegiance; and then a small, fat, red hand was thrust quickly under each of our noses and respectfully mumbled by us. . . . The ceremony above described made me a Privy Councillor. Afterwards I had to go into the room again alone, bow, kneel, and kiss hands once more as President of the Board of Trade. Not a word was spoken all this time except by the clerk reading the form of oaths. . . . I had hardly seen the Queen since I stood near her when she opened Aston Park some twenty years ago or more, and of course I could not see much resemblance to her former self. She looked a quiet little Lady.

The "quiet little Lady", in spite of Lord Beaconsfield's alarming intimations, must have thought the "Robespierre of the Midlands" anything in appearance but a truculent Jacobin. She had been prepared by Lord Granville's smoothing letter: "Chamberlain is not so strong as is supposed, but an admirable organiser with pleasing manners."[1] Queen Victoria must have thought him a quite presentable person, and though his measured audacities of speech will sometimes vex and inflame her inordinately against him for the next half-decade—and though even afterwards his irruptions into foreign affairs will give her qualms—she will live to count him nearest to Beaconsfield amongst the long ranks of her public servants through the second half of her reign.

After luncheon, in accordance with the ritual, no Royalty being present, there was an epilogue. It may well leave us musing:

I walked back to the station with Mr. Gladstone, who said someone had told him I was like the statue of Pitt in Westminster Hall—and that there was certainly a resemblance. And then went on to speak of Pitt, whom he called a great Reform Minister in his earlier life carried away later by the miserable wars in which he was engaged.[2]

The same afternoon on that 3rd of May he attended his first Cabinet in Downing Street, and thought the nation's governing Council "much like a Board of Directors, only the business is

[1] *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, edited by G. E. Buckle, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 91.

[2] Chamberlain to his sister, May 4, 1880.

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more important and the consequences of mistake more serious".[1] Then he issued his address for re-election at Birmingham and, with Bright, was returned unopposed. His city regarding him more than ever as the man of the future, took his promotion as its own. But the old life between them was changed, though not the old love.

A few days before, he had come up to London with a handbag on a Sunday. Now he had to take a house there.

In ten troublesome days he set up his establishment—it was at 72 Prince's Gate—and brought his sister and children to town. To Jesse Collings, his faithful Sancho, to whom he ever unbosomed himself most simply, he reports with rueful humour, "I have a new butler and have ordered a new coachman and a new carriage and a new footman and a new Court suit".[2] On this necessary transfer of life to London he looked altogether askance, and disliked pulling up roots more than he liked this new planting. Though a Londoner born, and proud of it, his heart was at home, and Birmingham had been home now for over twenty-five years; he was prouder of that and never altered. Soundly he made up his mind that his connection with the provinces, though less continuous, should not be less strong; and that his Midland city should be his base to the end.

At "Southbourne" the foundation of his public life had been laid; and there men like Morley had joined the Tabaks-Kollegium; but the house was no longer suitable. At Moor Green he now built, in the parliamentary style of domestic architecture typical of Victorian fashion, a spacious new house with stretching greenhouses and wide gardens; and called it "Highbury" as a link with boyhood in London.[3] Of Highbury there will be more and more to tell. It stood in surroundings and near other scenes dear once to his mother. He could recall in his sister's words "many delightful excursions made with her to the daffodil fields—which then stretched from Northfield to the Lickey, to Weatheroak for

[1] Chamberlain to his sister, May 4, 1880.

[2] To Jesse Collings, May 16, 1880.

[3] John Morley remarked—somewhat in the mood of Dr. Johnson, when he first visited Burke's impressive mansion and spacious estate at Beaconsfield: "You must have found your retreat [in the autumn recess of 1880] uncommonly strange after the bustle of forces for the last five or six months. But I suspect you found bustle enough in putting the new palace to rights. That must have been a stiff piece of work, and to me it would have been pure boredom. I hope you are different" (September 22, 1880).

primroses and sweet violets, and to Earlswood for primroses, and in the summer to all the neighbouring lanes for wild roses". To return at every chance to these associations, and to his flowers and to dwell with his own people—as he could not have done had he bought an old manor farther away when friends counselled him to it instead of building Highbury—this was to be through all his career henceforth the refreshment of his strength and his being, a "central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation".

CHAPTER XVI

AN IRISH REVOLUTION—CHAMBERLAIN VERSUS FORSTER

(1880–1882)

REVERSING Lord Beaconsfield—Early Disappointment—A Haunted Government and the Banshee—The Irish Chaos—Chamberlain versus Forster—"Reform before Coercion"—Shall he Resign?—Isolation and Compromise—1881 and the End of the Cromwellian Settlement—John Morley; an Interlude—Parnell in Prison and the Underplot.

I

BOOK IV. 1880–82.

NO ONE guessed then that Gladstone would remain in active politics for so many years to come. This is vital to remember. Chamberlain had reason to share the prevalent opinion that a veteran who already had sat in Parliament for nearly half a century would "give it all up" in a couple of years, and retire from public life; and that then the real struggle between Whigs and Radicals would be decided in favour of a new era of social reconstruction. When the new Prime Minister answered the Queen's unwilling summons, he was just over seventy. She thought him haggard, worn, and his voice feeble, a very old man. He said twice "he looked to his not being long in office as it was too much for him".[1] Thereupon he took the Exchequer as well as the Premiership.

Whether Gladstone ever plumbed the subconscious depths of his mind may be doubted, but in the bosom of his family no less than to his sovereign he protested his desire to resign after two more sessions or so. Hidden from him yet were the turbulent future, the continued clutch of circumstances; perhaps the inner-

[1] *Life of Disraeli*, vol. vi. p. 539. Queen Victoria to Lord Beaconsfield (April 23).

most dictate of his own heart to prolong power and defer repose; all the sequel of his far-stretched destiny. At first, he was bent on external affairs. Upon them the elections had turned. He hoped to abolish root and branch Lord Beaconsfield's Imperialism, to reverse its works everywhere, to improve national finances, and to turn from a last full harvest to a late rich evening of retirement and meditation. The thought of soul's peace detached from the world always haunted this combatant but never prevailed until he was not very far from ninety. The temper partly of the studious recluse, partly of the austere and commanding ecclesiastic, was overborne in him by the irresistible instincts of the supreme politician. As a psychological enigma, Gladstone from this time forward is far more baffling than had ever been "the Jew".

In the first Cabinet discussions during May, before Parliament met, Chamberlain found himself in adherence to Gladstonian tenets more Catholic than the Pope.

> In the first discussion as to the general policy of the Government I stood alone in urging a complete reversal of the policy of Lord Beaconsfield, which I maintained had been condemned by the nation. I wanted at once to recall Sir Bartle Frere, to reconsider the annexation of the Transvaal and to recall Sir Henry Elliot.[1] For none of these proposals could I meet with any support at the time. I also urged the importance of dealing immediately with the question of extension of the franchise, but Mr. Gladstone considered that this subject, entailing as it would a new dissolution, ought to be delayed till towards the close of the Parliament just elected.[2]

The Premier, sympathising doubtless with his own ideas as emphasised by his Radical colleagues, was reluctant to enter so soon upon a struggle with the Queen and the Peers. A Cabinet almost wholly Whig or semi-Whig responded a good deal to the feelings of a self-willed but patriotic monarch who sometimes, as in the vexed case of Sir Bartle Frere, was wiser than her counsellors, even the youngest.

As for domestic questions, Chamberlain avows his preference for a fairly short Parliament to carry county franchise and other

[1] British Ambassador at Vienna, 1877–84.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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electoral reforms and then to dissolve in order that Liberalism, re-established upon a broader basis, might be more powerful than ever before. But there he met the strongest negative from the rest of the Cabinet. By postponing democratic reform the patricians held Radicalism in leash for the next half-decade.

The session about to open so late in 1880 was not expected to last more than three months. Therefore, it was agreed that only minor questions should be immediately dealt with, "leaving questions of greater magnitude, and especially legislation for Ireland, to the succeeding Session".[1] Coercion was dropped; serious reform not yet projected for either island.

II

Thus the Queen's Speech was finally drawn up to Chamberlain's imperfect satisfaction. As to main points, he disagreed with the maintenance of "supremacy over the Transvaal" despite the accompanying promise of "large and liberal principles of self-Government" for the Boers. He was heart and soul for the announcement that in Ireland the expiring Peace Preservation Act—coercion—would not be renewed. He was at one with other paragraphs touching Gladstone's absorbing concerns—the Eastern Question and India.

Turkey had still to be brought by threats to execute the stipulated concessions to Montenegro and Greece. The Liberal Government declared for "the early and complete fulfilment of the Treaty of Berlin", an object to be attained by the Concert of the Powers. With desperate fierceness and wild uncertainties the Afghan War raged on. The late Government had insisted to the last upon partitioning the country and annexing its Kandahar region. Donald Stewart, after his furious fight with the tribesmen at Ahmed Khel, had just restored communications with our jeopardised troops at Kabul. But yet to come, through months of tension and vicissitude, were the disaster of Maiwand and its reversal by the thrilling march of Lord Roberts disappearing from his base to emerge in victory at Kandahar. This *dénouement* lying ahead, the Cabinet was in the thick of perplexities and anxieties when the gracious Speech looked rightly to "the

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

pacification of Afghanistan" on terms best suited both to the independence of its people and their friendly relations with the Indian Empire.

In these Oriental affairs the Radical leader was no Gallio, but no expert neither. Our narrative is soon freed from things that, however interesting in other connections, throw little light upon Chamberlain's own mind and character. While the Cabinet as a body is still wavering, he writes (September 12) to Dilke in his unvarnished and sometimes unquotable way, that "Candahar will have to be given up in spite of the Queen". And it was; and most wisely.

But, Europe? Gladstone's poetic preoccupation with Montenegro chafed Paris and fatigued Berlin. On this the President of the Board of Trade writes sceptically to the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (September 20): "What about the Concert of Europe? Will it last through a bombardment of Dulcigno?" Dulcigno, as a name, now sounds like light opera, but at that time it symbolised a diplomatic *cause célèbre*, filling columns in all daily newspapers. The place was assigned by "the Powers" to the Montenegrins; the Sultan, like the local Albanians, demurred. In deference to the threat of bombardment by the warships of five Powers under a British Admiral—such were the times—and the especially British hint of sterner naval coercion at Smyrna, the Turks rendered up Dulcigno; and the Concert of Europe remained intact without harmony.

Strongly Hellenic like Dilke, and because of him, Chamberlain in the Cabinet supported the diplomatic pressure required to secure for Greece a valuable extension of territory. Generally—Gambetta and Clemenceau being persons to him and not merely names—he was for warm accord with France, though the vacillations of French policy under changing Ministries made it hard for the wish to prosper. And very soon these European concerns, so vivid at first, became of lessening account in the Cabinet.

A few weeks after the great Election of 1880, turning on foreign and Imperial policy, domestic interests became convulsive. On that ground Chamberlain was as much at home as Dilke in continental topics.

III

BOOK IV. 1880–82.

After the swearing in, Parliament met for business on May 20. The new House of Commons evidently was more full of various life and character than any of its predecessors since 1832. The depth of conflicting feelings in this House, its unmatched variety in personal drama, the confusion of its fate—these could not yet be imagined.

The Liberal majority was in the full feather of hope. Their belief was that the Conservatives would take some time to recover their spirits; that Irish affairs would not be pressing before the winter; that the short session would be a humdrum preface. In every part these assumptions were violently upset. Instead, the pietistic harlequinade of the Bradlaugh case, with its erratic entrances and exits, began at once to stultify the Government and disorganise the Liberal majority. Lord Randolph Churchill and his Fourth party started their merciless guerilla. Like nothing yet known to the House, the new Irish party revealed itself as a serried band under a leader who seemed both inflexible and passionless. Parnell so seeming was soon to live in ceaseless dread of ruin owing to the intrigue in his private life with the wife of an intermittent follower. None the less was he intent upon gaining by degrees the balance of power in the House of Commons; so as eventually to master one or other of the two British competing parties or else destroy the historic working of the parliamentary system.

Take first the Bradlaugh case. In vain Chamberlain urged the Cabinet to wield its parliamentary majority. Without dogmatic or metaphysical question of the mind behind the accustomed words, let Bradlaugh be allowed to recite the oath—just as Speaker Peel enabled him to do nearly five years later. Lost was the opportunity for that Parliament. Writing in June 1880 to Dr. Dale, the Radical in the Cabinet describes the Bradlaugh muddle. "Christianity defended by rowdy Tories and Jingoes of the Drummond Wolff and Churchill stamp is a sorry sight". He deplores the indiscipline and disarray in the Liberal ranks; and already denounces the Opposition as "factious and obstructive to the last degree". He adds, "It is difficult to see the end of it, but at the moment our free institutions are choked and neutral-

ised by the forms intended to protect them".[1] These words sprang from sure instinct. The short session, expected to be humdrum and commonplace, proved no such thing. Imminent Irish struggles—the beginning of long, cumulative revolution—were to change all existing things in British politics; to throw Chamberlain like other men hither and thither; and to determine, in ways direct and indirect, his destiny to the very end.

IV

At this point the broad course of events for many months to come must be kept in mind. Strange to say, in the Queen's Speech the Liberal Cabinet had made no allusion at all to the Irish Land Question, though the omens of social upheaval were already dark. Disraeli, while his rival's gaze was turned in other directions, had expressed in his election manifesto on Ireland an almost mysterious instinct of prediction, though uttering his oracles in artificial phrases ridiculed even by his own side.[2] Now, the new Government of All the Talents, with the largest majority since 1832 behind it and a Gladstone at its head, became a Government pursued and bedevilled by the Irish spectre. Well might Chamberlain wish often to leave it and regret that he had ever joined it.

From this first session Ireland blocked the way against Liberal reforms in Great Britain. The Cabinet's first attempt at remedial legislation in the interest of Irish tenants, the Compensation for Disturbance Bill, was calamitously thwarted by the Peers in the interests of Irish landlords. After little more than three months' work through the summer of 1880, Parliament at the beginning of September rose for the recess.

In another sense Ireland rose. Through that autumn and winter and all through the following year, agrarian insurrection proved to be nothing less than the strongest native revolt for

[1] Chamberlain to Dale, June 22, 1880.

[2] "A danger, in its ultimate results scarcely less disastrous than pestilence or famine . . . distracts that country. A portion of its population is attempting to sever the constitutional tie which unites it to Great Britain. . . . And yet there are some who challenge the expediency of the imperial character of this realm. Having attempted to enfeeble our colonies by their policy of decomposition, they may perhaps now recognise, in the disintegration of the United Kingdom, a mode which will not only accomplish, but precipitate their purpose."

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over two hundred years; it sought to disrupt the bases of the Cromwellian settlement and of British rule. The Liberal Cabinet, after long wavering and divisions, returned to coercion of a stringency that Conservatism could not have exceeded. Coming second to repression, the great Land Bill failed in its moral purpose though it was beneficial in practical effect, and proved more revolutionary in further tendency than its author had conceived.

On nothing were the more habitually opposed elements of this Ministry of all the discords so deeply antagonistic as on Ireland. The crevasses opened in the first Cabinet meetings.

We must recollect what was Chamberlain's view of a Liberal policy for Ireland before he became a Minister. As yet he had nothing to do with the new Irish party. While his mind was made up against any weakening of the Imperial connection or any Irish secession from the House of Commons, "I have an idea in my head about a modified form of Home Rule which I think is practicable".[1] But it required thought, and he had not yet found leisure to work out the details. On the land question he followed Bright's prophetic advocacy of tenant-right and cultivators' ownership. But here again he was too much engaged by nearer things to bring his personal concentration to bear upon agrarian portents in what was then called the "sister island". For relieving the exceptional state of Irish distress and for a more lasting alleviation of Irish poverty, he was in favour of a bold organisation of public works. He had little sympathy with English landlords and less with Irish landlords. He was far from being fully awakened. Of coercion and suppression by the Liberal Government or of his own long entanglements in consequence he did not dream. During the General Election, one conspicuous appeal of Liberal candidates in the boroughs wherever the Irish vote was large, had been "Justice to Ireland". No one meant this more genuinely than Chamberlain.

He puts it very simply:

> The majority, at least, of the Liberal Party were pledged to give early attention to the redress of all grievances, and it was the hope of all of them, and the conviction of the Radical section, that a wise and liberal

[1] Chamberlain to Morley, October 21, 1879.

policy of reform would do much to conciliate the Irish people and would render powerless the efforts of political agitators.[1]

In one sentence, despite the turmoil and the Land League, his idea was "conciliation first", and that policy, he believed, would avert "coercion afterwards". As yet, like his colleagues, Gladstone included, he had not got much beyond the alphabet of the new Irish question. It was the old question about to be "writ large".

V

He had reason to open his eyes when he had been hardly ten days a Minister. So far from supposing that his old feud with Forster would begin again, he, like others, regarded that statesman as a particularly sympathetic exponent of Liberal "justice to Ireland".

But meanwhile, Forster, always prone to pugnacity in the cause of moderation, had crossed to Dublin. As earnestly as any one of his colleagues he desired reform of the Irish land system, though far from thoroughly understanding its roots and ramifications. But in Dublin "the Castle" was the citadel of the garrison and could not be anything else. There his staff "painted the devil on the wall". Full of their own actual difficulties and alarmed apprehensions in face of the new spirit and tactics of social revolt, saturated through personal connection by sympathy with the Anglo-Irish interest, they convinced their Ministerial visitor from London that "order" was the instant and paramount issue. As soon as the Chief Secretary returned to London his confidential views circulated amongst the Cabinet—to the dismay of one member of it—implied "Coercion First". Let us be just. What is not discriminate is not history. Forster was not merely swayed by bureaucrats of reactionary habit. Even enlightened landlords and moderate Liberals in Ireland were self-deceived. Like the O'Conor Don, they persuaded the Chief Secretary that he must put down disorder before grappling with reform.

By a calculated manœuvre of the late Government the Peace Preservation Act was on the eve of running out. Some period

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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without coercion would ensue. Uneasy in this unwonted situation and fearing above all free buying of arms during an extraordinary interval of "ordinary law", the Castle administration and the menaced classes in Ireland prayed for unrelaxed repression and for a sterner code as soon as the new Government could provide it.

To this view the Chief Secretary after his few days in Ireland plainly inclined; yet without any downright decision. Rather he seemed irresolute, as was sometimes his manner when his inward bent was about to become most obstinate. Chamberlain notes that if Forster

> had been uniformly firm and consistent in his demand for repressive measures he would undoubtedly have had the support of the majority of the Cabinet; and the minority must have given way or retired. But throughout the early days of the controversy Forster never appeared to have absolutely made up his mind. He leaned towards Coercion, but he also recognised the parliamentary difficulties in which proposals for such legislation would land the Government, and he constantly sought to throw some of the responsibility upon the Cabinet, and was reluctant to take the whole himself.[1]

At this Chamberlain, not daunted by his junior status—according to all conventional views of constitutional etiquette—showed for the first time in Cabinet[2] the touch of his character.

Disturbed and repelled by proposals for Irish repression at the very beginning of a new Liberal era, he argued at once that redress must come foremost according to Liberal pledges as well as to the wisdom of the case; and that coercion should only come when "lenitives"—as Burke says—had failed. The Radical Minister urged that the Chief Secretary was not giving himself time; that he was submitting too soon to the influence of Dublin Castle; and accepting its familiar arithmetic about the numbers of outrages without the kind of scrutiny required by the great change from Conservative to Liberal Government.[2] With these and other arguments Gladstone and Bright were in general agreement.

> We considered that he was asking for new powers before he had sufficiently tested the old ones; and we insisted that by a premature

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". [2] May 13, 1880.

resort to arbitrary measures he would prejudice the success of the remedial legislation the necessity of which he recognised as fully as any of us.[1]

Sure was this view, and every reader of the present pages ought to mark it well.

Again, the Conservative law for Peace Preservation would expire on June 1—little more than a fortnight from this encounter in the Cabinet. It would be impossible to pass a measure for renewal before the existing Act ran out. There would have to be some interval without coercion. Reimposing Conservative policy by Liberal votes would mean worse odium than continuing it. The Chief Secretary himself had to recognise the parliamentary perils. At first most of the Cabinet were with him; but they now came round. "The majority agreed that it was desirable to try the effect of conciliation in the hope that this course . . . would produce a better feeling in Ireland and stay the rising tide of agitation."[2]

Chamberlain had done sagacious work during his first experiences of a Cabinet. He had helped to prevent the Government from being hopelessly prejudiced at the very start by Coercion before Redress. Had the Radical Minister been listened to further by his Whig colleagues in the course of the next six sinister months the whole subsequent course of Irish affairs might have taken a better turn.

VI

"Staying the rising tide of agitation" by remedial measures meant above all staying evictions for arrears of rack-rent. That is, saving the peasants in Ireland from being robbed—it is the word—of their rightful share of property in the soil. That rightful share was constituted by the improvements made by themselves alone, and not, as in England, by the landlord.

In the wet, cheerless summer, the tenants, broken by three ruinous seasons, were thrown out of their holdings in larger numbers. Thereby the improvements effected solely by their own labour and expense were confiscated. Under the Irish system as it then stood, these improvements were their life-work, or that

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". [2] *Ibid.*

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of their families; their capital; their all. The law allowing this seizure was well contrived to make a people mad.

No one had ever denounced this iniquity with more penetrating eloquence than John Bright. No one felt it more deeply than the honest and humane Chief Secretary. Three weeks after his check in the Cabinet on coercion, Forster himself proposed the Compensation for Disturbance Bill. It was adopted by the Cabinet. To the tenant harshly uprooted and flung aside this measure gave back a little of his own or at least of its money value. It offered the only means of preventing the agrarian situation, bad as it was, from plunging speedily into a far worse state. But on the one hand the measure was too limited to arouse the gratitude of Parnell's men, and they gave the Government no help. On the other hand, Conservative vituperation fulminated in horrific terms against this gross inhumanity to landlords. Many broad-acred Whigs, especially those with large territories in Ireland, inveighed severely against a heinous violation of economic truth. What educated mind could fail to perceive that "tenants' right was landlords' wrong"?

In face of the parliamentary difficulties, especially Parnellite belittling of the relief, Hartington on July 2 actually advised withdrawal of the Bill. Chamberlain would not hear of it. Instead, "I told Forster that if he would nail his colours to the mast, and found it necessary in consequence to resign, Dilke and I would go out with him".[1] This spirit prevailed again, though Lord Lansdowne left the administration on the issue.[2] The Bill was pushed on. It passed the House of Commons by a good majority at the end of July. A few weeks after it was denounced, trampled and thrown out by an overwhelming majority in the Lords. No more foolish vote is recorded in the annals of the Upper House nor upon them rests a deeper stain. Of Whig peers many more voted against the Government than for it; and Lord Beaconsfield's peculiar glee in this exquisite vengeance remains a blot upon the last months of his statesmanship. Never was a

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". —*Dilke throws a sidelight:* "I noted in my diary of this day, 'I do not care in the least about the Bill, but I must either go out with them or climb into the Cabinet over their bodies, to either become a Whig or to eventually suffer the same fate. I prefer to make common cause' ". (Quoted from Chamberlain's duplicate.)

[2] Their first loss of this kind.

blinder stroke of folly and bitterly they rued. Ireland was doomed to a dark winter.

Had Chamberlain's counsel been taken the Peers in their blind vote for self-interest would not have triumphed with impunity. Needless to say he was for fighting. He thought at the time, and never ceased to think, "that an autumn session should have been called and the Bill again introduced. This would have shown the earnest desire of the Government to alleviate the distress of the Irish tenants."[1] But this time in the Cabinet the Radical leader, when he desired to force the fighting with the Peers, stood quite alone.

Amidst Radical misgiving and Conservative satire this first, short, ill-omened session was now prorogued early in September. Irish protests and warnings were furious but unintelligible to British members. Already the Chief Secretary, full of sympathetic memories and kind feeling when he took office a few months before, was damned in Irish popular opinion when the Nationalists invented the nickname of "Buckshot Forster".

What now? The Radical Minister tried again. His policy of calling an autumn session and fighting the Peers on the Compensation Bill had been scouted. Then he sat down to draw up an earnest and detailed Memorandum upon constructive policy in Ireland.

> Having regard to the impoverished condition of Ireland, and especially to the exceptional circumstances of the time, it is worth consideration whether present relief might not be best afforded by a well-designed scheme of public works which would permanently benefit the country.

He conceived: (1) improved communications; (2) drainage and reclamation of lands; (3) aid to industrial enterprises. In a word, he was in favour of relieving Irish distress not by parochial driblets but by planning on a national scale. This was the executive spirit of the great Mayoralty applied to a larger sphere. He was before his time. The document was circulated to the Cabinet on August 18. This was three weeks before the prorogation and there was still time to do something. Nothing was done. Nothing, though Forster himself liked Chamberlain's plan. Violence took the bit between its teeth.

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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The next three months opened a revolution in Irish history. Chronic disorder flamed into agrarian rebellion. From Westminster the Irish members crossed the water to spread the war. Without military forms it was a true national and racial war for the land in a country where the whole system of society rested in the main on an artificial basis resulting from conquest and acquisition over two centuries before, and hateful to the native majority. In the "terrible Celtic memory" was no statute of limitations; Cromwellian and later seizures seemed a wrong of yesterday; the cruel despotism of the Penal Laws bred an inextinguishable desire for vengeance as well as justice; the native tradition of the days before Cromwell was carried on from generation to generation; the peasants, still serfs in some parts of their condition, regarded the ownership of the land by an alien few as a yoke to be broken.

After two hundred years of inheritance and custom, the landlords as naturally thought their property as legitimate as any other property in the world. To themselves their moral as well as legal right seemed self-evident.

They were deluded like every old regime before its fall. Bad seasons had made impossible the continued payment of rack-rents soon to be declared unjust by the courts. The blind work of throwing peasants out of their homesteads raged under the protection of the military and the police. Banded together by the Land League as never before, and supported by a whole people, the tenants attempted to paralyse landlordism by the "boycott"—a new name and method borrowed since by most of the insurgent elements of mankind. Outrage and murder broke out on a scale unknown for many a year. Parnell's speeches at Ennis and elsewhere were of deadly efficiency in the movement to stop evictions first and abolish landlords afterwards. "When a man takes a farm from which another has been unjustly evicted, you must shun him . . . as if he were a leper of old."

Secretly a strange motive had already entered into the plot. Had Chamberlain guessed it then, or in the next few years, much would have turned out differently. Parnell had fallen fatally in love with Mrs. O'Shea; in these very weeks he yielded to his lure. The first flush of a romance so powerful and dangerous enhanced for the moment all the political force of a national

leader who had been inwardly amongst the most solitary of men. Unknown as yet, this affair always counts behind the scenes from now onwards. Ultimately it will change everything like few historic infatuations since Antony and Cleopatra. Meanwhile the fabric of British government in Ireland was shaken.

VII

Chamberlain and Forster were again in set antagonism, as they had been about education and the Caucus.

Parliament was no sooner dispersed than the Chief Secretary brought up coercion again, and urged it at successive Cabinet meetings held in the recess. Again the Radical still stood for conciliation and circumspection. He argued that the Land Commission was investigating the whole matter of Irish tenure; that until it reported no great remedial measure could be introduced.

> In the meantime, a proposal of coercion would be calculated to destroy beforehand all chance of cordial acceptances for any land reform. . . . The clearest evidence of necessity ought to be forthcoming before a Government distinctly founded on the principle of conciliation asked for coercive powers.[1]

For a short time longer the majority in the Cabinet took the same view, and Forster was held off.

Passages of correspondence show the tension:

CHAMBERLAIN, MORLEY AND DILKE

1880, *June* 6.—*Morley to J. C.*— . . . I wish very much that we could meet a little more regularly and frequently—not for long, nor necessarily at a dinner or lunch table. Ten minutes with you three times a week would be of great value to me and perhaps to the rest of the world. I see plenty of other important people, but you would be worth the whole lot and pack of them, because we understand each other, and have the same objects. . . .[2]

September 12.—*J. C. to Dilke.*—Next session will settle Forster one

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[2] Chamberlain's reply to this is missing, like all his letters to this friend from April 1880 to October 1881. Morley had become editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* a few weeks before the above letter.

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way or other. Either he will pass a Land Bill and be a great Statesman or he will fail, and be a pricked bubble for the rest of his natural life. . . .

Assassinations and the growing power of the Land League against law as it stood soon strengthened Forster's hands in the Government. In October they decided to bring Parnell and other leaders to trial. The Radical leader did not like the decision, but accepted it as a new means of postponing full coercion:

TO ASHTON DILKE [1]

October 27, 1880.—I confess I am not easy about the prosecutions, but I think they are the only alternative to measures which would be still more objectionable. There is no doubt that in some parts of Ireland a regular reign of terror has commenced. Ordinary law is entirely in abeyance, and I do not think the English constituencies, which are very sensitive on such a point, will stand this. The greatest pressure is being brought to bear by the permanent officials and by all the so-called "respectable classes" to induce the Government to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act or take similar steps. The prosecutions afford an answer, for we can say it is not yet proved that the ordinary law is insufficient. I doubt very much whether in the present state of Irish feeling they will be successful, but I am not certain they will not be useful in spite of this. . . .

If we can only tide over until we are in a position to bring forward our proposals with regard to the land question all may be well. . . .

I am convinced that Parnell does not want the Government to succeed. He fears that the settlement of the land question would be the death-blow to his Home Rule agitation, and he wants to make all proposals impossible beforehand. I do not think it would be well for the English Radicals to play into his hands. . . .

To Sir Charles Dilke, Chamberlain says on the same date, "I don't half like the Irish prosecutions, but I fear there is no alternative—except indeed the suspension of the Habeas Corpus, which I should like still less". But the Radical, by consenting to the State trials, had only gained an imaginary respite from the alternative he thought worse. The Chief Secretary became convinced of the absolute necessity for "special legislation; and if

[1] Brother of Sir Charles.

special legislation at all, we cannot conceal from ourselves that it must be special legislation in the most high-handed fashion".[1]

In mid-November Ministerial dissensions came to an extreme, and for nearly a fortnight the Cabinet threatened to split. Chamberlain in conversation had told the Chief Secretary plainly beforehand that at no price would he stand coercion without a Land Bill. More than this, the Radical leader had burned his boats in the public sight. His speeches rang out on the platform:

Birmingham, October 26.—This Government came into power pledged to the eyes to do justice to Ireland. . . . We were pledged to it before the recent agitation began, and there is nothing which has happened since—not even the excesses of the Land League . . .—which should cause us to swerve from the course upon which we determined to enter. . . . If the Irish people will not accept our endeavours . . . so much the worse for us and so much the worse for them.

Birmingham, November 16.—I would also venture to ask English Liberals not to allow themselves to be diverted even by crime and outrage from what is their plain duty in the matter. . . . It may be the work of Tories to crush out disaffection; it is the better and higher work of Liberals to find out the cause of disaffection and to remove it. . . . There are some men apparently who would destroy liberty in order to preserve law. I do not believe that is possible and I do not believe it is right. . . . It seems to me that there can be nothing more unconstitutional than at the first outbreak of disorder to proceed to suspend all the safeguards of liberty in a nation, without at all events at the same time enquiring into the causes, and endeavouring to remove the causes, which may have promoted and instigated that disorder.

When his townspeople cheered this last declaration they little knew that he had nailed his flag. By next morning, when he had been little more than six months a Minister, his resignation was in the Prime Minister's hands. The day before, at the meeting of the Cabinet, Forster, with his mind made up at last, had demanded an autumn session to carry drastic coercion by itself; in a form suspending the Habeas Corpus Act and equipping Dublin Castle with unlimited powers of arrest on sus-

[1] Forster stating the contingencies to Gladstone, October 25, 1880. Wemyss Reid, *Forster*, vol. ii. p. 261.

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picion. Chamberlain thought it a Tsarist policy and determined to fight it tooth and nail. "We had refused to call an autumn session to undo the work of the peers and to pass remedial legislation, and it appeared to me monstrous to take this extraordinary course in order to promote a Bill for the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act." [1]

This was what threw the Cabinet for a fortnight into jeopardy and public opinion into throes. Dilke meant to go with his friend, and has the best note on the crisis: "I saw Chamberlain immediately after the Cabinet which was held this day. Bright and Chamberlain were as near splitting off at one end as Lord Selborne [Lord Chancellor] at the other".[2] Chamberlain adds: "Mr. Gladstone proposed the creation of Grand Committees for England, Ireland and Scotland. He was warmly supported by Bright and myself, but the Cabinet were against him." [3]

Lest all these troubles might not be enough, there was a warm altercation about "leakages" and the newspapers. Chamberlain was accused of giving information to the *Standard*—through Escott, then a very rising writer—and he did not deny it. "But Forster was quite as much given to using the press as Chamberlain," adds Dilke, who himself was as much addicted. Public interest gained much. Public interests lost nothing.

VIII

Chamberlain left for Birmingham, and next morning his mind too was made up. He would not stay on the terms in prospect. Before going to his great meeting with Bright, he sat down at Highbury and wrote to the Prime Minister an admirable letter:

TO GLADSTONE

HIGHBURY,
Nov. 16, 1880.

MY DEAR MR. GLADSTONE— . . . I am compelled to trouble you and to say, as I do with the deepest regret and reluctance, that I think the proposal of Mr. Forster so wrong in principle and so bad in policy that I could not conscientiously give to it even a silent support.

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[2] Dilke's Diary.
[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum"

If it be adopted by the Cabinet I shall have no alternative but to retire from the Government. . . . Redress of acknowledged grievances should precede, or at least accompany, the suspension of the safeguards of liberty. The widespread disaffection of the Irish people grows out of causes of just complaint, and it is empirical to try to crush the one without first enquiring into and dealing with the other. I think the necessity for destroying the Constitution in Ireland is not proved. . . . The suspension of Habeas Corpus will not under present circumstances prove an effectual repressive measure. We are not in face of secret societies or of small knots of conspirators. . . . You might arrest half a county and still Captain Boycott's position would be as intolerable as ever, and Lord Leitrim's and Lord Mountmorres's murderers would go unpunished. . . . One alternative has suggested itself to my mind and that is, if it be absolutely necessary to propose coercion in December, to accompany it with a short Bill in one clause suspending evictions for three months pending the introduction of the Land Bill. I am very sorry to add to your anxieties at such a time. . . .

No document of the period shows a more competent insight into Irish affairs. When the Prime Minister received this first, not last, letter of the kind, he had before him at the same time his colleague's Radical speech the night before in Birmingham Town Hall. Gladstone ingeminated patience and postponed a clash.

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

10 *Downing Street, November* 17, 1880.—I have received your letter and have read it, I need hardly say, with great anxiety. To-day, we shall have the advantage of a fuller and more general expression of views than has yet been afforded. Should they appear at first sight to be irreconcileable I hope that we shall come to some decision, but take at least a day to consider the matter, which in any case is one of very great gravity.

Hard indeed it seemed at first to keep the Government together and to bridge positions so divided. At Birmingham Town Hall, after deploring and denouncing Irish outrages, Chamberlain, as we have seen, had defined his principle: "It may be the work of Tories to crush out disaffection; it is the better and higher work of Liberals to find out the cause of disaffection and to remove it". Forster's argument proceeded from a very different

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text: "It is our duty to protect life and limb. . . . Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act is our only mode of doing this" (Minute, November 15).

For four weeks the crisis was unsolved and the Cabinet not safe. Rumours of its breaking up were rife. Hartington was moody and inclined to secede. Conservative speculation dwelt much in private upon the chances of a Liberal disruption and a Coalition Ministry.

Chamberlain, fully supported by Dilke, was still determined to quit the Cabinet if Forster and the Whigs carried their purpose. But he had no illusions, and adds: "We should incur temporary unpopularity, as the current of public opinion in the country was running strongly in favour of coercive legislation, but we resolved to face this if the autumn session were determined on".[1]

The Chief Secretary, for his part, in sending to Bright and Chamberlain copies of his letter to Mr. Gladstone[2] stating the case for his own hardening views, adds in his likeable way: "I have written frankly and plainly as the importance of the subject demands, but I need not assure you both that I believe you are acting from a sense of duty, as I am myself."[3]

John Morley implored his friend in the Cabinet to think twice and thrice before going out into the wilderness at a most unpropitious time:

> I hate the Whigs, but I dread the Tories back again. Life is too short for another dose of Dizzy in our time. I hope we may have a chance of discussing the matter before you make up your mind. Nobody knows your firmness and conviction more than I do, nor is more satisfied at the victory which your firmness has just won. But I foresee ticklish times—and so do you, no doubt.[4]

IX

"The victory" Morley praises had been gained in the preceding twenty-four hours. The Chief Secretary waived his demand for a coercion session in December, and agreed that the meeting

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[2] Wemyss Reid's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 270.
[3] Forster to Chamberlain, November 23, 1880.
[4] Morley to Chamberlain, November 28, 1880.

of Parliament should be deferred for a month. Even now the strain was not quite over. The Whigs in the Cabinet longed to have the contumacious Radical out of it. He was isolated because Bright, reluctantly, had gone over to coercion. This was the time when Dilke made his note, already quoted, that an emissary of the Hartington wing called "to find out whether the offer of Chamberlain's place would tempt me to sell him".[1] It was not the last overture of its kind. Humorous to say, he was under his friend's own roof in Sloane Street at the time, and their alliance was stronger than ever.

Here, perhaps, the sidelights come in best:

November 23.—*Dilke's note on the crisis.*—Besides Mr. Gladstone who was an old man, there was only Chamberlain. . . . Hartington was a real man but a man on the wrong side.[2]

November 25.—*J. C. to Bright.*—I venture to think that you will not hesitate to accept the responsibility which he (Forster) throws upon both of us. Coercion has been tried often enough and has failed. I hope better results from a wiser and juster policy.

December 11.—*Harcourt to J. C.*— . . . I don't find Hartington in an unsatisfactory frame of mind himself. He thinks Forster so worried and ill as to be likely to break down altogether. In fact I fancy he is like the Yankee General after Bull's Run—"not just afraid but dreadfully demoralised". I have only one counsel to give: let us all stick to the ship, keep her head to the wind and cram her through.

At last, though not until a fortnight before Christmas, Chamberlain relinquished, for a while, his recurring idea of quitting this Government. There was not to be a special session for coercion alone. A great Land Bill was assured. He had got some of his own way and prevented a phalanx of colleagues from having the whole of theirs. Yet for him it was a hollow success even so far as it went at the moment. His innate idea—conciliation first—had been thwarted by Irish fatality.

Weakened by British popular feeling against Irish outrage and by Bright's deepening antipathy to the Parnellites, he still often regretted that he had not adhered to his original instinct

[1] Dilke's Diary, duplicate in Chamberlain Papers, Dec. 13, 1880.
[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 347.

against joining any Government mainly Whig. But, hoping to strengthen and expedite the remedial legislation, he remained in office; consented to the Life and Property Bill, a bristling code; and so far, sacrificed his own judgment to collective responsibility. There is no doubt that his own view, though isolated, was right. He went to the root. To stop evictions until a Land Bill could be framed was the only way of restraining disorder pending reform. He had run risks seldom indeed challenged by a new Minister; he had shown nerve enough for anything; and he had done quite as well as single-handed conviction in any Cabinet can expect.

One closing word at this year's end from the most expert letter-writer by far amongst all his correspondents has been reserved to stand by itself.

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 31, 1880.—I have eaten my little dinner with the P.M. Nobody there but Lord Granville and F. Cavendish. Gladstone was as interesting as usual; talked about Dante, Innocent III., house property in London, the true theory of the Church, the enormity and monstrous absurdity of our keeping Ascension Island, etc. etc. etc. Then after dinner he took me to a corner and revealed his Coercion [scheme] much as a man might say (in confidence) that he found himself under the painful necessity of slaying his mother. It was downright piteous—his wrung features, his strained gesture, all the other signs of mental perturbation in an intense nature. I walked away in a horribly gloomy state. . . .

Thus closed 1880, so ardently hailed by Chamberlain and his friends when "the Jew" was overthrown in a resplendent General Election, and April budded with all "the promise of things hoped for in the Spring".

X

Parliament met early in the January of 1881, on Twelfth Night, as we might almost literally say, to pass coercion first and a Land Bill after. Suspending Habeas Corpus and carrying an Arms Bill were initial items on the agenda. This kind of priority embittered the Irish members to desperation. The New Year opened grimly with Boer revolt as well as Irish *jacquerie*.

On January 6 began a session quite unparalleled—violent in contrary passions, convulsive in encounter, ennobling in one part of legislative achievement; but destructive of the old forms of the House of Commons—a session of cleavage and rending. Nothing seemed the same again. In Dublin the State trial collapsed; the jury disagreeing had to be discharged. This was humiliation for the Government and triumph for Parnell and the Land League. The futile arraignment stultified Forster's administration in Ireland and exalted the uncrowned king. The Parnellite phalanx reappeared at Westminster to fight coercion to the death. Part of Chamberlain's heart was with them at first. The House of Commons found itself defied and held up as never before or since. In two desperate passages of obstruction, one sitting in January lasted twenty-two hours, another at the beginning of February over forty-one hours, from Monday into Wednesday. Davitt's arrest on his old ticket of leave, a mean blunder, kindled Irish rage. The Parnellites were expelled in a body. Speaker Brand's *coup d'état* broke the deadlock.

The Queen's Speech, it is true, had promised Ireland county boards as well as land reform. The method of coercion first, without suspending evictions as Chamberlain had entreated, ruined the session for every purpose of conciliation in Ireland.

This was what the Radical in the Cabinet had too well foreseen when maintaining that agrarian anarchy was caused by unjust laws, and that for the sake of order as of equity, redress should go before repression. But British opinion, even amongst the working classes, was alienated by obstruction and agrarian outrage. Bright's case was typical. Even he had come round to Forster, and was firmly for the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.

> Chamberlain's position at this moment was that he personally did not believe in coercion, but that the feeling in the country was such that any Government would be forced to propose it, and he was not sufficiently clear that it was certain to fail to be bound as an honest man to necessarily oppose it.[1]

All his Cabinet colleagues, as well as the entire Irish executive, now held that the assertion of administrative supremacy in

[1] Dilke's Diary, January 12, 1881.

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Ireland was an obligation of duty and a necessity of State. In these circumstances his resignation would have been impotent. Doggedly he puts away all thought of it, though detesting the predicament.

In Cabinet he still strives to stop arbitrary eviction without compensation. Nothing at the moment could be more practical and salutary. Nothing else could mitigate at once the agrarian vendetta. This view—characteristic again of his realistic humanities—is rejected by his colleagues.[1]

The first coercive measure, the Bill for Protection of Life and Property, was forced through the House of Commons by February 24. Furious Irish resistance was overborne by crushing procedure. Even this the Radical leader had worked to mitigate. His next, and for a long period his last, fight of this kind in the Cabinet was on the second coercive measure, the Arms Bill. It made illegal the possession of arms and ammunition within proclaimed districts; took power to search suspected persons and houses; and to restrict the sale of arms.

This part of Forster's policy Chamberlain tried to stop altogether.

> Mr. Bright joined with me in endeavouring to get the Arms Bill withdrawn and several stormy discussions took place in the Cabinet on this subject. In the course of one of them Harcourt said "Coercion was like caviare—unpleasant at first to the palate but agreeable with use".[2]

At one moment he thought he had succeeded in preventing double-barrelled coercion. Gladstone's sympathies were with him. But Harcourt, now out and out with Forster and the Whigs for the iron hand in Ireland, carried the day. By a decisive majority the Cabinet settled to proceed with the Arms Bill. This too was forced through the House of Commons by overwhelming Liberal and Conservative majorities. Towards the end of March the Chief Secretary had triumphed in the Cabinet over his Radical opponent, and the Irish executive was equipped with all the repressive and suppressive powers that Dublin Castle could desire.

One more effort the Radical made in the same spirit. At the end of April the decision was taken to arrest John Dillon, just

[1] Dilke's Diary, January 22, 1881. [2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

then most passionate and sombre of all the Irish speakers who appealed to their people to resist eviction and defy coercion. The arrest would only make this fervid, picturesque man a martyr with a nimbus and double his moral power. Chamberlain opposed the step. The Cabinet was equally divided. Gladstone had brought in that gigantic half-measure—his Land Bill. Irish inappreciativeness seemed wilful sin. The Premier's own casting vote[1] defeated Chamberlain, and empowered the Castle administration to magnify Dillon by seizing him.

Chamberlain had now shot his bolt and lost his first long fight in the Government. Not for a year to come will he have any chance of renewing the struggle on the same lines. Then when he squares accounts with Forster and when the Cabinet comes round to his views at last, it will be too late.

His moral courage and good sense behind the scenes through the Ministerial episodes here recorded were little known at the time and less appreciated. It was remarked in the House of Commons during the coercion debates, that he and Dilke never once spoke on the main question. But Bright assailed the "rebel party" and the breach between him and Nationalist Ireland never was healed.

XI

Through months otherwise painful or repulsive Chamberlain fixed his mind and hope on the Land Bill. He regarded it as his justification for remaining in the Government. Through Labouchere and others, the Radical group in the House of Commons were in constant touch with their representative in the Cabinet. Already unhappy enough, they feared to be made more so by a policy of "strong coercion and weak reform". Chamberlain never doubted that the Land Bill would be much improved in Cabinet and further in the Committee stage, and he did help to mend it. Not, however, before he met an unexpected obstacle in the Prime Minister himself, who had to be dissuaded from a view which would have ruined the whole great design.

From the first, Chamberlain had expressed his own conviction that in Ireland nothing less than the concession of the Three F's would serve.[2] We may conceive his dismay and that of some

[1] Dilke's Diary.

[2] Fair Rents, Free Sale, Fixed Tenure.

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other colleagues when they first learned that the Premier's original scheme omitted the principal part of the triple formula. The following is a new footnote to history:

> The first draft of the Bill, as explained to the Cabinet by Mr. Gladstone, contained provisions for Fair Rents and Free Sale but not for Fixity of Tenure. The futility of this arrangement was pointed out to him, but he was obstinate and said he would resign sooner than accept a change. But at the next Cabinet, which was held within one or at most two days, without a word of explanation as to his reasons for the alteration, he brought in his amended proposal in much the same shape as the Land Bill ultimately presented to Parliament, and this practically gave all Three F's.[1]

With the Land Bill in Parliament, however, we are not concerned. Chamberlain was not amongst the few versed in the endless intricacies of its detail. Introduced early in April 1881, the Bill did not pass the House of Commons until the end of July and did not become law until mid-August. The Peers seemed inclined to exceed their mischief of a year before on the Compensation for Disturbance Bill and to kill the sheep like the lamb. Rejecting the Lords' amendments, the Government and Liberalism were prepared this time for a full trial of strength and for dissolution if necessary. Chamberlain mobilised the Caucus, and messages rained upon Liberal members urging them to "stand firm". In the second week of August the situation was still gravely strained. Then the Peers thought better of it; and, accepting the Bill, doomed in Ireland their order and all its connected interests. To work out the full sequel might take many years, but this was the beginning of the end. The Liberals intended this as little as the Peers. Sublime irony was inherent in the Irish conflict at that period.

Meanwhile the marked traits of legislative revolution in the Land Act gave a strong stimulus to Radical feeling in Great Britain. Chamberlain's growing stature in politics was admitted. He signalised himself when on June 7, in Birmingham Town Hall, he delivered the finest sustained speech that as a Minister he had made on the platform. It arrested national attention for more than one reason, and we shall have to recur to it. Here we must

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

keep to the Irish theme. In vibrant accents he defends remedial legislation and protests against political severance: "For my part I hate Coercion. I hate the name. I hate the thing. I am bound to say that I believe there is not one of my colleagues who does not hate it as I do. But then we hate disorder more. (Cheers.) It seems to me that the issue is now with the Irish people and those who lead them. They can have no doubt any longer as to the intentions of the Government. We have brought in a Land Bill. We have offered our message of peace to the Irish people. . . . I appeal to them not to make the policy of conciliation difficult or even impossible for us by acts of violence and disorder which every honest man condemns. . . ."

But then, pointing out that the Irish party were still obstructing in the House and threatening to harass the working of the Land Bill in Ireland, he added: "There is no secret about what I am going to say. There is no dispute about it. Mr. Parnell and those who follow him never concealed the fact that their chief object is not the removal of grievances in Ireland but the separation of Ireland from England. . . . How can we satisfy these men? Our object is not the same as theirs. . . . We want, I say, to bind the Irish people to this country in bonds of unity and cordial union; just as much as Scotland is united to England."

He was more and more in favour of extending self-government in Ireland to the widest extent unquestionably consonant with the unimpaired maintenance of a United Kingdom; but the notion of two separate legislatures and the removal of Irish representation from Westminster never entered nor approached his mind.

He received many congratulations on the Birmingham deliverance. Morley wrote at once:

> It is an admirable speech full of energy and go—and most excellent in diction. It will do you a deal of good and, perhaps what you care for more, it will do the party a deal of good too. . . . I am off to Rosebery's to dine and sleep and meet Gladstone, who is staying there.

XII

This autumn of 1881 saw a storm of controversy between parties. Pessimists speculated that real power was passing from

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the House of Commons to the platform. Chamberlain's inner mind is better followed in his correspondence than in his speeches. The state of Ireland in spite of the Land Act was plunging from bad to worse. He was in a divided mood. Holding that the Irish policy of disparaging the remedial Act and checking its operation was almost past forgiveness, and resolved to resist Parnell's political aims, he feels more at ease on the principle of coercion. Yet he soon begins to see that in practice coercion is likely to prove after all as hopeless as he had dreaded at the beginning.

The Chief Secretary fancied at first that, when equipped with sweeping powers of arrest on suspicion, he would not need to use them to the full, but would quell agitation by locking up local ringleaders—a few "village ruffians". This was the core of his original case. Against that view Chamberlain had minuted at once with keen realism:

> . . . It is really impossible to suppose that the arrest of thirty subordinate agents, as proposed by Mr. Forster, would immediately stop threatening letters and the assaults on life and property which are rife all over the country. It would be like firing with a rifle at a swarm of gnats. The tenants of Ireland are universally in a condition of excitement under which any one of them, in face of provocation, may take the law into his own hands. The remedy must be one which affects all—not the arrest of individuals when a whole nation has more or less escaped from the ordinary respect of the laws. (Minute marked "To Mr. Gladstone, 18/11/80".)

Now, nearly twelve months after, this judgment proved right to the letter. The gaols were crammed with suspects, but that did not diminish or cool the agitation. They might as well have hoped by filling buckets to cure a tempest at sea.

At the beginning of October the Chief Secretary and others were demanding further coercion; this time they wanted to strike with a vengeance by arresting Parnell, and taking powers to suppress the Land League. This last, if attempted by legislative enactment, would involve serious questions for Trade Unionism in Great Britain.

Rather than stomach this, Chamberlain again is inclined to go out. But he is not sure. Why did he ever join this lot? Think-

ing, chafing, at Highbury probably using some strong language to himself, he shares his mind with his ally:

TO DILKE

Highbury, October 4, 1881.—I have yours of 30th Sept. here where I am settled till the Cabinets begin. . . . I am very uneasy about the Irish business. . . . It is the history of last October over again. . . . I am clear that we were right in resisting coercion last year, and I even wish we had gone further and gone out upon it. But what is to be done now? . . . Can we go further in the direction of coercion? I doubt if the House of Commons would stand it. To put down the Land League would involve so many questions affecting public agitation in this country that the Radicals would surely be up in arms. It is possible the Tories might do it if they were in office which I wish to God they were. But can the Liberals do it, and above all can you and I be parties to any more of such work?

Then he shows frankly the opposite side of his mood, as was often his way in confidential intercourse though almost never in public:

I should not have a moment's hesitation in saying No—if I could find any alternative, but it is evident that Parnell has now got beyond us. He asks for No Rent and Separation, and I am not prepared to say that the refusal of such terms as these constitutes an Irish grievance. I should like to stand aside—and let the Coercionists and Parnell fight it out together. But I fear this is not now possible. Altogether it is a horrible imbroglio, and for the moment I don't see my way out of the fog.

Chamberlain had been hardening more and more against Parnell, and at this phase fully shared John Bright's view of the "rebel party". Not that the indissoluble association of agrarian and nationalist feeling in Ireland was what he yet understood.

But by the legislative revolution of the Land Act the Irish peasants recovered at least something like co-equal right in the soil, and the real Cromwellian basis was shattered. All who profoundly knew Ireland saw that dual ownership was but a step to the total abolition of landlordism. And then? Other things would go.

Parnell during the debate on coercion had avowed the double object of his political insurrection. "If landlordism were

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abolished . . . Ireland would peaceably and without violence obtain its legislative independence, linked to Great Britain by the bond of the Crown"; and he went on in weighed phrases to maintain that separation was a right, though something short of it might be expedient. On this the clash would come sooner or later between the Radical leader and the Irish leader.

XIII

Stroke and counter-stroke followed fast. At Leeds, on October 7, Gladstone with the thunder and lightning of language denounced Parnell as a preacher of hatred and plunder, and warned him that the "resources of civilisation against its enemies are not yet exhausted". At Wexford the Irish leader mocked at the Prime Minister's rebukes, and held him up to scorn as a "masquerading knight-errant". Ministers were brought to town for a sudden Cabinet held on Wednesday, October 12. After four hours' deliberation, Chamberlain not demurring now, but accepting sterner coercion "with all its consequences", they decided to seize Parnell. The Chief Secretary hurried to Dublin with the order.

Next day Parnell was arrested and taken to Kilmainham gaol. All these things had happened in a few days, since Chamberlain's letter to Dilke. There was to be another reverberating week of stroke and counter-stroke. From Kilmainham, to keep the movement going and to temporise with its extremists, Parnell launched the No-Rent Manifesto which he despised. The Cabinet instantly suppressed the League by proclamation. In honesty and laceration of soul Forster was fighting a man's fight, though not that of a great man. How kindly the gods look down on a good man struggling with adversity depends much upon whether the man has been wise as well as good. The stubborn, warm-hearted ex-Quaker had now staked his all on coercion and strained its utmost resources. A short period must determine the issue one way or the other and his own fate.

These scenes fixed a world's attention. Only two in the world fully knew that the theme of *All for Love* was involved. How this vivid thread works into the texture of the present narrative will quickly appear.

Nothing seems clearer than that in the autumn Parnell was deliberately provocative to an extent that no motive solely political could explain. He desired not to avoid arrest, but to court it, to make it inescapable. The reason is that on account of his child not yet born he was in an unbearable extremity. Humanly he could not remain free without making his tenderness the sure cause of his detection. If he meant to remain a political leader and yet communicate with the woman he worshipped through the time when she was herself in fear, his only resorts were prison and invisible ink. For his sake it was best; above all for hers. Just before the arrest he warned Mrs. O'Shea that "any further effort to avoid arrest would be inexpedient on all counts".[1] Immediately on his arrest he wrote, "The only thing that makes me worried and unhappy is that it may hurt you and our child . . . if anything happens to you I must die childless".[2]

There is one cheerful incident. The O'Gorman Mahon, M.P., was already over eighty, but full of the zest of his picaresque life. Approaching Chamberlain to plead for Parnell, he was asked by the Minister what guarantee he could give for his chief. "By God! sir," cried the old fire-eater, "if he doesn't behave I will shoot him!"

But Chamberlain, for political reasons, now thought Parnell impossible and wrote (October 12) to Dilke: "In for a penny in for a pound. I hope it will be a clean sweep. The electors will better stand a crushing blow than coercion by driblets."

XIV

Morley was of another mind, and the divergence caused lively argument between two devoted companions. Practical relations were necessarily changed since the time when Morley was simply the editor of the *Fortnightly Review*. Then there were weeks to discuss questions and adjust opinions and arrive at an identical alignment. Now as the editor of an evening newspaper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the great journalist often had to make up his mind and to take his line on the instant without a chance of consulta-

[1] *Charles Stewart Parnell*, by his Wife, vol. i. p. 203.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 207 (Oct. 13, 1881).

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tion. The Minister, on the other hand, had to regulate his policy with some regard—though the minimum—to the Cabinet as a whole. Occasional divergencies between the two became unavoidable. But affection was rooted deep. To help towards completion of the *Life of Cobden*—of all books as we may now say—Chamberlain had lent the author a sum, punctiliously repaid when the celebrated task was done. Rather like an oasis in the political sands are Morley's references to this work and its success.

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

Kingussie, N.B., August 14, 1881.— . . . I am driving away at Cobden like a house on fire. It will be finished before my holiday is over, D.V. . . .

Kingussie, N.B., August 21.— . . . I am as happy as a prince up here, working excellently at Cobden—breathing splendid air. . . . From this distance Pall Mall looks like pandæmonium. 'Tis a pity you don't let the suspects out. . . .

Putney, October 2.— . . . Dear Chamberlain, you know how grateful I am to you, and shall remain all my poor days.

Reform Club, October 22.—Amid engrossing affairs of State you will spare time to be pleased with the reception that "Cobden" has had from the press. *The Times* is really most handsome and generous: *Standard* (T.H.E.) ditto.

Pall Mall Gazette, October 25.—I *have* sent you the Cobden. . . . The success amazes me. Long, prompt, and uniformly laudatory reviews in all quarters. The sale has been first rate—1,500 exhausted in four days: they are going to press with another 1,500 at once. Gladstone wrote me seven pages, very civil and friendly. Altogether—I'm astonished. Your guest who writes in *The World* [Escott] calls me in that paper, "A shrewd hard-headed man of the world". I think I shall go in for bubble companies on the strength of that reputation. Did I make this joke to you before?

This harmony of private sympathies was interrupted by sudden jars when the political feelings of most men became exasperated. Sometimes more fore-sighted than the statesmen, Morley was full of misgiving about the Irish conflict and how it would turn out. In his *Pall Mall Gazette* he harried the Government without being as solid in positive advice as he was damaging in

censure. From this immediately after Parnell's seizure sprang an athletic tussle between two adepts: CHAP. XVI. ÆT. 44–46.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY (October-December 1881)

Highbury, October 18.—*J. C. to J. M.*—For heaven's sake do not let us "wobble". I say "us" because you and I are in the same boat, you in the Press and I in the Cabinet. . . . We are agreed that it is impossible to concede the present demands of the Irish Party—that national independence cannot be given to Ireland. No other *modus vivendi* with Parnell and his associates is possible. It is therefore war to the knife between a despotism created to re-establish constitutional law and a despotism not less completely elaborated to subvert law and produce anarchy as a precedent to revolutionary changes. If this be so, what is the use of criticising in detail the means adopted? Coercion in any form is hateful to us, but coercion with a silk glove would be ridiculous. . . .

Athenaeum Club, October 19.—*J. M. to J. C.*— . . . Everybody that I meet in these days talks as if I had got myself into an absurd fix and were trying to wriggle myself off the hook. That would not matter a pin to me, if I did not really *feel* in a fix. . . . In my heart I feel that the League has done downright good work in raising up the tenants against their truly detestable tyrants. . . . My pride, my temper, and my contempt for John Bull in a passion make me a bad hand at this moment. Your letter has done me good. . . .

Highbury, October 20.—*J. C. to J. M.*— . . . I do not see the slightest inconsistency in the line which we decided to take. We have always said and we still maintain that coercion is hateful. . . . We have admitted that it may become a necessity, and we are quite prepared to show that in that case we can carry out an ungrateful duty as sternly and as determinedly as any Tory of them all. . . . Never mind what the cluttering fools in London say. In a week or two they will have forgotten it all and be singing a different note. Pitch into the Tories who are taking advantage of the situation. . . .

J. M. to J. C.—I don't care a tuppenny d—n for the Tories, nor for the cluttering fools in London. But I don't want to be dished as a democrat for the rest of my natural life. There's the rub. It is nothing for a practical minister—but the case of the spiritual Power is different. However, I shall stick to it.

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Highbury, October 22.—*J. C. to J. M.*—Have you looked at Mill's pamphlet, *England and Ireland* . . . ? There is a passage on page 27 which exactly meets the present situation and shows that Mill would not have objected to coercion under the circumstances. . . . Our line is perfectly defensible. . . . People have short memories; and do not expect even from their spiritual advisers absolute infallibility.

Athenaeum Club, October 27.—*J. M. to J. C.*—I congratulate you on your Liverpool tour. It must have been a very great success and it certainly has done much good to the position of the Government in the country. . . . The Irish defence was as good as it is capable of being made.

Athenaeum Club, November 2.—*J. M. to J. C.*—His [Gladstone's] speeches have not made much mark. Yours have taken the wind out of his expedition; there is no doubt of it.[1] Lord Monck (just back from Ireland) thinks your Irish speech as good as possible, but Gladstone's at Leeds and Guildhall most mischievous, which is true. . . . I'm going to the play to-night with Spencer, Tyndall and L. Courtney. I'd rather go with you.

XV

Chamberlain throughout 1881 made no notable reference in Parliament to Irish affairs. At this phase, and for some years to come, his speeches in the country far excelled his best efforts in the House. When he visited Liverpool towards the end of October he well repaid a great welcome. He had taken exceptional trouble with his notes, and the power of his statement was for once recognised by Conservatives as well as Liberals.

"I say deliberately that if this agitation had followed English precedent; if its leaders had carried on within the spirit as well as within the letter of the law; if they had discountenanced violence and intimidation—then there was no agitation in the United Kingdom more deserving of untiring sympathy, and more entitled to complete success. But unfortunately they did not do that . . . the secret object was to inflame the grievance, not to remove it. It was to use it as a basis for securing national independence."

From this argument developed a further passage, and it will

[1] After Gladstone's oratory at Leeds, Chamberlain had spoken with great power at Liverpool.

become more and more significant as the present narrative proceeds:

"I say to Ireland what the Liberals or Republicans of the North said to the Southern States of America, 'The Union must be preserved'. Within these limits there is nothing which you may not ask and hope to obtain. Equal laws, equal justice, equal opportunities, equal prosperity—these shall be freely accorded to you. Your wishes shall be our guide, your prejudices shall be by us respected, your interests shall be our interests, but nature and your position have forged indissoluble links which cannot be sundered without being fraught with consequences of misery and ruin to both our countries, and which, therefore, we shall use all the resources of the Empire to keep intact." [1]

But, as he is never tired of repeating in private and public, coercion itself is as odious to him as ever. "It is not a fact for insolent exultation," he cried at Liverpool; "it is a blot on civilisation." Several correspondents warn him that the situation is still darkening and convince him that the antagonism to Gladstone's Land Act is not altogether so perverse as he had thought; that the Act for all its size and complexity is not adequate; that large reductions of rents will have to be made.

The Radical leader in November thinks yet again of resigning. But he decides that he is too deeply committed and must fight out this battle with the Land League, unless or until something unexpected happens. He sets his teeth:

TO MORLEY

December 18, 1881.—I hate coercion, but I loathe violence and disorder more. I do not judge the morality of Irish proceedings, but I recognise facts. We are in a state of war, and I will use every conceivable means to come out victorious. They want to destroy the Government, and perhaps in this they may be successful. They want also to make all government of Ireland by England impossible, and in this they will assuredly fail, as all our people, Radicals included, will resist them to the death. . . . They have great practical wrongs and grievances and one sentimental grievance—the Union. The latter is one on which we cannot and will not yield. . . . You will receive in a few days a barrel of the cele-

[1] Liverpool, October 25, 1881.

BOOK IV. 1880–82.

brated Birmingham oysters—all approved by the Caucus. Pray let them remind you of your sincere and affectionate friend.

With the Prime Minister himself the Radical leader, still watching for any chance to find a way out of coercion, opens a more instructive correspondence:

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE

December 14, 1881.—*J. C. to Mr. G.*— . . . I am very anxious to know your mind on two points. . . . The first is as to the threatened claim for compensation to landlords . . . the only persons I should be inclined to compensate are the unfortunate tenants who have been racked and robbed for so many years without hope of redress. The other point is as to the demand for some further measure of coercion. . . . Of course, martial law is out of the question, and the only practical proposal made is the suspension of the jury laws. I cannot see the object of this. We have already the power to imprison everyone whom the executive suspect. Surely it is not proposed to try, without a jury, persons whom we do not even suspect. . . .

December 15, 1881.—*Mr. G. to J. C.*—From Mr. Plunkett's speech I learn that you are a very dangerous person, but I have little else to do than to say ditto to your letter on the Irish question. . . . As far as my present knowledge goes, I see no case for compensation, and no case for more coercion; and the abolition of trial by jury would appear to be sheer folly. . . . But without doubt there is great and formidable mischief to deal with, and the Government will act freely, and boldly in support of the law as it is now doing, and with any additional improvement of means which experience may suggest.

So a chequered year in Chamberlain's career ended; and a far stranger year for him began with 1882. The Irish misery dragged on. While Parnell was in prison Captain Moonlight was at large. Laying hands on thousands of suspects, the vigilance system of Dublin Castle did not suspect the Invincibles. The suppression of the Land League forced the growth of the secret societies. But a man like Lord Spencer, whose Irish knowledge now carried weight in the Cabinet, wrote (December 21, 1881) to Chamberlain that the situation, however serious, was improving; that though coercion by itself might be a failure, the remedial working of the Land Act was breaking the back of agrarian agitation.

The Radical Minister was besieged by Irish sympathisers begging him to take the lead in some new course of conciliation. To these contrasting views he answered by emphasising his dual policy—on one side adamant against violence; on the other ardent for reform.

At the beginning of 1882, we find him with sound foresight pressing the Prime Minister to deal with the burning grievance of continued evictions for old arrears of rents proved by the new Land Courts to be unjust or iniquitous. On January 10 Mr. Gladstone rather demurred: "To amend the Land Act on any point at this moment would be hazardous". The Prime Minister was soon to do at a less favourable moment what his Radical lieutenant recommended. In this position, until towards the Easter of 1882, affairs and opinions stood unchanged. No man could have been more wholly astonished than Chamberlain when he was suddenly invoked to play the part of the dove with the olive branch. He might well be astonished. But he did not know some circumstances that made the next affair more like extravagant fiction than like a credible transaction in British politics.

CHAPTER XVII

OLIVE BRANCH AND TRAGEDY—KILMAINHAM PACT AND PHOENIX PARK MURDERS

(1882)

PARNELL'S Parole—Enter Captain O'Shea—Chamberlain and the Olive Branch—"At his own Risk"—He succeeds—The Kilmainham Treaty—A Great Hope—Chamberlain expected to succeed Forster—Passed over—The Assassinations and the Day After—Parnell's Interviews—Chamberlain again passed over—Mr. Gladstone's Motives—Another Dark Chapter in Ireland.

I

BOOK IV. 1882.

PARNELL wished to be released for reasons public as well as private. Agrarian agitation at that phase had achieved all it could. There were 30,000 troops in Ireland as well as the constabulary. He decided to swing the Irish movement into a quieter course, lulling English opinion for a useful period, though his further intention never changed—to master by degrees the Imperial Parliament. The private reasons were poignant.

Messages in invisible ink brought sadness and anguish. He asked to be let out on parole, ostensibly to attend in Paris the funeral of a young nephew. When he arrived at Eltham his own dying child was put into his arms before he went on to Paris, observing the forms. Bonfires flared through his three provinces and much of the fourth when his release on April 10 became known.

The same night Chamberlain hears the news—from Bunce, the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*. He is amazed. "If it has really taken place members of the Cabinet have been very badly treated in not having the slightest opportunity of offering an

opinion."[1] But he does not yet know that the release is on parole.

Wonders begin. A letter arrives at Highbury from Captain O'Shea.

We must mark well the figure who now enters these pages, for it will be long before we see the last of him. Suave and smiling as he looks, minor though clever personage as you might yet think him, with his ambitious meddling in the coming years and his vengeance when thwarted, he will make or mar as much history as any of them. He walks in like a character come to life out of the later novels of Charles Lever. Yet Captain O'Shea is no quite inconsiderable being. Sprung from the commercial middle class in Ireland, well educated, with an air of continental cultivation, he has been in the Hussars and has married into English Society. He has a dash of the fop and a good Under-Secretary's aptitude for politics—though he mistakes this for the quality of a statesman. Well-groomed and convivial, a man of fashion in his way, with expensive habits and an inadequate income of his own, he is a gay diner-out, agreeably acquainted amongst all parties. Now, he becomes a facile and assiduous intermediary.

The smooth finish of his manners seems reflected in the large rounded copper-plate of his handwriting. It is copy-book perfection without one touch of character. Inwardly he took a more serious view of himself, and with the highest opinion of his own political and diplomatic talents—and they were bright though superficial—he felt like a man ill-recognised. His darling aspiration, as yet, was to become Irish Under-Secretary and thus master of many things in his country and especially of its patronage. His foible was vanity, and through his foible he will be duped before he turns. His wife and Parnell flattered his political hopes to the top of his bent. Parnell, like Gladstone, sometimes talks of retiring. The favourite device of his dissimulated hatred is to affect feebleness in presence of the puppet. He suggests that he may nominate "the Captain" as his successor. Assuredly "the Captain" at this time is preening himself. It is possible that his first suspicions of the relations between the two had been allayed, and that now and for long afterwards he was most masterfully deceived.

[1] To Bunce, April 10, 1882.

II

BOOK IV. 1882.

Moved by an adroit woman—and we must remember that she was concealing at the time distress of heart as well as passion—O'Shea at first attempted *pourparlers* with Mr. Gladstone himself.

A presumptuous letter—framed after consultation with Parnell, and no doubt with Mrs. O'Shea, but carefully represented as being written on "the Captain's" sole initiative and responsibility—reminds the Prime Minister of earlier overtures, and reproaches him for not having had the wisdom to accept them. The long and clever epistle proceeds:

> At the eleventh hour and even under the aggravated circumstances I believe that the pacification of Ireland is by no means so difficult as it appears to be. But you must pay for it, and you must cease to ignore an important Irishman. . . . The person to whom Mr. Parnell addresses himself in many cases (much as I differ from him in serious matters of politics and policy) is myself. . . . Eighteen months ago he used every effort to induce me to take over the leadership of the party. I mention these things (the last one is known only to two or three besides ourselves) as an explanation of what would otherwise appear to be fatuous officiousness. . . .[1]

He goes on with the same assurance to suggest heads of arrangement between the Government and the Irish party. Gladstone did not encourage this style. Then, in mid-April, the intermediary turned to the Radical of the Cabinet, as "a Minister without pedantry"; and adopts a different tone:

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

April 15, 1882.—As you appear to be a Minister without political pedantry, I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of a letter which I have written to Mr. Gladstone. . . . I ask you how the Liberal party is to get in at the next election, and at the one after, and so on against the Irish vote? And if by any chance it did get in how on earth is it to get on? Why is the Government in such a mess? Simply because Liberal Ministers failed to perceive the signs of the times. . . . You have to deal with men and things as they are, and although time and many hateful incidents have

[1] O'Shea to Gladstone, April 13, 1882. Copy in the Chamberlain Papers.

aggravated the difficulties, still I believe that it might be to the advantage of the Liberal party if its leaders were to try to compromise honourably, and that such an effort might be met by the most influential Irishman of the day in a candid and moderate spirit. This letter and enclosure are, of course, confidential.

While Parnell was still in Paris, this brisk, tempting missive was written on a Saturday. This latter detail ought to be marked, because the present chapter, dealing with an almost incredible four weeks, must be almost a day-to-day narrative.

Unlike the Prime Minister, Chamberlain up to this had no knowledge whatever of this emissary beyond exchanging a few words in the lobbies of the House; and he took a day to consider.

We have his own reminiscence:

> I received his letter very hopefully. It seemed to me to offer the possibility of a new departure and of an understanding with the Irish representatives, which might lead to a permanent and satisfactory settlement. The Government had started with the best intentions, but their efforts had been frustrated—first by the rejection of the Compensation for Disturbance Bill in the Lords, and second by the introduction of coercive legislation before land grievances had been dealt with.[1]

After twenty-four hours' reflection in this mood, Chamberlain on Monday morning, April 17, sent a reply guarded but not discouraging:

CHAMBERLAIN TO O'SHEA

> [*Monday*] *April* 17, 1882.—I am really very much obliged to you for your letter and especially for the copy of your very important and interesting communication to Mr. Gladstone. I am not in a position, as you will readily understand, to write fully on the subject. I have no authority to commit my colleagues, and I am bound to some extent to reserve my personal opinions; but I think I may say that there appears to be nothing in your proposals which does not deserve consideration, and which might not be the basis of a subsequent agreement. . . .
>
> There is one thing you must bear in mind and that is that if the Government, and the Liberal party generally, are bound to show greater consideration than they have hitherto done for Irish opinion, on the other hand the leaders of the Irish party must pay some attention

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK IV. 1882.

to public opinion in England and Scotland . . since the present Government have been in office they have had not the slightest assistance in this direction. . . . The result is that nothing would be easier at the present moment than to get up in every large town an anti-Irish agitation almost as formidable as the anti-Jewish agitation in Russia. I fail to see how Irishmen or Ireland profit by such a policy as this, and I shall rejoice whenever the time comes that a more conciliatory spirit is manifested on both sides.

III

The mingled amenity and sternness of this answer makes the Captain less jaunty, but more eager. He agrees entirely with the Minister's spirit. "What the French call the psychological moment ought not to be lost." "Parnell will be with me at the end of the week."[1] Meanwhile may the Minister's letter be communicated to the Irish leader? To this Chamberlain at once consents.

At the same time from the Board of Trade he writes a very important letter to the Prime Minister informing him of what is occurring. In effect he says that a golden moment has perhaps arrived for conciliation, and he offers to attempt it:

April 18, 1882.—*J. C. to Mr. G.*— . . . Mr. Parnell is tired of prison life and would, I think, be found reasonable. . . . Might it not be worth while to open negotiations? I have not liked to speak to any of the Irish members for fear of embarrassing Mr. Forster, but I could if permitted to do so, approach Healy, Gray, O'Shea, and others of the party—without committing the Government—and ascertain in what humour they are —that is to say whether they are still anxious to make all government impossible in Ireland, or whether they are now ready to unite with us to secure the good government of their country. I have always thought that we made a mistake, in the first instance when we came into office, in not taking any steps to communicate with any member of the Irish party outside Ulster.

I cannot but think that Mr. Parnell and his friends might have been committed to our policy—or at least precluded from actual opposition —if some show of consulting them, before that policy had been finally decided on, had been made.

One other point I would press upon your consideration. Might not

[1] O'Shea to Chamberlain, Tuesday, April 18, 1882.

Mr. Forster offer Mr. Parnell, who seems to be suffering from indisposition, an extension of his parole under present conditions? [1]

Gladstone is benevolent:

I will send your letter to Forster. With you I attach importance to the fact that the extreme men are introducing a Bill to amend the Land Act. It may be a question whether they could go further except upon some movement from us towards meeting their overture.[2]

At this, the President of the Board of Trade sees the Chief Secretary, who authorises him to tell Captain O'Shea that the Irish leader's parole

might be extended if he wished it, and either on the ground of his indisposition or of his desire to be with his sister who had just lost her son. I met Captain O'Shea at the House of Commons on the 21st [Friday], and the same evening I received his reply.[3]

It was dry and short. The Irish leader through O'Shea refuses to ask any extension of his parole, and will present himself in due course at Kilmainham. This is Parnell's own diplomacy. He is too wary to introduce into the negotiations at this stage any bargain for his own release such as if known would ruin him in Irish opinion. But he means business all the same.

All that same night he and O'Shea sat up framing the first draft of the Kilmainham treaty; and Parnell's child died at daybreak. A piercing hour for a man and a woman who had to mask what they felt except when alone with each other.

That Saturday, April 22, was momentous. A Cabinet was held; Chamberlain read the documents and explained the circumstances. He was authorised to enter into negotiation on his own responsibility and at the risk of being disavowed if he failed, or made any false step.[4] On those hazardous terms—with Forster on his flank—he undertook the task.

The same evening O'Shea brought to Prince's Gate the ideas worked out at Eltham through the trying night before, and in his presence Chamberlain wrote down a celebrated memorandum:

[1] Chamberlain to Gladstone, Tuesday, April 18, 1882.
[2] Gladstone to Chamberlain, Wednesday, April 19, 1882.
[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[4] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". He adds, "At this meeting Forster did not show any unfriendliness, nor did he give any indication of a wish to resign".

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If the Government announce a satisfactory plan of dealing with arrears, Mr. Parnell will advise all tenants to pay rents and will denounce outrages, resistance to law and all processes of intimidation, whether by boycotting or in any other way. No plan of dealing with arrears will be satisfactory which does not wipe them off compulsorily by a com position—one-third payable by tenant, one-third by the State—from the Church Fund or some other source—and one-third remitted by the landlord, but so that the contribution of the tenant and the State shall not exceed one year's rent each—the balance, if any, to be remitted by the landlord.

Arrears to be defined as arrears accruing up to May 1, 1881.[1]

On Sunday morning (the 23rd) O'Shea in person brought back full confirmation from his principal,[2] who urged in addition that the release and aid of Michael Davitt were vital to the success of the new policy, especially of the stipulated exertions to stop outrages, intimidation and the No-rent movement. At this Chamberlain went out to call on Forster, Bright and Harcourt. The former only made demur on details, and all agreed that there seemed a bright prospect of settlement. To this effect the Radical peace-maker the same evening informed the Prime Minister. The rapid drama of one week seemed to have cleared the whole outlook, and Chamberlain had not been in higher hope since he joined the Government.

IV

But Forster kicked again, and now with real mulishness. "Parnell and Co.", he said, must publish their pledges.[3] That useless humiliation would have extinguished the influence the Chief Secretary desired them to assert. This was a tight knot —to be loosened if persuasion could do it or else to be cut at the cost of Forster's official life.

[1] Produced in O'Shea's evidence before the Special Commission, 1888.

[2] "The proportions in the Memorandum (of which I enclose a copy) appear to Mr. Parnell to be just. At the same time he considers that an alteration of detail ought to be introduced so as to give tenants who have made payments on account the full benefit of the composition. He adds that the date ought to be extended to Nov. 1, 1881."

[3] Forster to Chamberlain, April 23, 1882. "An assurance by which they will be bound in honour before the public—that is an undertaking that they will not themselves renew an agitation to replace the law of the land by their law. . . ."

There were other hitches in this second week of the negotiations, after Parnell went back to prison on Monday, April 24. Through O'Shea he made a last bold effort to raise his terms and suggested large concessions on coercion and on other agrarian questions besides the understood settlement of arrears.[1]

Chamberlain flatly refused to be drawn further. He was risking his own political life, and they had met their match. O'Shea backed down at once. "My note was in no way intended to spring any fresh demand on you."[2]

Keeping his colleagues acquainted with everything, the Minister now extended his conversations to several Irish members. Amongst others he talked to T. M. Healy, who records the meeting in his reminiscences:

"In a downstairs room of the House of Commons I met the Birmingham magnate immersed in a cigar. . . . I parted with him feeling that he was an honest man thrust into a thorny situation" (April 25). Healy "inferred from the conciliatory spirit shown by Gladstone and Chamberlain that Parnell was about to give in"[3]. This follower already was no friend to his leader. But in the House of Commons Healy himself, like his colleagues, was amiable when the Government met with friendly words the Irish party's Bill for amending the Land Act.

This return to constitutional procedure moved Mr. Gladstone's benignity. The whole outlook according to Chamberlain's desire seemed to be clearing and brightening within ten days from his getting to work. Conservatives themselves talked of releasing Parnell and the suspects, and moderating coercion. A genial atmosphere breathed in the House of Commons; and public opinion outside was enlivened by sanguine expectations of a new departure.

Frustrated as he was, and deserted as he felt, the Chief Secretary grumbled somewhat that the negotiations were "leaking out". In fact confidence on all main points had been guarded with unusual success.

When on April 28—Friday of this second week—Lord Spencer's appointment as Viceroy was announced, the signs of change were plain to all men. Chamberlain put it to O'Shea that it was high

[1] O'Shea to Chamberlain, Monday, April 24, 1882.

[2] Same to the same, Wednesday, April 26, 1882.

[3] T. M. Healy, K.C., *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. i. p. 155.

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time now for Parnell to make some binding and public declaration. At the Radical Minister's suggestion apparently, though without any direct request of his to Forster, the emissary at once asked the Chief Secretary for permission to visit Parnell in gaol. The assent[1] was Forster's own act. That evening he informed Chamberlain. O'Shea was already posting to Dublin.

V

On April 29, a Saturday morning, the Figaro of politics drove up to Kilmainham gaol "in a four-wheel cab" officially accompanied by the deputy chairman of the Irish Prisons Board. The conversations with Parnell lasted from eleven o'clock to five in the afternoon with decisive results. "The Captain", feeling it one of the lucky moments of his life, speeds back to London bringing Parnell's historic letter, presents it to Forster on Sunday morning, and gives a copy to Chamberlain:

Private and Confidential.

KILMAINHAM,
April 28, 1882.

MY DEAR O'SHEA—I was very sorry you had left Albert Mansions before I reached London from Eltham. . . . I desire to impress upon you the absolute necessity of a settlement of the arrears question, which shall leave no recurring sore. . . . If the arrears question be settled upon the lines indicated by us, I have every confidence—a confidence shared by my colleagues—that the exertions which we should be able to make strenuously and unremittingly would be effective in stopping outrages and intimidation of all kinds. . . . It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon the enormous advantage to be derived from the full extension of the purchase clauses, which now seems practically to have been adopted by all parties. The accomplishment of the programme I have sketched out to you, would, in my judgment, be regarded by the country as a practical settlement of the Land Question and would, I feel sure, enable us to co-operate cordially for the future with the Liberal party in forwarding Liberal principles and measures of general reform. And I believe that the Government at the end of this Session would, from the state of the

[1] O'Shea says: "Mr. Forster gave me an order so that I might make it clear to the Cabinet how everything was going on". Evidence of W. H. O'Shea before the Parnell Commission, October 31, 1888.

country, find themselves thoroughly justified in dispensing with further coercive measures. CHAP. XVII. ÆT. 46.

With this in his hands, on Monday morning—when the third week began, fated to end in fearful tragedy—Chamberlain triumphed, and had reason. In fourteen days his efforts seemed to have transformed the political outlook.

Coercion had been a detestable necessity. He wished it to cease. A democratic alliance between Liberalism and the Irish party had been his early, but thus far disappointed dream. Now what vistas were opened of British reform and Irish reconstruction—of everything short of disrupting the legislative union. It was the best May-day so far of his life political.

So radiantly began the third week of this intrepid and skilful endeavour—a week destined to close in eclipse.

That same day the Cabinet, to Gladstone's happiness, decided for peace—to release immediately the Irish leader and his comrades and without further conditions. Days before, the Viceroy, Lord Cowper, had resigned. A man of vast property and not insignificant in character or attainments, he had always been stronger for coercion than the Chief Secretary himself. When the Kilmainham transaction began he would have none of it. The new Viceroy, Lord Spencer, always high in Gladstone's favour, had received a seat in the Cabinet, and concurred in the new policy.

Forster in his turn determined to have naught to do with it. Next day—Tuesday, May 2—he left the Government on the ground that Parnell's assurances were inadequate and unsatisfactory.[1] The loose-limbed, rugged man, with the rough, red-grey beard and furrowed brow, was charged with all the moral belligerency of Quaker blood. Of cogent ability without perceptive imagination, obstinate yet anxious, kindly-earnest in the Irish question without ever understanding what it was, stung by torturing insult and dogged by assassins, he waged his struggle according to his lights with a clean conscience and flawless courage. To secure his assent to the new policy Chamberlain had sincerely laboured. Without his intention this time, Forster was brought to the ground by his antagonist of ten years

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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before in the Education struggle: the momentary victor not suspecting that one day he would have to face on the Irish question a worse ordeal of hatred than Forster had endured.

Gladstone's comment years after was that "Forster having laid down a condition for the release of Parnell, and having obtained its perfect fulfilment, resigned because he had not got it!"[1] More lenient always was Chamberlain's view of his old antagonist's exit—"he wanted to get out of the Irish Office, and naturally was on the look-out for a reason".[2]

And again:

> He was, I believe, absolutely honest and conscientious. He was brave and untiring in his work. . . . It is not certain that any other man or any other policy would have succeeded where he failed, but his failure was complete, and the time had come to make a new experiment.[3]

He continues:

> His [Forster's] resignation appeared to mark a new stage in the history of the Irish Question, and to close the long struggle that had been going on in the Cabinet from its first formation. The situation seemed to most of us very hopeful. At last the alternative policy would have a chance of being fairly tried. I believed in the sincerity of Mr. Parnell, and that with his assistance the reforms required to complete and supplement the Land Act would be proceeded with, unprejudiced by arbitrary measures of repression and coercion. The Arrears Bill was to be immediately introduced. Later on, if it were found absolutely necessary, a moderate extension of the criminal law might be carried without serious opposition even from the Irish members; but it was open to us to hope that even this might be found unnecessary, and that the complete pacification of the country would give no excuse for any difference between the law in Ireland and in Great Britain.[4]

VI

After Forster would Chamberlain be the new Chief Secretary? Not fully known but widely rumoured, his part had been such that the whole country, friend and foe, at that instant pointed

[1] August 11, 1888. Gladstone to Morley for communication to Chamberlain.

[2] Chamberlain to Morley, August 11, 1888.

[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[4] *Ibid.*

to him as the right choice for Ireland. Lord Morley often testified to this after the political severance between these friends.

Healy records:

> On Tuesday, 2nd May, 1882, Parnell, Dillon and O'Kelly were released from Kilmainham Jail, and Gladstone made the formal announcement of the resignation of Chief Secretary Forster, and the Lord Lieutenant Cowper. Chamberlain came to me next day, and asked me to go to the smoke-room. . . . I assumed from Chamberlain's conversation that he was to be Chief Secretary in lieu of Forster. . . . Chamberlain was frank and winning, and I felt sorry to have to hold him at arm's length, as I realised he was sincere. After some talk he asked if I could get Sexton and Arthur O'Connor to join us. I did so, and in our further conversation conceived a high respect for his character. I felt that a straight-forward and truthful man of business confronted us. . . . We parted that afternoon in the hope that he would take Forster's place.[1]

In Cabinet a few days before, the Radical Minister had shown his fitness for the post in a masterly memorandum upon the reorganisation of Irish government. One of the ablest, clearest papers he ever wrote, argued for consulting Irish representatives; for abolishing general coercion and replacing it by a minimum of special powers; for amending the Land Act by wiping out the haunting arrears of excessive rents, and expediting the work of fixing fair rents; for a Royal Commission on the condition of the Irish labourers; for a great programme of public works.

He seemed marked out pre-eminently to conduct an Irish administration animated by this thorough spirit of friendly intercourse and constructive energy. On Wednesday, May 3, amidst premature congratulations, he waited for the offer of Forster's place. Far from coveting that reversion, he would have accepted it as a matter of duty.

No offer came. Why? This is a most curious question, better discussed a little later in this chapter.[2]

Next morning — Thursday, May 4 — a perplexed country

[1] T. M. Healy, vol. i. p. 155.

[2] On May 2, immediately after Forster's resignation, Chamberlain wrote to Gladstone strongly urging that the new Chief Secretary should be an Irishman, and naming Mr. Shaw, leader of the moderate Home Rulers. O'Shea, himself a Home Ruler moderate enough, protested at once that it would not do, and that the complications would be worse for any Irishman than for an Englishman like Chamberlain.

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learned that Hartington's blameless brother, Lord Frederick Cavendish, hitherto Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a personal favourite with Mr. Gladstone, had been appointed in this emergency. And without a seat in the Cabinet. There were many murmurs. Lord Frederick was described by some as an unproved man; by others as "a painstaking devotee of the Prime Minister". The Ministerial organ, the *Daily News*, thought that a great opportunity had been thrown away; the Irish papers were all displeased by a "colourless appointment".

O'Shea asserted that at Parnell's desire he went to Gladstone and asked him to appoint Chamberlain to Ireland. The following communications are notes on the margin of a perverse story:

May 2 (*Tuesday*).—*O'Shea to J. C.*—I understand that you are hesitating as to accepting the Chief Secretaryship. I hasten to assure you that if you accept it, it will be a point of honour with Mr. Parnell to work as if for himself to secure the success of your administration. It is the one thing necessary to crown the edifice. Do not overrate the risk; I believe there is little or none for you, although another might easily create it for himself.

Dilke to J. C. (undated, but at this time).—*You* (and not I) are the man because you believe in success and I don't. Still I would act or serve under you and if it were thought I could be of any use, I would join you in Dublin on the day the House was up and spend the whole autumn or winter with you as your chief private secretary. I could always have the work of my London post sent over in boxes.

Tuesday night (*May* 2).—*T. A. Dickson, M.P., to J. C.*—We Irish members all look to you in this crisis. I hear on good authority that the office of Chief Secretary is under your consideration and earnestly hope you will see your way to accept.[1]

August 20, 1888.—*John Morley to J. C.*—My recollection is that it was in your mind as in that of everybody else except Mr. Gladstone that you would have to take it (the Chief Secretaryship). . . . I, at any rate, and I suspect you too, expected a message from Mr. Gladstone at any moment. On the Wednesday evening (May 3) after dinner, you went to

[1] Mr. Dickson was the spokesman of the Ulster Liberals, a body valuable to Ireland beyond their numbers until they were virtually extinguished by the extent of Gladstone's Home Rule proposals in 1886.

his evening party at Downing Street, and there first learned that poor F. Cavendish was to go to Ireland. CHAP. XVII. ÆT. 46.

In these conspicuous conditions, what motive, and what autocratic perversity led Gladstone to pass over Chamberlain's head without one grateful or tactful word? It is a question of historical interest. There are various answers to the riddle.

For one thing, Morley with zealous intentions had lately done Chamberlain some serious harm. The *Pall Mall Gazette* had severely attacked Forster, demanding his resignation and naming Chamberlain as his successor. Forster's friends insinuated that these articles were instigated by Chamberlain's ambitions and intrigues. No surmise could be more natural and none more baseless. The articles causing the untoward commotion were written on the editor's initiative to Chamberlain's discomfort.

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

April 12, 1882.—Your thunderbolts in the *Pall Mall* have, as you say, created a situation. But unless I am much mistaken, the immediate result has been to establish a kind of reaction in favour of Forster. . . . The position of his successor would be almost intolerable—especially if a malevolent fate should select one of the members for Birmingham for this post. I felt that it was certain that I should be accused of a base attempt to oust the Chief Secretary. . . . A feeling of this kind would gather strength, and would do much to destroy any chance of success which I might otherwise have had. . . . I wish you would openly advocate Shaw—an Irishman—as Chief Secretary. . . . The Home Rule difficulty is nothing. Why should the Government be considered to have made Home Rule an open question by taking in Shaw, any more than they made the Republic an open question by taking in Dilke?

Morley, at first not amenable, was soon vexed with himself and regretful—but the mischief was done. The Prime Minister in these matters reacted against newspaper suggestion, especially when it so obviously appeared to be contrived by an aspiring colleague; though in fact plain-seeming was false as it so often is. A long time afterwards, Gladstone gave an explanation more singular even than the fact:

I never even knew that Chamberlain desired to succeed Forster, however others did. Would it have worked? . . . Had I known Chamberlain's

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wish I should not have set it aside without consideration and counsel. But I am writing from memory and memory may deceive.[1]

To this the Radical leader, when he had become a Unionist, answered through Morley:

August 16, 1888.—. . . Did you tell Mr. G. that I wished to be Irish Secretary? If so, it is a mistake. I had the greatest horror of it, and believed that if I had to take it, it would probably destroy me as it had done Forster. I thought it very likely that Mr. G. would ask me to take it, on the ground that I had been the most strenuous opponent of Mr. Forster's policy, and if he had done so I should have accepted as a matter of duty, but with the greatest reluctance.

Mr. Gladstone's later memory throws but a misty beam upon the surface of his unfathomable psychology in all his relations then and after with his Radical colleague. The Prime Minister, no doubt, was determined that Lord Spencer as Viceroy should be the head of the Irish executive and that a new Chief Secretary should not be in the Cabinet. He cannot have been so wholly unconscious of general opinion regarding Chamberlain's claims after the main part he had played, with the Prime Minister's own encouragement, in making possible the new policy. As was colloquially said, Gladstone "never liked Joe", nor appreciated him adequately in any way until too late; nor did the Prime Minister ever desire to strengthen the Radical interest. These were an old man's typical failings. Not liking the idea of any Radical aspirant to his throne, Gladstone could be prodigiously courteous on occasion to the Radical leader, but never spontaneously did he do anything to increase Chamberlain's importance.

In this case, for once, he was not even courteous. Consulting his own inwardness only, he decides to strengthen his personal connections with the Whig side of his ever-divided Cabinet. Chamberlain was not a man to be played with by anyone. So far he was more deferential to Gladstone than he had ever been, or was afterwards to be, to any human being, except to the Queen at a later period. These things, as Bismarck would say, are the *imponderabilia* of history. What might have been had

[1] Gladstone to Morley, August 11, 1888.

Chamberlain at that juncture taken command of Dublin Castle never can be known.

Immediately Edmund Burke's word came home—"What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!" The Prime Minister's choice was annulled by murder.

VII

Until late on Wednesday Chamberlain had expected to become Chief Secretary for Ireland. On Saturday evening Lord Frederick Cavendish, who had accepted that office, was stabbed to death. The week opening so hopefully closed with a ferocious crime like nothing in the world's politics since the assassination of Alexander II. Lord Frederick on his arrival in Dublin was killed in Phoenix Park, as well as Mr. Burke, permanent Under-Secretary in the "Castle" administration. Though he perished under the knives of Catholic fanatics, he was the grand-nephew of Cardinal Wiseman.

Chamberlain was at Highbury and knew nothing of the event on the night of that terrible Saturday, the 6th of May.

The telephone was not yet a political instrument. Early on Sunday morning Schnadhorst sent a first rumour of calamity. Chamberlain cried, "I hope to God this is not true". The next intelligence made it certain. He left for London. All his days for a month had been out of the common round. This Sunday seemed past believing.

The very night before, the Irish Nationalists had celebrated Michael Davitt's release. It had been brought about at Parnell's desire, by Chamberlain's urging. This, Davitt never quite forgot, mirror of erratic chivalry as he was—a Quixote with one arm.[1]

On Sunday morning at Blackheath station Parnell, unsuspecting, opened the *Observer*, and was appalled by its news of the Phoenix Park atrocity. Ruthless in politics, he loathed physical

[1] "When we first made the stipulation with Chamberlain about Davitt . . . he interrupted us by saying: 'Of course I had thought of that. I have already written to Sir William Harcourt (then Home Secretary) to say that Davitt's release is indispensable" (Justin McCarthy and Mrs. Campbell Praed, *Our Book of Memories*, p. 96). The Radical Minister had in fact written successfully to the Home Secretary: "May 3, '82.—I am strongly of opinion that Davitt's case should be immediately considered. Is it necessary to make conditions? . . . We ought to deal generously with this case and not wait to be pressed or appear to yield against our will."

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cruelty. And this insane deed of blood might make England inexorable. For this once he was nearly shattered.

First he went to Captain O'Shea at Albert Mansions, and by him sent a message to Gladstone offering to leave politics. Then he went on to the old Westminster Palace Hotel and, aghast, entered Davitt's room. We must always remember that the far-sighted, daring moderation of the Kilmainham compact had strained his authority to the limit. All his perfervid, unseeing lieutenants talked of his "surrender". For months he had loathed the gross clumsiness of extremist methods no longer opportune. Now they could only protract the misery of the peasants in arrears; provoke crushing reforms of procedure in the House of Commons; and jeopardise extension of the rural franchise in Ireland on the same terms as in Great Britain. Private reasons counted, but they clarified realistic insight into the need for temporary moderation. He was all for a manifesto repudiating the murders, but though he only signed it, having no verbal fluency of his own, he misliked and pruned the rhetorical pathos of Davitt's draft. His own sense of exact good English was unfailing.

Parnell and Justin McCarthy went first to Dilke. He said that though he would not shrink from the Chief Secretaryship if the offer came to him, the best man for Ireland now was Chamberlain. "If Chamberlain goes he'll go to smash things, meaning the Dublin Castle system."[1]

Then they went to Chamberlain, just arrived from Birmingham, and encountered him at Prince's Gate.

> We found him perfectly willing to go to Ireland, but he said he must have his own way there, and he would either make or mar—by which we understood the Castle system. I remember with peculiar interest how he scouted the notion of any intelligent Englishman believing for an instant that Parnell had any sympathy with assassination and outrage. I remember Parnell saying to him that he did not believe the murder-gang in Ireland could muster more than twenty men all told. Captain O'Shea came in while we were talking.[2]

Nearly ten years afterwards Chamberlain noted:

[1] Justin McCarthy and Mrs. Campbell Praed, *Our Book of Memories*, p. 97.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 97, 98.

> Parnell was white as a sheet, agitated and apparently demoralised. At the time I thought he was abjectly afraid for his own life which he said was in danger. "They will strike at me next," were his words. He asked me, "What shall I do—what can I do?" I said, "Your first duty is to denounce the assassins and to endeavour to ensure their apprehension." . . . He said he had offered to Mr. Gladstone to retire altogether from public life. I dissuaded him from such a course, which would almost justify suspicion of his complicity in a crime which I felt sure he detested.[1]

Parnell, like nearly all the persons who are called strong men—like Bismarck eminently—was an inexplicable compound of emotion and steel. "White and apparently terror-stricken" was Dilke's impression,[2] like Chamberlain's. They were both wrong about this man, who had as little fear, physical or other, as anyone living, but had a disordered and imperilled nation on his hands. Broken on this day as never before nor after, scared by the maniacal spirits he had helped to raise, hating mobs and speeches, he longed for private freedom, for unharassed love, for mechanical and chemical experiments; above all, for rest. The vengeance of the extremists might slay him too at any moment. O'Shea went immediately to the Home Secretary to ask police protection for Parnell—and himself—and says he did this at the latter's request made "in a cab on the way back from Mr. Chamberlain's house".[3] Parnell denied this version, and he is supported by Justin McCarthy, who says that he sharply refused to call a cab for more safety, but walked away on foot with McCarthy from Chamberlain's house.[4]

Who now was to go to Dublin Castle? Forster chivalrously offered to resume the post of peril. To accept him was impossible. In the Prime Minister's view equally impossible was the appointment of Chamberlain. That would have made him the master of the Cabinet; for Mr. Gladstone's credit would have been deeply damaged by tacit confession that he had been wrong in his choice a week before. Chamberlain was ready and unflinching. His brothers, with the family grit, determined that if he went now, one at least of them would go too, to stand on guard

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[2] Dilke's "Notes" in Chamberlain Papers.
[3] Parnell Commission, 1888, O'Shea's evidence.
[4] *Our Book of Memories*, p. 98.

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by him at all moments. Arthur's letter is a good piece of old-fashioned family spirit and must be given here, as showing well the fibre of the Chamberlain stock:

BROTHER TO BROTHER

Sunday, 3 P.M. [*May* 7]—DEAR JOE, I cannot believe that W. E. G. would be so mean as to ask you to take *now* the appointment that he did not offer when it seemed your due.

But if you should go over there, it is impossible that we should let you go alone. I hope and believe that there will be no danger for the new Secretary, but there must be a terrible strain, and if you think it your duty to accept the post, you must allow one of us to be with you—not to get in your way and follow you about, but to be handy when you have time to talk, so that you should have one of your own family to talk with.

I am waiting now to see Dick and Herbert and Walter, to settle who should go with you. I think I ought to be allowed to go and have agreed with Louey [his wife] so—but must consult with the others to obtain their agreement.

In any event one of us will come by first train to-morrow. . . .

VIII

He would have taken Ireland now not only, as Dilke said, to "smash things", but to make things—a purpose as more difficult as better. To make things on the lines of his great Cabinet memorandum of April 21 advising wide changes in administration; and likewise on the basis of his old programme of public works on a national scale—communications, reclamation, main drainage and so forth.[1]

Considering all his bold ability in practical organisation—

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum" in reply to Forster's, April 21, 1882: "I believe that sooner or later it will be found necessary to undertake some public works in Ireland, though I fear that the majority of the Cabinet are opposed to the consideration of any such measure. But England is the only country in the world in which it has been found possible to leave public works entirely to public enterprise. State assistance in some form or another is afforded, especially to the provision of communications and to great works of reclamation and main drainage, in every country of Europe, and indirectly by grants of land and other privileges in the United States of America. I fully admit the dangers and difficulties of any such undertaking; the probability of jobbery and inefficiency; but having regard to the political exigencies of the situation as well as to the character and the poverty

trained by commercial and civic experience to execute as a Minister of State the largest constructive plans—it is a pity that this Radical prepared to play the better part of a Strafford never had his chance in Ireland.

The murders destroyed his hopes of a short week before. His risks and skill before the Phoenix Park catastrophe earned more obloquy than recognition.[1] Repression was the task ahead. Had he of all men undertaken that task he would have been more hated than Forster.

When poor Lord Frederick Cavendish was murdered I thought it possible, and even probable, that Mr. Gladstone might ask me. I remember Healy spoke to me in the Lobby and told me frankly he hoped it was not likely for my own sake. He said that he would personally do what he could to help me, but that the situation was impossible—sooner or later I should find myself unable to satisfy Irish demands and in conflict with Irish members; and then they would no more spare me than anyone else. I thought he meant the warning kindly, and I believe he was right. I was therefore very glad that the task was not imposed on me.[2]

Probably Gladstone's personal clutch on Irish affairs, though at the moment it seemed to ignore the work and status of the Radical leader, saved Chamberlain from political destruction. This he was ready to face—overcoming mental and moral repugnance to the nature of the duty. No passage in his life is more open and manly.

Next day (Monday, May 8) the Irish Secretaryship was offered to Dilke—without a seat in the Cabinet. This suggestion, indignantly and rightly rejected, was almost the very oddest of Gladstone's errors, at that time and later, in dealing with other people. He was not truly interested in other people. His colossal self-absorption on high matters forbade it. He had not

of the Irish people, I would at once appoint the strongest scientific and technical commission it would be possible to obtain to report on certain broad classes of undertakings, especially on railways, reclamation, main drainage, and harbours, with a view to some considerable scheme of public works.

"I do not think the pecuniary risk would be so great as is generally supposed; and in any case I should regard the loss as a reasonable insurance against much greater evils.—J. C."

[1] At this time a provincial Conservative exclaimed: "If Joe Chamberlain had been stabbed in the Park on Saturday he would have met the just deserts of his own policy".

[2] August 16, 1888. Chamberlain to Morley, with reference to Gladstone's letter of August 11.

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a particle of Disraeli's perpetual interest—typical of the novelist turned statesman—in all human personality and circumstance. He was devoid of the great Jew's genius—sympathetic or satirical, but always attentive and discerning—in managing men and women.

From the first Dilke had felt bitterly his exclusion from the Cabinet. Chamberlain repeatedly urged his admission. Dilke had proved by far the best Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in any recollection; his replies at question time were masterpieces of adroit terseness; no man had more signally earned promotion; and up to this his ally had been strongest in advising him not to take the Irish office without the Cabinet. Chamberlain, however, now entreats him to accept the terms, arguing the extreme emergency; that this is the best chance of saving the new policy; and will ensure early entry into the "charmed circle". The advice causes the first sharp difference between the pair whom Opposition prints sometimes called "the Corsican brothers" of politics. Dilke would not look at the Chief Secretaryship in Dublin without admission to the Cabinet.[1] So the horrid post went to Sir George Trevelyan.

Mournful was the scene in a crowded House of Commons, when the elegies on the Phoenix Park victims were pronounced. A witness noted a little detail beside the Speaker's Chair:

> Mr. Chamberlain being about to enter, Mr. Gladstone touched him on the arm, and the two retired together, but came back in a few moments, the Prime Minister leading his subordinate by the hand. The President of the Board of Trade seemed haggard with grief. Never before had he appeared without a flower in his coat.

IX

Within a week from this solemn sitting the House of Commons relapsed into orgies of partisanship. The Opposition summon Ministers to produce the dossier of the Kilmainham treaty, called, of course, infamous by the Conservatives. And more dangerous is Forster, who sees in the murders his own full vindication and the exposure of Chamberlain's credulity.

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum" and Dilke's Diary.

During ominous debate in the middle of May, Parnell from his place in the House reads out most of his letter of April 28, carried by O'Shea to Forster and Chamberlain. He vainly omits the awkward pledge "to co-operate cordially for the future with the Liberal party in forwarding Liberal principles and measures of general reform". But the omitted sentence is of the essence of "the treaty". Forster makes a damning interruption, "That's not the letter". The suppressed words were dragged out of O'Shea —forced there and then to read out the authentic version thrust into his hand by Forster.

An eyewitness records:

> The House of Commons has known many dramatic moments, but in my thirty-eight years there I never felt such emotion as at that interruption. Parnell paled. Gladstone's face mantled with pious resignation. Chamberlain sat erect like a soldier who knew that the password had not been rightly rendered and that the guardroom yawned for a culprit.[1]

Next day, Chamberlain firmly defended his effort for peace. "I for one am content to trust to the future." He never changed his mind afterwards though the Kilmainham affair was often reopened. Throughout this endeavour he meant the best. He had not one selfish thought.

But darkness had closed once more on the Irish situation. Forster, with all his power to sweep up "suspects" with a dragnet, had incarcerated many harmless agitators but missed the "Invincibles" and their fell conspiracy. Seizing arms, he had not discovered the surgical knives of the Phoenix Park assassins. Fate was perhaps too strong for any Government at that hour. The only remedy found by the Liberal Government for the worst failures of coercion was to double the dose. Harcourt was rabid for crushing powers.

For months Chamberlain, co-author of the Kilmainham peace, worked to salvage somewhat from the wreck. He worked in vain. Still deputed by Gladstone to negotiate with Parnell, the Radical Minister in Cabinet fought to mitigate the new Crimes Bill. Harcourt, flaming for reprisals, refused all concessions,[2]

[1] T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. i. p. 161.

[2] Harcourt to Chamberlain, May 17, 1882: "I will see you in the H. of C. at 5 P.M., but I am more convinced than ever that on this Bill we must stand very firm".

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threatening to resign rather. He was safe; popular rage was with him; and with him the majority of the Government. Gladstone himself was nearest in views to those of his President of the Board of Trade, but that sort of nearness did not mean increase of personal sympathy. Virtually Chamberlain once more was isolated in this Cabinet. Once more for all that he was right in practical ideas.

A fortnight after the murders, still keeping his head, he circulates to the Cabinet another sane minute on the Crimes Bill:

> . . . The Irishmen want clearer definition of the offences under the Act. Treason, treason-felony, incitement to intimidation, unlawful assembly, suspicious circumstances, etc., etc.—all these are very vague, and if construed by the class of men who are the Resident Magistrates—or by the police—*may very easily be made to include very innocent actions*, and to be a source of tyrannical interference with the whole life of the people of Ireland. I cannot believe that the wording of the Bill in these respects is so perfect that it cannot be amended, and unless we are prepared to meet the request for alteration by some kind of concession—as we should most certainly do if this were a Scotch Bill opposed by Scotch members—I foresee the gravest trouble and dissatisfaction even among our own party, who are now straining everything to give support to the Government. We have brought in according to the Tories and Forster, the strongest Coercion Bill ever introduced. . . . [1]

The Premier agreed with him, but the majority of this odd jumble of men in a Cabinet called Liberal supported Harcourt when he insisted "upon carrying his measure almost without amendment".[2] Chamberlain was inclined yet once more to resign and leave them all to their own devices. He writes to the new Viceroy a prophetic letter:

TO SPENCER

May 24, 1882.—I am afraid the difference between us is too deep for argument. I am very doubtful whether I am right to remain in the Government. . . . I have always felt that some kind of Repression Bill was necessary—but we have . . . committed ourselves to a whole code of Draconian Laws which will place every Irishman's public and private

[1] Minute on the Repression of Crime Bill, May 20, 1882.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

life at the mercy of an official and administrative class, whose past ineptitude and indiscretion is largely responsible for the present condition of Ireland. . . . It seems to me impossible that you can succeed . . . a few days ago we had the game in our hands—now we have lost it beyond recall. We might have passed a moderate Bill with a few clauses directed specially against intimidation and actual outrage which would have secured the support of men like Charles Russell and Shaw, and could not have been bitterly opposed by the Parnellites. These last were anxious for a *modus vivendi*, and would have tried to help us over the stile. . . .

But we cannot get both sides—we must fight with or against the "garrison". In my opinion we cannot fight with them—and if we do we shall be defeated as we have been before, and as we deserve to be. . . .

The only question with me is whether by leaving at this time I should strengthen or weaken your hands. If I could feel sure that I should not do the latter, I would resign at once.

I have not said anything to Mr. Gladstone about this as he is already worried almost beyond endurance. . . . But I am so certain that we are running on the rocks that I cannot refrain from liberating my mind.

Spencer, not budging the least from his own opposite feeling for drastic coercion, replied (May 25), "Pray do not think of leaving us". Chamberlain unwillingly agrees to remain, but tells Dublin Castle, "A policy of coercion ought to be carried out by those who believe in it, and my views in every detail are influenced by my original distrust of the policy as a whole." [1]

X

Next Parnell in his turn sheered off. In the circumstances he could do nothing else. His hold on Ireland was at stake, his practical judgment ignored, his whole unsubduable nature challenged. The fight went on for weeks. Chamberlain is in the most difficult of all positions—asked to mediate once more with men to whom all real concessions have been refused. Gladstone in June asks him to advise Parnell to beware of trying "to punish the House of Commons . . . by the consumption of its greatest treasure, its time". [2] But the Radical Minister could not

[1] To Spencer, May 26, 1882. [2] Gladstone to Chamberlain, June 8, 1882.

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make bricks without straw. He asks for some straw. "On June 11 some modifications were at last made in the Bill after a stormy discussion in the Cabinet." [1]

In Irish opinion the modifications meant little or nothing. But with them, Chamberlain, waging his thankless fight on two fronts, tries to do what he can. This epilogue to the Kilmainham compact and the Phoenix Park tragedy is worth notice, not for its importance at the time but for its hints of the future:

CHAMBERLAIN, GLADSTONE, O'SHEA

May 25, 1882.—*O'Shea to J. C.*—I took Parnell down to Eltham last night, and he has promised to repudiate Dillon and all his works this evening. . . . My efforts are directed to prove to Parnell that the crisis has come and that he is bound to put it clearly to the Irish people whether they mean to follow him or not. If he does this I myself have no fear of the result.

June 7, 1882.—*J. C. to Gladstone.*—There was no "conference", but I met Mr. Parnell accidentally in the Lobby and had some conversation with him. I have spoken fully and openly to him and to many other Irish members since Mr. Forster ceased to be Chief Secretary—in fact I have treated the Irish members exactly as I have been accustomed to treat members belonging to every other section of the House. Parnell was very anxious to know if any concession was to be made to him on the Report of the Crimes Bill. As I knew nothing, I could not tell him anything. He says that if all his proposals are rejected he cannot keep his party from violent opposition. . . .

June 9, 1882.—*Same to Same.*— . . . It seems to me most important in the interests of peace and order that direction of the Irish National Movement should not fall entirely into the hands of the extreme men, but should remain with Parnell, who is, I am convinced, now sincerely anxious for the pacification of the country. . . . I have just seen Captain O'Shea. . . . Parnell . . . is most anxious to see an end to the agitation in Ireland and the irritation in Parliament.

June 23, 1882.—*O'Shea to J. C.*—Parnell is frequently in a "moony" drifting state of mind nowadays, with which it is difficult to keep one's temper.

O'Shea to Parnell (same date).—A very considerable period of debate

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

has now elapsed since at your request I informed the Prime Minister that there would be no obstruction of the Prevention of Crime Bill. I have therefore a special right to beg of you to carry out your engagement in its spirit as well as in its letter.[1]

June 28, 1882.—*O'Shea to J. C.*—I spoke in the very strongest terms to Parnell yesterday afternoon. . . . I cannot understand him.

June 28, 1882.—*J. C. to O'Shea.*—Your letter of the 28th and the previous one on same subject fully justify the confidence I have always felt in your good faith and honour. I wish I could say the same of Mr. Parnell's conduct, which is most disappointing to me. . . . I consider that he is bound, in honour, to make a public effort to bring the debates in Committee on the Crimes Bill to a close—indeed he ought to have done so at least a week ago. If he will not do this there is no power to make him, but he will have himself destroyed all possibility of a *modus vivendi* such as he has so often expressed himself desirous of securing.

June 29, 1882.—*O'Shea to J. C.*—Having to leave the House without speaking to Parnell, I have written him a letter of which I enclose a draft. I am afraid I do not know what more to do. [The enclosure is a lengthy lecture by O'Shea to Parnell: "I hope you will seriously consider that what I may term your duty to me extends much further. . . . At your request I informed Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain that it (the Crimes Bill) would not be obstructed. . . . Exasperation is growing very fast. . . . The consequences may be deplorable. But this is altogether outside the graver question as between you and myself—the honourable fulfilment by you, at any risk, of an important pledge."]

There was no pledge binding Parnell to accept increased and unprecedented coercion in Harcourt's sense. By now the Irish leader must have regarded O'Shea as Chamberlain's political jackal, no less than as a potential destroyer for other reasons. Contempt and hatred of the intermediary must have been deepened by the necessity of managing him with care. Parnell and his band were bound to resist more stringent coercion applied to their constituencies. They refused to acknowledge that their conduct was "obstructive" in the sense of blind unreason.[2] No English statesman fully understood this—not even Chamber-

[1] O'Shea's copy sent to Chamberlain.
[2] T. P. O'Connor, *Gladstone's House of Commons*, pp. 216-219.

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lain, though amongst them the most clear-minded and fair-minded at the time. None of his Birmingham constituents was in danger of becoming a toad under the harrow. "The Captain" was a cipher in the affair. Keeping him in play by ingenious verbiage, Parnell was perfectly cool and resolute in his parliamentary action at this phase. The Crimes Bill did not pass the House of Commons until July 12—the Orange festival—after twenty-four days' discussion.

XI

The day before this conclusion the Radical Minister—in a quandary, no doubt, but indomitable as isolated—passed to Gladstone a caustic minute against the Home Secretary's zest for the "caviare" of coercion:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

July 11.—Harcourt seems to have come to the conclusion that the Government have utterly mismanaged the Irish question and that the whole policy of the Liberal party since 1868 has been wrong. If so, we are not the right people to carry out an alternative plan; and we ought to make way for the Conservative statesmen whose foresight and wisdom we should, on this assumption, be prepared, however tardily, to acknowledge.

I do not agree with this view and I am not inclined to despair because the Irish difficulty which has existed for centuries has not disappeared by magic on our advent to office.

I do not think the situation as bad as he represents it. Agrarian outrages have diminished—owing, I believe, to the operation of the Land Acts. The Secret Societies are more active. For them we have the Crimes Prevention Bill which Harcourt has himself represented as a sovereign remedy.

I hope it may be found so, but I do not expect it.

All experience shows that this evil—of slow growth—is also of slow cure; and, in my opinion, nothing but a steady persistence in well-doing —*i.e.* in sincere efforts to discover the irritating causes at work which make the bulk of the people disaffected, and the honest endeavour to remove them—will be effectual in the ultimate pacification of the Country (J. C., 11/7/82).

On the whole, we must think it rather a pity that Chamberlain, though only forty-six, was not Prime Minister at this juncture. In the House of Commons he was usually conspicuous by his absence or silence during the twenty-four days' struggle upon high coercion after his work for peace had been destroyed by the murders.

In particular one remedial idea, an Arrears Bill, had been the real pivot of the Kilmainham negotiations opened less than three months before though now it seemed three centuries. The Arrears Bill to relieve the unfortunate victims of rack-rents no longer payable could not be introduced until early in July. It went through. But as in 1881, the policy of whipping before lollipops—always opposed by Chamberlain—thwarted every purpose of moral appeasement in Ireland, and sterilised for yet another session all Liberal projects of reform in Great Britain.

So perished another opportunity to lay the foundation of a constructive settlement, and to build it up by degrees, without disruption of the Liberal party, or of the Irish island, or of the United Kingdom.

It was to be the last opportunity but one. The next attempt will be made some few chapters hence by the same perceptive and persevering man, who had risked everything for a compromise with National Ireland through extreme vicissitudes of hope and tragedy during the spring and summer of 1882.

An Irish Nationalist far more brilliant in words and details than Parnell, though as much inferior in action, regretted, as we may recall, having on principle to hold Joseph Chamberlain at arm's length; and thought him at this time "an honest man . . . frank and winning, . . . straightforward and truthful".[1] From this time an American saying was often used of him, and well through his further life it applied: "He is beat, but he won't stay beat."

[1] T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. i. p. 155.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THE SOCIAL QUESTION"

(1883)

"THE Man of the Future"—Looking Forward—A "Loathsome Crisis"—"Henry George for Merry England"—The Coming of Democracy—Social Politics—The Whigs for Delay—Chamberlain breaks out—"They toil not, neither do they spin"—Franchise First and Irish Equality—Birmingham and the New Charter—The Queen's Displeasure—A Dangerous Controversy—Hartington's Struggle and Defeat—The Cabinet Decision—Froude on Chamberlain.

I

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THE theme of this narrative now seems at once to double in breadth as when a full stream receives as large a tributary. Taking up the social question in its full scope as affecting the masses in both town and country—the question of "the condition of the people"—Chamberlain enters on the course which will bring him to the unauthorised programme.

Advocating more comprehensive and definite ideas of constructive democracy than any statesman before him, he stirs and spurs the working class like no one since the days of the Chartists. The bugbear of the possessing classes whether Conservative or Whig, and the chief object of their anathemas, he draws upon himself the displeasure of the Crown. All this assists to make him the hope and the idol of advanced Radicalism. Breaking through the former bounds of Victorian statesmanship and leadership he rouses a spirit of change deeper, more far-reaching than that of 1832 or 1868. The consequences are felt to this day.

Upon what instruments does he count? Above all, upon a sweeping extension of the electorate in the counties and upon

drastic reform, already partly accomplished, of the cumbrous working of Parliament itself. Irish obstruction, having forced us to learn the English for *clôture*, may be made in spite of itself to clear the path of the coming British democracy instead of "blocking the way".

Chamberlain's conception of the near future demanded that the House of Commons should be made in advance an expeditious legislature—an efficient mechanism for carrying out the will of the common people in the field of social reform. In Cabinet he, with Harcourt, was strongest for limitation of talk, for using even a bare majority to guillotine debate, and for other means of putting through the piled arrears of democratic legislation.

Conservatives suspected his hand in everything they thought wicked. A most "dangerous man" as their word went. The man of the Caucus had become the man of the *clôture*. He would; and could anything be more typical of an English Robespierre? To lose our ancient liberty of debate and place it at the mercy of a bare party majority—what could this mean before long but reducing the Mother of Parliaments to be the cook-maid of the Caucus? *Clôture* was a vile word typical of the "Brummagem Girondist", as confused allusion also named him. The real answer then as now was that as legislative subjects become more numerous the time available for each of them necessarily becomes less.

The Radical leader's characteristic view was that when the constituencies have declared, majorities must not be thwarted by minorities. "Otherwise representative Government will become an absolute farce. The primary object of a parliamentary assembly is, in my opinion, to carry out the decisions at which the nation has arrived. . . . The House of Commons is the people's House, and public opinion can make it what it will; and if you will restore it to its ancient authority . . . the House of Commons will execute your decrees instead of as at present frustrating and postponing the decision of the constituencies." [1] "Parliament has been choked not by its work but by its talk, and of the two functions of Parliament, discussion and legislation, discussion has been carried to such an extent that legislation has been made impossible. . . . I believe we have scotched the snake of obstruc-

[1] Birmingham, January 5, 1882.

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tion but I am not sure we have killed it. . . . If it should not be so . . . of one thing I am certain—that sooner or later . . . the people will insist that effectual means shall be taken to restore to Parliament its efficiency and to make it the true exponent of the will and wishes of the nation."[1]

When the House of Commons resumed in the late summer of 1882 and sat for six weeks, the New Rules for expediting Government business and curbing obstruction were passed. "Gagging" measures they were called by the two Oppositions, Conservative and Parnellite; but our Radical was elated.

And no sooner so than by the ceaseless irony of political existence he was sharply confronted with a personal episode amongst the most unexpected and disagreeable in all his career. He was taken on his vulnerable side—the side exposed to considerations of affection and alliance. It was an ordeal of friendship as trying as may be conceived in politics, and he stood the test. He always looked back upon it as what he called it at the time, "a loathsome crisis", and we must share his feeling about this odd story.

II

At the beginning of December following the first efforts to modernise the old legislative machine, Parliament was prorogued after the longest session up to then in the Queen's reign.

Gladstone, now nearly seventy-three, was prostrated by the strain. Would he ever reappear in the House of Commons? For weeks he had talked of resigning but was persuaded to remain; not, however, on the terms conjectured by his colleagues, and not with any assurance to them that he would go on very long. Dilke notes talk with Chamberlain at Sandringham towards the end of November:

> Chamberlain told me that Lord Hartington and Lord Granville were going to insist with Mr. Gladstone that he should stay as nominal Prime Minister, Hartington taking the Exchequer and dividing the lead of the House with him, and Rosebery and I being put in the Cabinet.[2]

We shall see what happened, and that Gladstone's way in these matters was all his own. A few days later his fiftieth

[1] *Fifth Annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation, Ashton-under-Lyne, December 19, 1882.*

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 492.

anniversary in public life was widely celebrated. The nation realised with astonishment that its Prime Minister had been first returned to Parliament so long ago as mid-December 1832[1]— some years before the person of the present narrative was born. The ensuing exchange is worth marking:

GLADSTONE AND CHAMBERLAIN

December 13, 1882. — *Chamberlain to Gladstone.* — I hope I may be permitted to add my heartiest congratulations to those which you are receiving from all parts of the country on the completion of half a century of public life and labour. After such a glorious service I cannot wonder that the idea of rest should be often present to your mind. . . . I think your presence at the head of affairs is at least as necessary now to the true welfare of the State as it has ever been.

December 15, 1882.—*Gladstone to Chamberlain.*— . . . I have always watched, and worked according to, what I felt to be the measure of my own mental force. A monitor from within tells me that though I may still be equal to some portions of my duties, or as little unequal as heretofore, there are others which I cannot face.—I fear therefore I must keep in view an issue which cannot be evaded.

What could any plain mind gather from this but a feeling—such as all appearances and intimations had suggested to Queen Victoria nearly three years before—that Mr. Gladstone's retirement from public life was more or less proximate? It seems almost impossible for the most diligent student to cope with Gladstone's psychology or to fix the exact moment of decision between his floating notions of retirement and his innate impulse to continue.

Meanwhile in this early December of 1882 the Prime Minister, having to alter his Cabinet, goes about it in a manner suggesting that the strength of his idiosyncrasy is not impaired by his physical fatigue. Of the two great offices he has himself hitherto held, the Premiership and the Treasury, he relinquishes the

[1] The entry in Stanford's *Poll Book* may suggest the memories:

"1832—Dec. 14
Newark, Notts—2 members

Gladstone, W. Ewart (C.)	887	Elected
Handley, Farnworth (C.)	798	Elected
Wilde, Sergeant Thomas (L.)	726	Not elected"

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latter. Childers becomes Chancellor of the Exchequer. This appointment, more estimable than effective, was made to avoid another. As former leader of the Liberal party in the House of Commons, Hartington on his merits ought to have succeeded to the Treasury; but that would have seemed clear gain to the Whigs, and the Prime Minister never willingly did anything to weaken his balancing power over the rival sections of his Cabinet or to give either of them predominance.

By common recognition Dilke could no longer be excluded from the Cabinet. The Prime Minister proposed to bring him in as Chancellor of the Duchy, a post involving special relations with the Court. The Queen stiffly objected to one who had not only been a Republican in the abstract but was still an active *frondeur* against the Civil List.

Chamberlain, earnest in urging his friend's claims, had not dreamed for a moment that his own position might be stultified. Gladstone had been perverse enough, earlier in the year, in his attitude towards the Radical leader on the Chief Secretaryship. Now he conceived the most ingeniously infelicitous device that could have entered his mind. Incredible to say, he adumbrated the idea—not to be put forward as coming from him—that Chamberlain might quit the Board of Trade and descend to the Duchy of Lancaster in a manner certain for a time to damage him in public estimation and weaken him in the House of Commons.

Longing for the Cabinet at last, as well he might, and seeing no other solution, Dilke, this once, lost his better judgment and brought himself to frame an awkward letter:

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Secret.—Foreign Office, December 12, 1882.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, Austin Lee told me a few days ago that the Queen had told his great friend Prince Leopold that she would be glad that I should be in the Cabinet *but not in the Duchy*. This was the line taken by Mr. Gladstone yesterday. He tells me that he thinks it would be possible to get over this objection in time. There is, however, another possibility about which he tells me to write to you at once but not as from him.

Would you take the Duchy and let me go to the Board of Trade, you keeping your Bills? This would be unpleasant to you personally, I feel

sure, unless for my sake, though the Duchy is of superior rank; it would of course be a temporary stop-gap—as there must be other changes soon. It is not necessary that you should do it, else I know that you would do it for me. So that please feel that you are really free. I told Mr. Gladstone that I could only put it to you in such a way as to leave you free.—Ever yours, CHARLES W. DILKE.—You had perhaps better write your answer so that I can show it him, though I suppose he will suppose himself not to have seen it!

When Chamberlain received this suggestion he was confounded. The two friends never had been more attached. Putting their alliance first, they had repeatedly stood by each other on occasions when their opinions were divergent. Dilke's little son "Wentie" had recently left Highbury after living there for eighteen months, and affectionate messages had passed.[1] But this novel sort of trial to fidelity was a bitter test. Few men would have been capable of his answer to the appeal.

TO DILKE

Highbury, December 13, 1882.—MY DEAR DILKE, Your letter has spoiled my breakfast. The change will be loathsome to me for more than one reason and will give rise to all sorts of disagreeable commentaries. But if it is the only way out of the difficulty, I will do what I am sure you would have done in my place—accept the transfer. I enclose a note to this effect which you can show to Mr. G. Consider however if there is any alternative. I regard your *immediate* admission to the Cabinet as imperative, and therefore if this can only be secured by my taking the Duchy, *cadit quaestio*, and I shall never say another word on the subject.

Two other courses are possible though I fear unlikely to be accepted: (1) Mr. Gladstone might tell the Queen that I share the opinions you have expressed with regard to the dowries, and intend to make common cause with you—that if your appointment is refused I shall leave the Government and that the effect will be to alienate the Radical party from the Ministry and the Crown and to give prominence to a question which it would be more prudent to allow to slumber. I think the Queen

[1] "On the day of Tel-el-Kebir [September 13, 1882] I received a very pleasing letter from Chamberlain thanking me for what I had said to him about his reception for so long a period at Highbury of my son. It was a touching letter which showed both delicacy and warmth of affection" (Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 483).

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would give way. If not, we should both go out. We should stand very well with our party, and in a year or two we could make our own terms. Personally I would rather go out than take the Duchy. . . .

(2) Has the matter been mentioned to Dodson?[1] He *might* like an office with less work, and he *might* be influenced by the nominally superior rank. . . . Now you have my whole mind. I would gladly avoid this sacrifice, but if your inclusion in the Cabinet depends upon it, I will make it freely and with pleasure for your sake.—Yours ever,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

Dilke answered joyfully:

December 14.—I have your letter which is exactly what I expected and exactly what (I hope) I should have written if the places had been changed.

On the same day Gladstone, still not perceiving that he was putting to the torture his President of the Board of Trade, wrote benignly to the victim:

December 14.—Dilke showed me and deposited with me your letter. I shall be glad if I can to avoid acting on it. But I cannot refrain from at once writing a hasty line to acknowledge the self-sacrificing spirit in which it is written, and which I am sure you will never see cause to repent or change.

What was the truth? Obstruction and congestion had deprived the Radical Minister for two years of any fair chance to carry Board of Trade legislation. Were he removed now an unavoidable impression would prevail that in departmental work, even of the kind he had been supposed best fitted for, he had not been a success. No misjudgment could be more galling to himself nor more injurious to his whole political standing. The more he thought of it the more he writhed. To his other nearest friend he confesses all his astonishment and disgust:

December 15.—*J. C. to John Morley.*— . . . The change is *loathsome* to me. I like my present office—I like the officials and they like me. I like the work, which I have mastered, and I hate the idea of a sinecure, my acceptance of which will be the signal for all sorts of sneers and unkind inferences. I don't think friendship was ever put to a harder test. How-

[1] Then President of the Local Government Board, afterwards Lord Monkbretton.

ever, I wrote a letter to Mr. G. in which I set forth my objections . . . but concluding with the statement that, if there were no other possible alternative, I would not allow my personal feelings to stand in the way of Dilke's advancement.

When Harcourt heard of the situation, he thought it preposterous, and swept in with all his robust kindliness and happy hand in personal complications. He thought Chamberlain's self-abnegation exemplary but absurd:

> . . . I cannot bear the thought of your being relegated even for a time to a place altogether unworthy of your great powers and intellectual position. . . . I am very much disturbed in my mind about this business. I have so much regard for you that I cannot endure the idea that you should be made the victim in the business, and I confess I can hardly understand how anyone could accept the sacrifice you are prepared to make. . . .[1]

The Home Secretary protested vigorously to Gladstone, Granville, Hartington and others in Chamberlain's interests, and pointed out that to accept their Radical colleague's offer would be politically dangerous as well as grossly unfair. He took up Chamberlain's original suggestion that Dodson ought to leave the Local Government Board and go to the Duchy.

In a few days Her Majesty helped. Dilke reports to Highbury: "I congratulate you. The Queen refuses to take you in the Duchy. She requires the holder to be a 'moderate politician'." Chamberlain was insisting by now that the true reason for his supersession at the Board of Trade should be made public. Both the allies were on tenterhooks. After more days of it Dilke sends a pencilled note: "I have not vexed you, have I, by anything I have done or left undone?" (December 21). His friend responds like a brother and at once goes up to London to reassure him. When he leaves again, Dilke says (December 23): "I *was* worried and cross till I saw you. You dispelled the clouds in a moment. I suppose it will not do for one politician to say to another—by your smile—but so it was."

How telling is this little illustration of the two men. Chamberlain, game in any tight pinch, can reassure his comrade with

[1] A. G. Gardiner, *Life of Harcourt*, vol. i. p. 465. (Harcourt to Chamberlain, December 17, 1882.)

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steely cheerfulness—a trait he had, as all who knew him well remember—when his thoughts were far from bright.

Fortunately, just after this, everything was arranged as it might have been at first had Gladstone any gift of felicity in dealing with his Radical lieutenant. Dodson went to the Duchy; Dilke took the Local Government Board and entered the Cabinet. Chamberlain, to the delight of his officials and his own, remained at the Board of Trade. After ten days of this execrable *imbroglio* the relief came just in time to enable him to spend a merrier Christmas than he had expected. In the course of his penance John Morley remarked, "You being what you are—loyal to your friends almost to *morbidness*".[1]

To follow this queer affair in some detail has been instructive as throwing light on his true character.

None the less it was painfully evident to him that he had been weakened in position of late on all sides; with moderate opinion by the sequel of the Kilmainham compact; with Radical opinion, as we shall see by his revelation of democratic Imperialism in the Egyptian crisis; with the Irish party because of his "sombre acquiescence" in coercion.

For the first time, not the last, he found himself under-estimated all round; and whenever that was so, instead of fretting and complaining, he took a level estimate of realities and exerted new powers.

III

Extremely significant is this development of his life at the beginning of 1883—for him a year of full recovery and powerful advance. Two letters reveal his inmost mind.

The born organiser has never cared for words except as an aid to action. Three years have passed with little done. Was it worth while to have left municipal politics and become a Minister of State? Is it worth while to remain a Minister well muzzled? He doubted the first question and said "No" to the second.

He writes[2] to his friend Sir Edward Russell of Liverpool:

> The politics of the future are social politics, and the problem is still how to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number and especi-

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, December 16, 1882.
[2] January 22, 1883.

ally of those whom all previous legislation and reform seem to have left very much where they were before.

Next day he sends John Morley a newspaper-cutting upon the progress of Birmingham, and remarks that the extract might be headed "The Frightful Results of the caucus":[1]

TO MORLEY

January 23, 1883.—Putting aside personal compliments what are the facts? A saving of 7 per thousand in the death-rate—2,800 lives per annum in the town. And as 5 people are ill for everyone who dies there must be a diminution of 14,000 cases of sickness, with all the loss of money, pain and grief they involve.

Unless I can secure for the nation results similar to these which have followed the adoption of my policy in Birmingham it will have been a sorry exchange to give up the Town Council for the Cabinet.[2]

This is the keynote for the next three resounding years, culminating in the campaign for the "unauthorised programme." Henceforth he would speak out at any cost, and act as strongly.

Besides, another thing had happened. A book had happened. Henry George appeared, and like few since Tom Paine he awakened new imaginings and aspirations amongst Radical working men; they thought they saw a great light. Amongst them that passionate and ingenious work *Progress and Poverty* went like wildfire. Chamberlain read it, electrified; the effect on Morley was the same. They both read likewise the simultaneous plea of Alfred Russel Wallace for nationalisation of the land, and they compared ideas from time to time. They believed that the whole English land question, with its urban aspects of housing, overcrowding, ground rents and the rest, may have to be "the great business"[3]. Chamberlain was against nationalisation; he thought it predatory; but he was keener than ever for multiplying small owners on the soil, for breaking up big estates to the extent required; and began to meditate on taxing urban property to abolish the slums. To promote social reform in general, he aimed especially at taxing wealth automatically increased in towns by

[1] This aspect does not occur to Ostrogorski when composing his pages on Chamberlain and the Caucus in *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties.*

[2] The italics are the present biographer's.

[3] Morley to Chamberlain, December 24, 1882.

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the growth of the community without effort to the owner. Some owners, for instance, made immense profits out of insanitary dwellings. He would levy on all "unearned increment" and bear hard upon comfortable possessors of slum property.

IV

These ideas were bound to bring him into more angry conflict with the Whigs. And before these aims could be put into practice at all, the approaches had to be opened by extending the suffrage to the agricultural labourer.

County franchise would double the size of the existing body of voters. That it would double the power of Liberalism in the State and make Liberalism synonymous with Radicalism, Chamberlain believed. On this purpose he set himself to stake his all. There had been long delay. A decade had passed since he had been moved by Joseph Arch, as now more potently by Henry George's eloquent pictures of the contemporary contrasts, and they were glaring, between the wealth of the few and the distress of the many.

From now forward, the Radical leader stands out—more loved and more hated than before—as a "man of the future" second to none, a public combatant relying on the platform and the National Liberal machine more than on Parliament.

So opened in domestic politics 1883, a year of loud alarms and militant excursions preparatory to the battle of the franchise. The Cabinet of Incompatibles henceforward was strained again and again to breaking-point, though it just held together. Undisguised and continual contradictions between Chamberlain and Hartington enabled Gladstone with prodigies of finesse to dominate them both, leaning towards each in turn.

A few weeks before, at Ashton-under-Lyne,[1] during the "loathsome crisis" concerning his personal position in the administration, the Radical leader had made a big speech. He took a wide range of domestic, Imperial and foreign affairs and excelled in lucidity and force. His temper was generous on Ireland. He warned his audience against the prevalent feeling that there had been enough of Ireland. "As long as Ireland is without any insti-

[1] Ashton-under-Lyne, December 19, 1882.

tutions of local government worthy of the name . . . so long the seeds of discontent and disloyalty will remain, only to burst forth into luxuriant growth at the first favourable season." Many thought this good who did not usually agree. But Hartington, for the Whigs in the Cabinet, sounded a counterblast repudiating further concessions to a nation in rebellion (Bacup, January 20, 1883). The Radical promptly answered at Swansea (February 1) that while separation would be fatal, Ireland could not be governed as a "conquered dependency". "How long do you suppose that Englishmen, proud of their free institutions, would tolerate the existence of an Irish Poland so near our shores?" Startling at the time was this drastic comparison. His gift of terse phrase and illustration was from now a characteristic power in public speaking when that art, fully practised under a limited electorate, and fully reported before the rise of the more popular press, counted for much more than it does now.

Unlike the Radical, the Whig in his slow, weighty way felt that equal extension of the franchise in both islands would make the Union untenable. The sanguine and the foreboding statesmen were equally honest. Lord Salisbury derided both. Public opinion was more intrigued by Ministerial dissension than conscious of the tremendous issues truly involved. For Chamberlain, the Radical, "Franchise first", including Ireland, and the establishment there of local self-government on a broad basis, meant the prelude to a great political and social reorganisation of the whole United Kingdom. For Hartington, the Whig, the same formulas meant the disintegration of the realm and the coming of extreme democracy; predatory in finance, perhaps totally subversive. The patrician, Conservative in every fibre though Liberal in name, was all for conciliating the Opposition—for inoffensive measures, for marking time. The middle-class democrat and "man of the future" was for boldest progress and the full shock of encounter. Gladstone, with shadowy vision and less fixed conceptions, was already in his own mind beginning to move towards some kind of Home Rule; but he rejected the social ideas of Radicalism, and, against them at least, sympathised with the Whigs.

As early as January 18, 1883, the President of the Board of Trade minuted to the Prime Minister that projects for County

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Councils ought to be postponed "until the rural inhabitants are more generally represented. Any Bill passed now would be a County Gentlemen's and County Magnates' Bill, and would infallibly have to be altered". "Franchise first" ought to be the principle and not encumbered by a concurrent scheme for redistribution of seats. Before the meeting of Parliament the Cabinet decided against him. The session of 1883 would be devoted to the work of making up in various useful respects arrears of practical legislation. Gladstone himself was chiefly desirous of conceding Irish Local Government, perhaps going somewhat beyond County Councils. Chamberlain agreed with the principle, but not that putting it foremost on the programme was the right order of business. The Prime Minister's idea was shelved by Hartington, who would not have it at all. Franchise was postponed for another year. Its details could not be settled before autumn. Till then the vital issue—in fact, the final issue—between Radicals and Whigs remained to be fought out in the Cabinet and the country.

V

Hartington was becoming more ready to resign rather than be dragged too far. Chamberlain was determined to resign rather than yield too much. Each section manœuvred for "Mr. G.'s" support. But would the Prime Minister himself remain in public life? Overworked and overworn, but playing upon all doubts regarding himself to augment his authority, Gladstone went to Cannes, and speculation on his retirement was now rife.[1]

His mighty nature at seventy-three is really inclining not to retire but to start again. Impressively, profoundly, he revolves within himself the coming issues. For him, not social reform in town and country is, as Chamberlain, Dilke and Morley supposed, the next "great business". The Irish Question is that "great business". Agreeing rather with Chamberlain than Hartington on county suffrage and equal franchise for Ireland, but deprecating their controversy, he contemplates already that

perilous crisis which no man has as yet looked in the face; the crisis which will arise when a large and united majority of Irish members demand

[1] Gladstone left for Cannes on January 17, 1883, and returned to Downing Street on March 2.

some fundamental change in the legislative relations of the two countries.[1]

To restrain, if he may, Radical and Whig antagonisms, the Premier renews the hint of his own exit. At this phase the Government is like a Ministry in solution.

Chamberlain's correspondence throws its scintillations amidst these cloudy uncertainties, his leader's interior state of mind being beyond divination:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

January 20, 1883.—*J. C. to Dilke.*— . . . He [Hartington] has as much right to talk Whiggism as you and I to spout Radicalism. Only I don't see how we are to get on together when Mr. G. goes. . . . So if we are driven to fight we shall easily recruit an army. . . .

February 2.—*J. C. to Dilke.*—If Spencer and Trevelyan really believe I have set Morley against them they are very foolish. On the other hand I have done all I can to keep him straight, but you know he is "kittle-cattle to drive". If I have not converted him I must admit he has rather shaken me. . . .[2]

February 3.—*Dilke to J. C.*— . . . Lord Granville sides with Mr. G. against Hartington's speech and on the merits thinks there is much to be said for Mr. G.'s view of an Irish Local Government Bill. He evidently fears that Mr. G. will at once resign (on the ground of health) if Hartington's view prevails. Between ourselves I feel sure that England and Scotland would like a non-Irish session if we can keep the Irish quiet by fair words for the future.

February 4.—*J. C. to Dilke.*— . . . I agree that next session must not be mainly Irish—but I am strongly in favour of an Irish Local Government Bill. Could we not introduce and refer to a large—not Grand—Committee? . . . A Tenant Right Bill is essential and would be a great stroke of business. Without it we shall lose the farmers for a certainty. . . .[3]

Gladstone returned in no valedictory mood, but as arbiter in a very real sense, however subtle the method—holding the

[1] Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 554. (Gladstone to Granville, January 22, 1883).

[2] Chamberlain lately had done his best to restrain Morley's criticism of Irish coercive administration, but on this matter Morley was not to be held.

[3] See also Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. pp. 516, 517, where part of this correspondence appears.

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Whigs by putting off rural enfranchisement for that session, but giving deferred hope to the Radicals. Irish Local Government too was dropped. An intimate letter from Dilke shows how the marvellous old man remained supreme, keeping his threat of resignation suspended over the heads of his discordant colleagues, though in reality this sword of Damocles hung not by a thread but by a cable:

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

March 30, 1883.—Mr. G. called me out last night to his room and talked to me very freely and for a long time. He has never before spoken of next year's County Franchise Bill except with the statement that *he* would be gone before it—but on this occasion he talked of it with warm interest without saying that, and he left the impression on my mind that his *present* intention is to stay with us and to conduct next year's bill. Harcourt to-night let me pump his views as to the application of the reform to Ireland. He is strongly with us, which is important.

Coolly conducting his Board of Trade Bills with the success we shall see in the next chapter, Chamberlain within himself smoulders dangerously when all advanced reform is shoved aside for yet another session.

He records:

The Radicals in the Cabinet were now only Dilke and myself, and we found ourselves ignored or outvoted by the majority of our colleagues. In the country, however, our opinions were endorsed by at least four-fifths of the Liberal Party. It was clear that this state of things could not continue indefinitely, and that as soon as the franchise was extended the policy of the Government would have to be modified in the Radical sense. My first effort was to induce the Cabinet to take up the franchise question as early as possible and to separate it from redistribution, which was sure to provoke local jealousies and would raise an opposition that might be fatal to the Franchise Bill. I desired also to secure the equality of franchise throughout the three Kingdoms. . . . These were the main objects of the [his own] platform campaign in 1883.[1]

On all this he unbosoms himself for once like Hamlet, though nearly all outsiders thought him Fortinbras, little given to self-searching:

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

TO MORLEY

May 19, 1883.—I do not see my way very definitely out of the present difficulties and am consequently much disinclined to make speeches. The time is coming when our party (of three or four) must have a programme and know exactly what it is aiming at. . . .

Our Foreign and Colonial policy—on the whole a policy of justice, of self-abnegation and of peace—has not been so triumphantly successful as to form a satisfactory text. Take the restoration of Cetewayo and the surrender of the Transvaal for instance—virtue has found its own reward a very poor one in both cases.

Then look at Ireland. I believe the Liberal policy the only one possible—but its immediate consequences are anarchy, murder, outrage and coercion. If the Tories had been in power and had put down the first appearance of the Land League, they would perhaps have postponed the crisis for a few years.

These reflections "make for the melancholies", as my Swedish friend said. The moral is that half policies never succeed and unfortunately in the present state of things whole policies are absolutely impracticable.

"In the present state of things" it was exactly so. Towards the middle of 1883 he was right in letting his group in Birmingham think that no further social reform could be looked for from the frustrated Parliament of 1880. Pinning his faith on a new electorate to redouble the power of democracy and "clear the line" for constructive Radicalism, he was all for "franchise and dissolution".

VI

So much for his meditations. In public life his popularity amongst the masses had already taken another up-swing. Because 1883 opened his greater epoch on the platform, we must return to his speeches.

He says of himself:

Besides the parliamentary work, which was very severe, I undertook in this year a great number of platform engagements, and commenced the campaign of constructive Radicalism which soon brought me into conflict with the Whigs—both in the Cabinet and outside.[1]

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

As usual his opponents were his auxiliaries in spite of themselves. In their eyes he was worse now than "the Robespierre of the Caucus" and the "Brummagem Girondist". Sir John Gorst, applying the affrighting terms made familiar when Irish subterranean conspiracy was unearthed after the Phoenix Park murders, made bold to suggest that the Caucus crew were political "Invincibles", their chief a "No. 1".

Beginning to exalt Chamberlain by singling him out for continuous attack, Lord Salisbury went to Birmingham itself (March 28). His adept irony was never better whether in writing or speech than at this period. Now, he likened the Government to a Dutch clock—the old man coming out for fine weather, the old woman for bad. "We may say safely that the mechanism of our political system is this, that when it is going to be fine weather Lord Hartington appears, and when Mr. Joseph Chamberlain appears you may look out for squalls." Next day the Conservative leader denounced the Caucus and its machinating demagogue who meant to make the House of Commons itself the pliant tool of a tyrannous organisation.

Within twenty-four hours Chamberlain retorted (March 30) from the same Birmingham platform—Lord Rosebery presiding—and one Biblical phrase in his rejoinder set the whole nation agog:

"Lord Salisbury constitutes himself the spokesman of a class—of the class to which he himself belongs, who toil not neither do they spin (great cheering), whose fortunes, as in his case, have originated by grants made in times gone by for the services which courtiers rendered kings (renewed cheers), and have since grown and increased while they have slept by levying an increased share on all that other men have done by toil and labour to add to the general wealth and prosperity of the country. . . ."

The majority of the working classes in town and shire hailed this resounding defiance with boundless enthusiasm. "The class who toil not neither do they spin"—there was more incitement in that phrase than in a whole year of ordinary speaking by advanced reformers. Chamberlain as never yet became a hero to the mass of democracy and an embodiment of hope no longer vague. His success was heightened when at this very moment of political confusion Lord Randolph Churchill

played a similar part amongst the Conservatives and assailed their leaders.

"They toil not neither do they spin"—unjust to too many and true of too many—only a few left alive now can recall, or perhaps understand, how that phrase, as we must repeat, struck deep into "the general heart of man" like no catchword for many a year. Advanced Liberals thought it like Bunyan and Cromwell—more English than Gladstone; more concentrated than Bright, whose powers as Morley wrote at this time were now sadly waning. Soon, our phrase-maker's faculty was accentuated with more stinging provocation to his assailants while exciting more jubilant belligerency on the Left. The leader of Radicalism—his name now was more cheered at Liberal meetings than any except Gladstone's[1]—gave a rough shock this next time to half the country, from the throne downwards, and a more fiery impulse to the other half, most of it not yet enfranchised.

We must attend well to this episode. It was a far more serious matter in several ways than any outside the inmost circle knew at the time.

In June the Birmingham celebrations of John Bright's jubilee as member for the city were a landmark in domestic politics. For some days the old orator received magnificent honours, deepening though enriching his sense of twilight. Morley wrote somewhat later:

> I was rather pained to find at dinner how poor J. B. is losing his vigour and faculty. He forgot his argument more than once, and altogether seemed as if half of him were absent; how dreadful it will be if this goes on.[2]

Now denouncing the "Irish rebel party" and rebuking the United States for rejecting free trade, Bright spoke at his jubilee in Birmingham like the survivor of a former age, and found little comfort in his younger colleague's appeal to the rising generation.

That appeal was made before the twenty thousand persons assembled in Bingley Hall for John Bright's jubilee.[3] When the

[1] Morley writes from Liverpool, May 18, 1883: "Everybody here is very Radical, and your name last night was the best received of all, save Mr. Gladstone of course".

[2] Morley to Chamberlain, March 24, 1884.

[3] June 13, 1883.

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older leader sat down the younger rose, and his speech was the event of a great evening. Much more, it outlined a programme for a new era of democracy. Through long passages nearly every sentence roused shouts of enthusiasm or laughter from the surging multitude. His keynote was, "Every day the country is becoming more Radical and more democratic". With all homage to the veteran he said in effect that they must begin again where Bright's old school of progress had left off, arrested by the forces of privilege still possessing undue weight in the House of Commons and a practical monopoly of the House of Lords. When John Bright first represented Birmingham five out of six of the adult males in the kingdom had no vote. A quarter of a century after, five out of eight were still outside the franchise. He urged the cause of "Franchise First". By all the memories of 1832 and 1866 he adjured his own city to head that struggle. Lancashire and Yorkshire had their own honours for prowess in other questions, but in battles for wider electoral liberty it was Birmingham's accustomed claim to lead the van.

He worked up to his closing passage: "Shall we put the dots on the i's? What do we want?" Amidst the startled excitement of his hearers—so novel then were ideas now commonplace or forgotten—he went on to declare what they, or he, wanted; and he advocated enormities. Manhood suffrage—equal electoral districts—one vote one value—payment of members! In Whig and Conservative eyes the drama now was "Robespierre Revealed"—a jacobinical logician, self-exposed, avowing a programme of constitutional sacrilege, threatening to profane every venerated principle of our political tradition. Clearly he meant the House of Commons to become the slave of the Caucus. And so forth. All these apprehensions may be found in the journals of the time.

Yet this programme of democratic supremacy through electoral reform—even this was not the head and front of Chamberlain's offending. More censure, and with good reason, was caused by a mistaken passage of sardonic decoration in his tribute to Bright. He hinted that the recent coronation of the Tsar was a ceremony as hollow as bedizened by comparison with the people's celebration—unassisted by royal favour—of John Bright's moral majesty:

"Your demonstrations on Monday (cheers) lacked nearly all

the elements which constituted the great pageant of the Russian coronation. (Hear, hear.) The pomp and the circumstance were wanting. No public money was expended. (Hear, hear.) No military display (hear, hear) accompanied Mr. Bright. (Cheers.) The brilliant uniforms, the crowds of high officials, the representatives of Royalty—they were absent (loud laughter and cheers)—and nobody missed them." (Renewed laughter and cheering.)

These were the words of a Minister of the Crown in those early 'eighties when conventional respectability was probably at its summit, just before new anti-conventional influences began to make themselves felt in English literature with corresponding changes in social manners. Chamberlain's fling was unnecessary and in every respect injudicious, flouting the Queen's susceptibility, disserviceable in foreign affairs. There was no good excuse for these words used by a statesman who had kissed hands and was still in office. We can only say for him that he was in his heart as anti-Tsarist as he had been in his youth, like so many other advanced Liberals, during the Crimean War; that he had reason to regard the Crown as an influence hostile to Radicalism and democracy but especially to Dilke and himself; that he had been thwarted for three years in his hopes of reform when he took office; that in his conviction the existing political system would have to be altered in a drastic sense before he could begin "to do for the nation what he had done for Birmingham". The years were passing vainly as he thought; loss of time seemed sin to him with his lifelong training in definite duties and their daily discharge. All this would constitute a sufficient defence for a Radical leader out of office and "unmuzzled"; it was no palliation for a Minister of the Crown.

Whigs and Tories in general were in a frenzy. Radical workmen were exultant. Somebody was disturbing at last every kind of established complacency. "Joe" was their man. Bright was cloudy; Gladstone vexed; Windsor thunderous. The "grand-daughter of George the Third" had sent no message for John Bright's jubilee; and could not be expected to understand what it meant for Birmingham and democracy. The Queen's wrath with her President of the Board of Trade was just, though not judicious in method of rebuke. As the Premier said, Chamberlain had erred "most especially in relation to the Crown,

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to which the speech did not indicate the consciousness of his holding any special relation." [1]

VII

A message of severest Royal displeasure was conveyed to the head of the Government. Gladstone groaned, "I am the more sorry about the speech, because Chamberlain had this year in Parliament shown both tact and talent in the management of questions not polemical, such as the Bankruptcy Bill".[2] The gravity of the offence, as the Prime Minister felt, lay not so much in specific terms of indiscretion as in something less definable, yet very obtrusive, in the Radical attitude.

Of course, the Conservatives and the Whigs were louder in opprobrium than ever yet. Lord Salisbury declared that Chamberlain's recent utterance was "the Jacobin theory pure and simple".

> It is a new, a most sinister, a most terrible feature in our constitutional history. There is no reason so far as difference of opinion is concerned, why the present Ministry should not receive into its sympathetic bosom Mr. Parnell or Mr. George.[3]

Gladstone at first remonstrated indirectly through Dilke, who saw Chamberlain but found him "very stiff".[4] His ally suggested that in another speech aptly arranged for a few days hence, he should seek to turn away wrath by gentleness. The Prime Minister entreats that his colleague will set the matter right "with grace" at the Cobden Club dinner.[5] But if this hardy culprit had made a blunder, as in his heart he well knew, he was not going to give Whigs or Tories or anyone else the pleasure of seeing him eat humble pie in public on this occasion. Determined not to submit easily in future to the old-fashioned restraints, Chamberlain did not apologise but with frigid audacity he explained. The Cobden Club dinner was held on June 30 at "The Ship" in Greenwich. Several Whigs had resented his chairmanship by resigning from the Club, and he kept this in mind. First

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 112.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Lord Salisbury at St. James's Hall, June 27, 1883.
[4] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 526.
[5] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, edited by G. E. Buckle, Second Series, vol. iii. (1879–1885), p. 433.

he praised the Queen and her people together—"the respect which we tender to the occupant of the throne is only equalled, I feel assured, by the respect which the Sovereign has always paid to the true spirit of the Constitution". Then he turned his eulogy of Cobden's career into a resourceful defence of his own independence. The march of the Liberal army must no doubt be slackened by the pace of its slowest contingents. But Radicals compelled to accommodation in practice must have full freedom to declare their faith and ideals. "What we yield is liberty of action in the present; what we claim is freedom of opinion as to the future."

Gladstone at this noted to Granville, "he seems to claim an unlimited liberty of speech" [1] in the recent Birmingham style. But while inwardly charged with reprobation the Prime Minister makes the best of the apology; and again surpasses all recorded men in his genius for cogent definition of the nicest qualifications.

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

July 2, 1883.—. . . I venture to anticipate your concurrence on two points. The first is that though speech cannot universally be confined by a Minister within the limits of action to which he has conformed, yet that declarations, tending to place him markedly in advance or in arrear of his colleagues on subjects of high politics, or otherwise delicate, should be made as rarely and reservedly, and if I may so say as reluctantly as possible. . . . My second point is that, as Ministers, we are bound to recognise the balanced character of the system under which we live and of which we are the official defenders . . . all that belongs to the person and family of the sovereign are specially in our charge and are to be watched over by us with careful and even jealous respect.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

July 2, 1883.—I thank you very much. . . . I believe that I can accept without reserve your two points. As to the first, I will only say that it must be to the interest of every Government that its several members should not entirely lose their individuality in the corporate existence, but that they should retain their representative character, and thus continue to bring to the Government of which they form part whatever

[1] Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 113.

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influence they may have possessed in this capacity. As regards your second point, I accept that also without hesitation; and I have never consciously failed in respect to the Sovereign or Royal Family. . . .

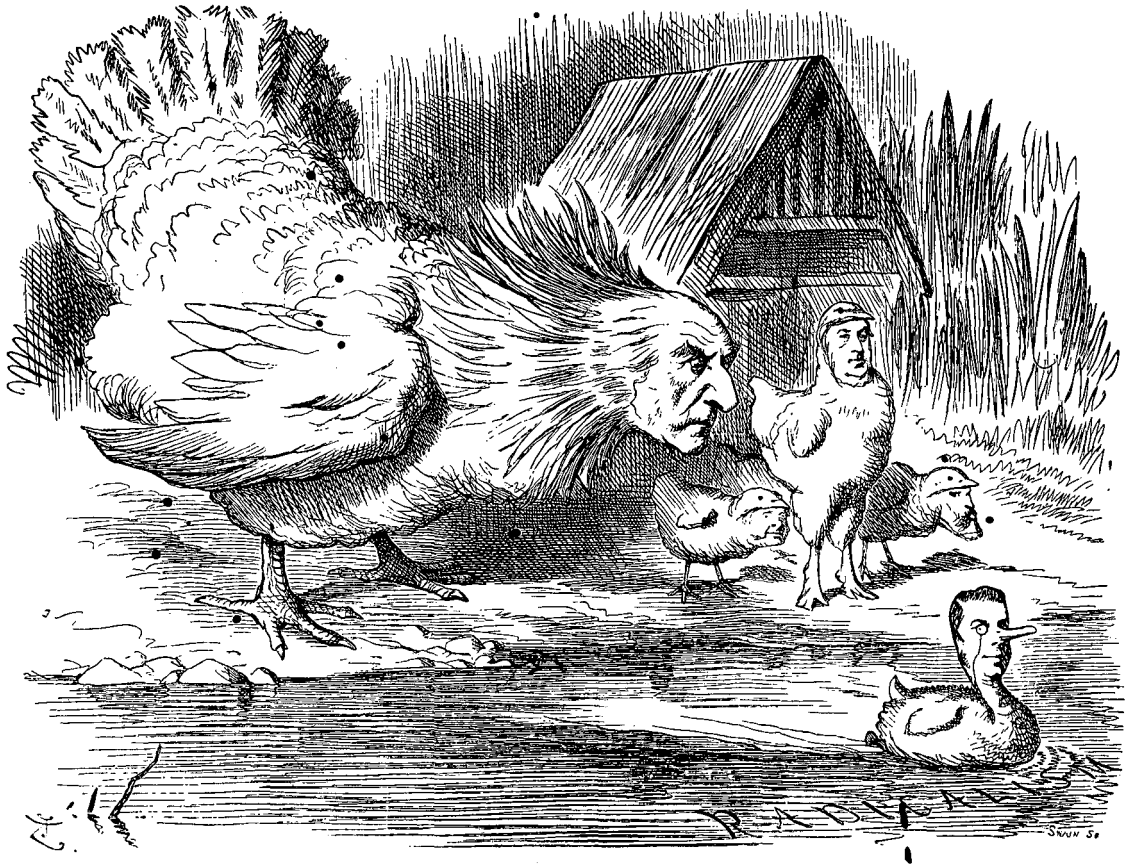
His explanation did not please, but as nothing better was to be extracted from him in his wicked mood it was judged well to leave him alone for the present; and this in effect was what Gladstone advised.[1] Thus precarious peace was made, but this incident was the beginning of a long and dangerous controversy. Chamberlain meant to wear his official muzzle with a difference. We see in these letters the clash of two generations. After Chamberlain's coolness at Greenwich in covering his temerity at Birmingham he was more than ever "the man of the future" in the eyes of advanced Liberalism. By its younger ranks he was idolised. The majority of the nation was more enlivened than outraged. It liked his spirit; he quickened all politics.

Tenniel hit off the situation[2] in a shrewd, jovial drawing, "The Daring Duckling" cartoon, done at Frank Burnand's suggestion. The Prime Minister, the "Grand Old Hen", ruffled in every feather, beholds with consternation that one of her chicks has turned out a bird of another sort and is swimming out on the pond, not to be controlled by any cluckings from the bank. But there had been penetration in *Punch's* earlier advice to him: "Keep your eye on the pence of your manner, Joseph, the pounds of your politics will take care of themselves"; and the comic oracle now added:

> Oh, where is he going and what will he do?
> And will he to warning give ear and turn back?
> Will he prove deaf to the hullaballoo?
> And make his own choice between cackle and quack?
> Cluckitty-cluck!
> Audacious young duck!
> Is he off prematurely to try his own luck?

Was it a duckling? Might it not be as in Hans Andersen a swan? When the session ended a few weeks later he had much raised his parliamentary reputation by his management of his Bills on Bankruptcy and Patents. The next chapter will deal separately with his administrative and legislative record as head of the Board of Trade.

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. i. pp. 436-437.
[2] *Punch*, June 30, 1883.



THE DARING DUCKLING

Grand Old Hen: "Come back—come back! Goodness gracious—where ever *is* he going to?"

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, June 30, 1883, by kind permission of the Proprietors

VIII

It was a recess blowing great guns of oratory. The Conservatives helped the Radical leader with his own side by singling him out for assault. In their autumnal warnings he was still "Robespierre revealed", and they would have been right but for two things: he was no whit like Robespierre, and as yet was not at all revealed.

About this time Chamberlain began to suggest, and to plan with his friends, the general scheme of the articles afterwards elaborated as a series in the *Fortnightly Review*, and finally reprinted in the once well-known volume called *The Radical Programme*. Housing scandals he studied again with more concentrated intention. He mobilised the Caucus against the Whigs. The National Liberal Federation demanded Chamberlain's policy—a democratic franchise for the whole country, in the counties as well as the boroughs; and the same extension in Ireland as in Great Britain. This demonstration of prevailing Liberal opinion told with weight during the autumn of 1883 upon the struggles within the Government. We can picture the typical rivals—the keen-faced, swift-witted Radical who seemed so quick that it was hard to regard him as indomitable; and the heavy, lounging Whig whose eyes were full of reserves, whose obstinate lip was noticeable through his beard, and whose whole countenance and manner suggested depths of resistance.

In the autumn Cabinets after a long struggle on franchise extension the vital issue between the Radical demand and Whig reluctance was settled wholly in favour of the former. When Ministers came to grips in their counsels towards the end of October, the Radical leader backed by Dilke was more than ever insistent on his three points—immediate extension of the franchise to the rural labourer, inclusion of Ireland on perfectly equal terms, and sequent instead of simultaneous redistribution. Hartington stolidly resisted the latter two points.[1] But he soon stood alone. Gladstone brought round all the other ministers when he threw his whole weight on the side of the two Radicals, though as against them he drew the line at "one man one vote".

[1] Bernard Holland, *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 395. October 24, 1882.

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By the end of November the great question for the United Kingdom was virtually settled in the Cabinet. Next session the size of the electorate would be doubled, with franchise equality for Ireland, and in some sort real democracy would begin to reign. Few Cabinet decisions in our history have been charged in the same degree with far-reaching implications. None present could guess all that it meant—the Radical Chamberlain as little as Hartington the Whig, whose consent to the policy is full of misgivings and reserves.

In this duel Chamberlain seemed to have won. By no means was it to be so easy. Hartington fought a rear-guard action. In a few days the new quarrel between Chatsworth and Highbury was a public conflict, bringing the Cabinet to extremity, and re-opening in a more serious form the controversy with the Crown on Ministerial free speech and collective responsibility.

Addressing at Bristol, November 26, the annual Grand Meeting of the Caucus—he delighted in parodying the enemy's word—Chamberlain kindled hotter feelings. His theme in effect was that after years of waiting the common people were about to enter their own kingdom. The new franchise would throw open the gates; and social legislation would march in. He made a whole-hearted plea for identical treatment of Ireland; he condemned privilege for minorities and giving weightage to their representation. Minorities had too much power already. Let there be fair play for majorities. He avowed his own belief in manhood suffrage, though admitting that its time was not just yet. And far from stopping there, he instanced, as amongst the first measures of the coming democratic era, religious equality, free education, better housing, better conditions for the agricultural labourers, popular control of the liquor traffic, and readjustment of the burthens of taxation.

His preparation for his speeches was always intent, but by this time his closely premeditated practice was like second nature in freedom and unerring skill of delivery. No speech he had ever made was more continuously and fervidly applauded than this at Bristol.

But it roused Hartington, who resented this prompt disclosure of his defeat and now refused to recognise it as definite. Next night he replied and seemed to show a solid will to put the brake

on the Liberal machine.[1] Particularly, he dwells on the grave difficulties of including Ireland on the same terms as Great Britain in electoral reform next session. A few days later, stung by Conservative taunts, the Whig spokesman declared that moderate citizens could not swallow on a first summons such a Reform Bill as had been sketched out by the Radical Caucus.[2] Hartington's public words were sober as always. Privately he was in the more rumbling mood of his later celebrated postscript: "Thank God we shall soon be out of this damned Government".

Between the Radical twins confident notes passed:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

November 28, 1883.—*Dilke to J. C.*—I liked your speech of course, but I liked it all the more when I read Harty's. He grumbles and will yield—you will have publicly conquered him and dragged him at your wheels. But what a good fellow your victim is all the same! How I shall respect that man when we belong to different parties. I wish you'd make the Caucus soap the stairs at the Duchy of Lancaster—it's in the Savoy tell them—if it has stairs, and if Dodson ever goes there. . . .

(*P.S.*)—Please write to me or put a minute in any box that comes round and don't say what you think of Dodson in that letter which I am to show him. You may in any other.

November 29.—*J. C. to Dilke.*—Why does Hartington think aloud when he thinks one thing and means to do another? And why does he snub the Caucus when he has made up his mind to do exactly what they want? . . . Don't give way to Dodson, but if necessary bring the matter to the Cabinet. There you are safe to have a majority.

But the day after his protest against the Caucus, the Whig spokesman intimated that his differences with the Radical leader were likely to bring about his own resignation.[3] Gladstone wrote at once to Chamberlain, with high compliments, but entreating him to tone down his impending reply at Wolverhampton:

It is I know difficult and disagreeable to maintain these reserves, and rein in a strong conviction, a masculine understanding and a great power

[1] Hartington at Manchester, November 27, 1882.

[2] Hartington at Accrington, December 1.

[3] *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 396.

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of clear expression; but pray be as cruel as you can to your own gifts. I cannot now explain my reasons for writing, but you may divine them, and will I am sure excuse the act.[1]

Wrongly supposing that the chief reason again was the Queen—who was indeed offended once more but had not passed formal censure—the Radical irrepressible went at once to Wolverhampton (December 4), and his speech was anything but a sedative.

IX

He roused tumultuous enthusiasm. There must be no flinching upon the franchise, even if Lord Salisbury meant to force a dissolution rather than pass the coming Bill. "Then the issue will be between the Peers and the People, between the privileges of the few and the rights of the many." (Great cheering again and again renewed.)

The harassed Prime Minister, with no reason to love this method, expostulated again, urging that the Government's intentions were not formally decided and should not be aggressively proclaimed (December 6). Intentions by now were substantially decided by the general agreement of the Cabinet and by the overwhelming pressure of Liberal opinion. The Radical leader represented these necessities in his answer to the Prime Minister, and regretted that any uncertainty about them should now be suggested.

I cannot help saying that the doubt and hesitation in which this question of paramount importance is now left are damaging to the Government. Members of the party in the House, in the press and in the country who would be perfectly loyal to the decision of the Government, if they knew what it was, are perplexed and divided by the uncertainty which prevails.[2]

To this Gladstone replied much more gravely:

December 10, 1883.— . . . What is perhaps most material is to bear in mind that no judgment of the Cabinet has yet been reported to the Queen, and that she has given us no permission to proceed with or

[1] Gladstone to Chamberlain, December 3, 1883.
[2] Chamberlain to Gladstone, December 8, 1883.

HAMLET, PRINCE OF BIRMINGHAM

Enter Hamlet and (un)certain players

First Player (H-rt-ngt-n). "I hope, Sir, we shall reform *this* indifferent well!
Hamlet (Ch-mb-rl-n) (*impatiently*). "*O reform it altogether!!*"

Act iii., Sc. 2 (adapted)

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, December 8, 1883, by kind permission of the Proprietors

announce a Franchise Bill. As you have public deliverances in prospect I ought to mention to you that there is disturbance at headquarters about the original speech, but my attention has not yet been drawn to particulars, so I am still in the dark. . . .

Adroitly the Ulysses of affairs added a hint that a useful speech might show how the strengthening of popular institutions "imported no danger whatever to" the monarchy.

The Radical replied next day:

Board of Trade, December 11, 1883.— . . . My only difficulty is that as I never had the remotest idea of attacking the monarchy, and as I cannot think there is the slightest suggestion of anything of the kind in my speeches—whether at Bristol or at Wolverhampton—I fear I may be anticipating an accusation which nobody would ever think of making, and by so doing be raising a discussion which would be inexpedient and possibly harmful.

My own view clearly is that the extension of the franchise and the widening of the basis of our representation will tend to strengthen the Throne, and that the only possible danger to monarchical institutions would be the continued exclusion of the majority of the people from any share in the Government, or the ostracism of any considerable political party from all part in, or responsibility for, the advice which is tendered to the Sovereign.

In this sense he did indeed speak quite handsomely at Birmingham on December 17, and thought the unpleasant issue was closed. But immediately afterwards Mr. Gladstone, while satisfied with the placation of the throne, requested his Birmingham colleague to be more tender to the Peers.

This was too much. If Hartington through these weeks was strongly entrenched at Hardwick and Chatsworth, Chamberlain was heavily fortified at Highbury. His rejoinder was uncompromising and amongst State papers it ranks to-day, nearly half a century after, as a considerable document:

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE

December 21.—MY DEAR MR. GLADSTONE, I cannot see my way to alter or qualify anything that I have said about the House of Lords. I agree with Mr. Bright that a hereditary legislature cannot be a permanent institution in a free country, and if it ever sets itself against the will of

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the people it must bend or break. If the Lords throw out a Reform Bill, I think they will provoke a formidable agitation against their present anomalous privileges, and this agitation will have my full sympathy and support.

Unless I am mistaken, Mr. Forster spoke in the same sense in the House of Commons when the Lords threw out one of the Irish Bills, and in the coming contest he will find many imitators and followers.

My loyalty to the Throne is founded on the belief that in this country it is no obstacle to popular progress. I cannot say the same of the House of Lords, whose action has hardly ever been more mischievous than during the last few years when it has been largely responsible for the condition of Ireland.

I shall be sincerely sorry if these views should unfortunately incur your disapproval, but as they are the result of strong conviction, I feel bound to place them frankly before you.

The wise Premier retrieved a false step with perfect grace:

Hawarden Castle, Chester, December 22.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, . . . You will forgive me for seeming officious, because my difficulties in keeping things together at the moment are very great, and I do not well know what will be the end.

I am however the less anxious about this collateral matter because I find that your observations about the Throne appear to have had a good effect.

It is my misfortune to have a considerable degree of concurrence with your estimate of the legislative performance of the House of Lords, and it would not have a savoury effect were I to speak out all I think on that matter. . . .

P.S.—Since I wrote to you last I have discovered a segment of the Cabinet who hold that at the last sitting *nothing* was decided!—W. E. G.

Hartington still would and would not. "I am terribly sick of office and seldom find myself in real agreement with my colleagues."[1] No further concessions were to be expected from the Radical leader. Apart from his recent correspondence with Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, as well as Granville and Harcourt, worked all through December to avert Hartington's resignation, and at the beginning of the New Year he was dissuaded. The

[1] December 2. Holland, *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 397.

hint of the Prime Minister's own resignation—that ever-recurring and never-occurring contingency—had been used to bring pressure on the last of the great Whigs. He remained with the Government upon an odd condition—Gladstone's agreement to "stay on" if possible for two more sessions in order to pass redistribution after franchise reform. This Cabinet always *in extremis* was thenceforth doomed to surpass all fable in the more than feline number of its lives. Gladstone was nearer to the Whigs on redistribution of seats; but relatively Redistribution meant little for the political future; Franchise with Irish equality meant everything.

X

The political drama of 1883—partly exhibited, mainly concealed, at that time—does in fact begin the fall of the Whigs after two centuries. But it will not establish that permanent supremacy of Radicalism assumed to be certain by Chamberlain, Dilke and Morley. In Dublin, Earl Spencer and Trevelyan were altogether with Chamberlain for making Irish Nationalism practically dominant in the House of Commons by throwing into Parnell's hands five-sixths of the parliamentary representation of Ireland —at least 80 seats counting 160 on division for or against any British Government.

One way or other, this was sure to break the traditional system at Westminster. To break it was not only Parnell's personal intention, but the clear idea of the whole Irish Nationalist movement. Chamberlain did not foresee well that coming strategical situation already grasped by Gladstone's thought and dreaded by Whig instinct. From Dublin Castle the Irish Chief Secretary, Sir George Trevelyan, writes at the end of 1883 that Chamberlain's letter to him is "like a trumpet". Gladstone had partly persuaded his reluctant Whig lieutenant, Hartington, by speaking on Ireland in conversation "more strongly than I have ever heard him before of the utter impossibility of the English and Scotch majority assenting to the legislative separation of the two countries".[1]

Amongst them all Hartington's irresolute gloom was nearest

[1] Holland, *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 403.

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to coming realities, but Liberals, Conservatives and Parnellites were all forging unsuspected fates for each other.

We may break off the main narrative here to glance at other things. In this autumn of 1883 a great movement began for the better housing of the people. It was started in October by one of the anonymous articles of *The Radical Programme* contributed under Chamberlain's supervision to the *Fortnightly Review*. This article by itself did not attract much notice at the moment. But a few weeks later appeared a terrible pamphlet written by a missionary working in the poorest districts of the metropolis, and called *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. This devoted non-political appeal had an extraordinary effect. Both parties were conscience-stricken on the Housing Question. Lord Salisbury for the Conservatives took it up with deep sincerity. But Chamberlain had been working at it for some time and especially through this recess; and he published his thoughts in the December number of the *Fortnightly*. His article made a stir. He showed that housing was inseparable from other factors in the social question. He advocated drastic measures to improve the slums chiefly at the expense of their owners. This was what opponents called his "State Socialism". He argued that franchise and redistribution would be useless unless they led directly "to the practical solution of some of those social questions which intimately concern the welfare of the masses and in the settlement of which they have a right to make their voice heard". Morley read the proofs of the article, and noted: "Its vigour and clearness are remarkable; I doubt whether you wrote as effectively before in your life". This friend, it is true, thinks the outcry about the misery of the people tends to become unbalanced. He thinks there has been much more improvement than Chamberlain recognises. But, of course, not enough; and he concludes: "Your paper will make a strong impression and will give people confidence in what you say. It is so clear—pointed—intelligible. Above all, it suggests a strong and effective system of cure."[1]

Froude detested Radicalism in general but desired efficient government. He thought that Chamberlain, whom he had admired for some years, was the most likely man to direct a new policy of national reconstruction, and that the sooner he became

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, November 11, 1883.

the reorganiser of Britain the better. Long before,[1] the historian had written:

> I often think of you. You seem to me to be the one member of the Cabinet who looks beyond the division list of this or the next session, who knows what he wants to do, and means if he can to do it—an invaluable quality which will carry you far. I cannot say that the direction in which things are moving, or in which you would move them, is to my mind. But I see the hopelessness of any wholesome action in Conservatism even if another chance is allowed it—and when I cannot have my own way I like those best who can choose a way for themselves and have courage and skill to follow it.

[1] June 28, 1881.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BOARD OF TRADE

(1880–1885)

THE "Board", its Traditions and Staff—A New Man and New Life—The Chief and the "Permanents"—Grain Cargoes, Seamen and "Crimping"—Employers' Liability, Electric Lighting, Bankruptcy, Patents—"Poor Jack" and the Merchant Shipping Bill—The Crusade against "Coffin-ships"—A Desperate Fight; Chamberlain's Offer to Resign—Temporary Defeat and Later Vindication—Calumny and Friendship—Suez Canal and Channel Tunnel—"Free Trade" and a Defender of the Faith—Germs of Heresy—Chamberlain *versus* Gladstone—Humours and Vexations in "The Department"—Devotion and Farewell.

I

BOOK IV. 1880–85.

IT is time, and it is convenient here, to turn to Chamberlain's work through five years in the first public department entrusted to him—the Board of Trade.

On one aspect of his career as a statesman, and perhaps on one only, there is no dispute. As a great administrator his name is accepted as at least the equal of any. When, much later in his life, we follow his work in a larger sphere, whether he had an equal amongst the administrators of his time will be a question to consider.

Of the department's new political chief at work we must take a nearer view. Some whose long experience gave them the best qualifications to judge—and they remembered Milner Gibson who first began to raise this office to its modern status—testified that there never had been an abler, more expert President of the Board of Trade, whether in departmental efficiency or in parliamentary spokesmanship. And before he quitted that post, not again to return to it, he had proved himself in the cause

of the merchant sailors greater-hearted than any of his predecessors.

The "Board" itself claims a word or two. As that old name may indicate, it had struggled up irregularly since Cromwell's day. Neither in form nor in powers did it resemble any logical creation. Like Topsy, it "growed". As it stood towards this latter part of the nineteenth century its duties were rambling and multifarious. Yet its scope and organisation were inadequate to the needs of a nation whose commercial supremacy amidst changing conditions would no longer be lazily maintained. The age of virtual monopoly had just passed, and the age of foreign competition was just beginning. Formerly the office of President had ranked below Cabinet position, and sometimes, like the Post Office, had been regarded as a convenient depository for politicians of high rank called statesmen by courtesy. The Ministerial head of the Board was accounted much below a Secretary of State in status as in pay. True, this office had been thought suitable for John Bright, though the surpassing orator did not shine in executive capacity.

None the less, the similar elevation of another and younger middle-class man—from Birmingham, and one who could not deny that he had been a mayor—was regarded by many old-fashioned Whigs and Tories as a breach of propriety. Disraeli had invited an owner of bookstalls to manage the Queen's Navy and a provincial lawyer and banker to become Home Secretary. Incapable of these Oriental strokes, Mr. Gladstone was little given to unconventional appointments of any kind. He regarded Chamberlain's promotion to the Board of Trade with Cabinet rank as an irksome and extreme concession to the spirit of the age. The new Minister, if he meant to make the most of his department, would have to depend uncommonly on himself.

II

Totally unprepared, when he entered upon this task in May 1880, he felt at first more misgiving than elation. To a friend he writes with his usual honesty in dealing with himself:

> If I could only have a recess before parliament meets I should be quite *au fait* by that time. As it is, I dread having to reply to questions, and speak on subjects that I do not fully understand.

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Some months after, in a frank speech to his constituents, he gave a fuller picture of his state of mind on taking office:[1]

"I never spent a more anxious time in my life than in the few days which followed my acceptance. . . . I like the office which has been conferred upon me. I find the work congenial to me, and I find an ever-fresh interest in the many fresh subjects with which I am brought into close acquaintance. . . . When I first commenced, I found myself face to face with a hundred questions, many of them involving many technical details of which I humbly confess I was profoundly ignorant; and if I was saved from making mistakes which would have been humiliating, I owe it to the care and knowledge and intelligence of the permanent officials of my department, who have in so many cases to supply or to conceal the deficiencies of their parliamentary chiefs."

What he "did not understand" he meant to learn. Through months of application until it gave him headaches he fell upon the study of his business, then had it at his finger-ends and settled his own grip on the office. He explored all the divisions of its organisation. The "Commercial Department", devoted to innumerable statistics and general information, he finds—strange to say in a country like ours—much reduced in staff and influence; but he will not leave it so. There is the "Railway Department"; the "Marine Department"; the "Harbour Department"; and the "Finance Department" dealing with all manner of accounts concerning itself and the rest. So Chamberlain in Birmingham had gone into gas and water and clearance and reconstruction until he knew the essentials of the work of every single committee better than any member of it.

Evidently this new Minister was to be no parliamentary mouthpiece ventriloquised by his experts. In no department hitherto, not even in the Treasury, had the principal civil servants been more entirely in command.

They were personages in their own right. The Permanent Secretary was Mr. Farrer, afterwards Lord Farrer—signally able; dogmatic without mitigation on free-trade theory; seldom weakened by deficiency in self-estimate. Mr. Giffen (Sir Robert later), head of the statistical staff, had been an eminent journal-

[1] Birmingham, December 26, 1880.

ist; and now, a flowing source of comparative information, he was, as well, a real man of mind possessing both breadth and solidity. Farrer afterwards told Sir Algernon West[1] that he was struck by his new chief's ignorance "of all economic questions". The real difference was between the doctrinaire bureaucrat and the realistic statesman. When sugar-bounties abroad, for instance, began to ruin sugar-refining at home, Farrer, like Philosopher Square, thought that result was entirely in accordance with "the immortal rule of right and the eternal fitness of things". Chamberlain did not see his way to question the theory, but he was not comfortable about the fact. And so in other matters. The Permanent Secretary knew nothing of Chamberlain's range of ability and knowledge both in national business and international competition. About the working conditions of capital and labour in British industry this President of the Board of Trade knew more than all his staffs put together. At the same time, though he was their ruler, he was their mainstay—loyal and more towards his civil servants: generous in public acknowledgment of his debt to them; pushing their personal interests stoutly, as with some amusement we shall find. The entire department he had in hand like no one before him.

III

We might say that fresh air blew through the corridors and freshened the rooms.

Hitherto the "Board" had been too much like what is now called a Correspondence College and was then called a Circumlocution Office—where no business possible to transact by epistolary and documentary procedure was supposed to be done otherwise. Perusing, inditing, copying; compiling, computing, docketing; tying up and putting by—the department filled countless pigeon-holes and consumed immeasurable red tape. And all this, most of it proper and necessary no doubt, was before the official use of typewriters.

The new President encouraged a more personal contact with national life. One of those amongst his subordinates who saw most of him[2] records:

[1] Sir Algernon West, *Contemporary Portraits*, p. 68.

[2] Sir Alfred Bateman to the present writer.

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Mr. C. was about the first president to favour any personal investigations being made by his staff into commercial questions. It had been quite unusual for us to visit Chambers of Commerce or even to interview commercial people, who were supposed to make their views known to the Board by writing.

"Mr. C." was hardly a year in office before he represented to "Mr. G." that his department, enlarged, should receive the style and functions of a Ministry of Commerce.[1] For his elaborate and detailed memorandum there is no room here, but it is a cogent document filling many pages. He rejects, indeed, suggestions that agriculture should be included. In that case, if the President "were a country gentleman he would not have the confidence of the trading classes, while if he were a commercial man his decisions would not be accepted as satisfactory by the agriculturists". But he desires to give much greater importance to the Statistical Department and to extend its purview. He wishes that the reports on trade and agriculture then made by attachés or consuls to the Foreign Office shall be transferred to the "Ministry of Commerce", and that to it shall belong all "legislation and questions in Parliament concerning bankruptcy, partnership, patents, trade-marks, copyright of designs, and all other matters affecting trade".

The proposal anticipated the spirit of our own era; but the distractions now beginning to surround this Government and the reluctance of its Whig section prevented "Mr. C." during his half-decade from putting through a third of the work he intended at the sanguine outset. He often sighed for the "democratic autocracy" of Birmingham.

Though he did not get his Ministry of Commerce, he went a good way towards it by raising the department's status in every respect and making one capital addition to its equipment. The Commercial section had been in eclipse since many of its former duties had been transferred in 1872 to the Foreign Office, where, as it proved, they could not be well performed. The new growth of tariffs abroad made an adequate statistical system at home more necessary than ever. In 1882, after a difficult struggle —very ably conducted by Dilke—over French tariffs and British

[1] June 3, 1881, memorandum to the Prime Minister.

trade, Chamberlain revived the Commercial Department and restored it to its proper place in relation to the Foreign Office. This by itself was no inconsiderable public service.[1]

IV

No department had so many legislative projects in its pigeonholes. This suited the President's temperament at the outset. He met obstacles unknown to his predecessors owing to the unprecedented congestion of business and distraction of interests in that House of Commons.

Most of his hopes, like those of some other Ministers, might be blighted by Irish struggles and Egyptian crises, by the Bradlaugh muddle and the Fourth party, and by the franchise conflict between the two parties and Houses. But he let no session pass without some strenuous attempt. Now and again he carried home his sheaves; at other times he had to endure bruising disappointment and defeat of endeavours he had most at heart. He blamed bitterly the "selfish interests" and the culpable indifference of national habit for these thwartings and repulses. They hardened his temper and whetted his language. But his fierce onslaughts upon the abuses of property, where it seemed to him to stand against the rights of human life—as in the case of slums, coffin ships, and feudalism on the land—came in the latter part of his tenure of office. At the outset his paths were smoother.

Within a few days after taking office he had assured his old friend Samuel Plimsoll that he would never forget the cause of the merchant seamen, and before he left office he jeopardised his political life to keep his word. Meanwhile, short as was the first session of the new Parliament, he passed in 1880 two little measures for "poor Jack".

The Grain Cargoes Bill provided for the safer stowing of those cargoes to prevent dangerous shifting.

The Seamen's Wages Bill sought to secure fairer payment. It proposed to abolish the abuses of "crimping" and prohibit the notorious "advance-note" system.[2] For cashing those notes the crimps charged rates of discount leaving half the money or some-

[1] Sir Herbert Llewellyn Smith, G.C.B., *The Board of Trade* (Whitehall Series) (1928), pp. 69-70.

[2] August 25, 1880.

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times more in their own hands. In return these decoy-men were bound to the owners to put on board the men, drunk or sober, before the hour of sailing. The men were usually drunk; and many, kidnapped in this way, deserted at the first chance. Chamberlain's intentions in this direction were thwarted by evasion for some years. Other clauses of the Seamen's Wages Bill were more effectual. The sailor on completing his engagement was to be paid in full immediately after quitting the ship. Further, Chamberlain abolished the degrading anomaly of making sailors liable to arrest without warrant and to summary imprisonment for refusing at the last moment to sail. On this point, though much pressed then and afterwards to give way, he was adamant.

He was much complimented[1] in the House for his tact and grip in piloting his first two measures, but was already incurring the rancour of most shipowners.

Again in this session, with the same pointed reasonableness, he defended the Employers' Liability Bill—a very modest instalment of justice—against cries about freedom of contract and about interference with the rights of property, as against charges that his ideas would cripple our depressed trade in face of foreign competition and bring about the ruin of the country. On this particular question of "life and property"—the question of compensation to labour for casualties suffered in the course of its service—the Radical leader already had in mind a greater system; and he lived to lay down part of its foundations. Borrowing amply and rightly from Bismarck, he will one day inaugurate in Great Britain the spirit of social insurance.

Next year, however,—in 1881—all his hopes for British measures were scattered by the Irish tempest. The following year again was nearly as barren in the same sense.

Vexing through two sessions was the sterility of his effort as head of his department. But in 1882 he succeeded in passing at last one measure—the Electric Lighting Bill. He has been much censured for it by technicians perhaps little acquainted with the political circumstances of the time.

This Bill enabled municipalities with the consent of the Board of Trade to adopt "the new illuminant". They might generate it themselves; or delegate supply to companies or individuals,

[1] July 6, 1880.

while reserving powers to repurchase. In the latter case conditions were stringent. The tenure of electric-supply undertakings by private enterprise was limited to twenty-one years. At the end of that term the local authorities were entitled to take over at the bare value of the material—a "break-up price", as it has been called. This prospect, needless to say, deterred investment and crippled private enterprise which otherwise would have been the main national factor in extension. No doubt municipalities, relieved from the former cost of special Bills, could now secure speedy and cheap authorisation by Provisional Orders. From this new facility resulted many good civic supplies of the "new illuminant". The main purpose was missed.

It must be said for Chamberlain that the whole question was of a novel character; that electricity was then regarded by all but a few from the standpoint of local lighting, not of industrial power; that the false analogy with gas-supply was generally accepted; that a dread of creating new monopolies in what is now called the field of public utilities was beginning to prevail; that general opinion was with him as well as that of his "permanents"; and that several years passed before the outweighing disadvantages of his legislation became unmistakable. But on the balance he was misled by an excess of municipal enthusiasm. The Act retarded electrical development in the United Kingdom for more than half a decade. His Bill of 1882 was his chief mistake at the Board of Trade, and that fact must be honestly recorded in these pages.[1]

Keeping up one favourite habit now useful to a President of the Board of Trade, he extended his knowledge of foreign countries. His French and German holidays were numerous, and once he visited Russia. In the autumn of 1882 he went to Sweden again and made an excellent impression on our Minister at Stockholm, Sir Horace Rumbold—not prepossessed in advance by Chamberlain's Radical repute.

> To a diplomatist past middle-age . . . with strong, innate Conservative tendencies . . . the extreme programme attributed to the rising statesman was disquieting, if not distasteful. Mr. Chamberlain, it is almost need-

[1] Six years after, Chamberlain's Act was amended. The Act of 1888 increased from twenty-one years to forty-two the period allowed to private undertakings before municipalities could enforce—if they chose to exercise that option—their right to repurchase.

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less to say, came, and not only conquered—an easy victor—but captivated our home circle and all those with whom he came in contact during his short visit to Stockholm. He had an audience of the King, who talked to him *à cœur ouvert* of his Norwegian troubles. . . . Mr. Chamberlain's impression, which subsequent events proved to be quite correct, was that the Crown had been led by maladroit advice into a position whence it could with difficulty extricate itself without some loss of prestige. . . . I have preserved a strong personal regard for the then stalwart Radical member for Birmingham.[1]

V

Not until 1883 did the state of parliamentary business allow him a real chance to legislate with both hands. Then he made full use of the long-deferred opportunity. His Bankruptcy Act and his Patents Act were a double-event justly admired.

Take first the Bankruptcy Act. Up to that time the jest ran that no honest man with a conscientious regard to the interests of his family could dream of paying twenty shillings in the pound. Examples to the contrary were favoured by the state of the law. Dishonest debtors escaped through many loopholes. Facilities for collusion enabled adroit or fictitious claimants to oust the body of the creditors. In more than nine-tenths of the failures the existing provision for legal investigation was a dead-letter.

It became evident that the fundamental error of the whole series of laws which culminated in the Act of 1869 was the failure to distinguish between the judicial and the administrative aspects of bankruptcy control, and the assumption that effective administrative supervision could be expected from judicial tribunals which were constitutionally unsuited for the purpose.[2]

When the new President of the Board was appointed in 1880 he had to consider at once a powerful memorial already presented by the bankers and merchants of London. Searching enquiries were carried out. On the results was based his great Act three years later.

For want of time in a House of Commons disorganised and

[1] Sir Horace Rumbold, *Further Recollections of a Diplomatist* (1903), pp. 291-293.

[2] Sir Herbert Llewellyn Smith, G.C.B., *The Board of Trade*, p. 172.

almost paralysed by the Irish Question, Chamberlain's first efforts at thorough reform were frustrated. His Bill of 1881 had to be abandoned, though introduced before Easter with his best lucidity.[1] For the next eighteen months the Minister for Trade raged against the impotence of Parliament for British legislation. Almost from his first experiences at Westminster he had foreseen that drastic changes of procedure would become inevitable. Now, he writes to the Prime Minister entreating that there shall be no weakness.

I am informed on the best authority that the feeling of indignation at the prolonged incapacity of the House to fulfil its duties is very strong and has only been restrained hitherto by doubts as to the necessity or expediency of public demonstrations (June 22, 1882).

As well as the closure he favoured the establishment of two Grand Committees, one for Legal Bills, the other for Commercial Bills. Their proceedings were to be public; and measures so dealt with, when reported, were to be expedited as though they had been discussed by the whole House. This practical innovation was adopted in the autumn session of 1882. The legislative field was opened at last to the President of the Board of Trade. In that capacity, he had his fair chance in one session only of this Parliament. He made that session fertile.

VI

Early in the session of 1883 the second reading of Chamberlain's Bankruptcy Bill was taken. His speech on that occasion was distinguished by his very exceptional power of simplifying statement.

"This is not a matter which can be considered as a very exciting one or one which is generally interesting. It does not lend itself to flights of eloquence; but it is a question which has a deep interest for great masses of our people, and especially for the great body of industrious tradesmen who see, with natural indignation, that under the present system swindling is made so easy, so safe, and so profitable."[2]

His Bill struck at the root of the evil by providing for rigorous enquiry and efficient action. A Bankruptcy Department of the

[1] April 8, 1881.

[2] Hansard, March 19, 1883.

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Board of Trade was created with an Inspector-General of Bankruptcy. Official Receivers were appointed to the number of sixty-seven, available in all the principal business centres in the country. They were to call meetings of creditors, and investigate the conduct of the insolvent debtor with power on sufficient evidence to initiate prosecutions. Collusive compositions were to be prevented, and fraud punished. Though wages were still to be a first charge on the assets, if any, disclosed after liquidation, other "preferential claims" at the expense of the average creditor were restricted. No longer, as hitherto, would escape be easier for great rogues than for petty defaulters. The Bill allowed for special cases of hardship.

Soundly as the whole scheme was conceived, it had to meet party criticism. Conservatives tried to show that it would increase the curse of bureaucracy, and give a more octopus-like semblance to the tentacles of the Board of Trade. Obstinate opposition was offered to one of the shrewdest provisions of the Bill—that the trustees should pay into the Bank of England all money received. In favour of local banks Chamberlain consented to make some exceptions but held to his rule. The balances at the disposal of the Government would be substantial enough to make the new Bankruptcy Department self-supporting from the beginning, as after half a century since then it remains.

Criticism was rather Chamberlain's opportunity than his difficulty. Two years' study since the stifling of his first Bill for want of parliamentary breathing-space had made him master of all the intricacies. The clauses were many, amendments bristled; but winning praise on both sides by his quick clearness and cool head, he overcame all difficulties in Committee and achieved what had baffled law-reformers for many years—more than one Lord Chancellor having turned away in despair. He received the best assistance from the lawyers, but some of them thought him too lenient towards hard cases. When Chamberlain was insisting on giving the benefit of all doubts before inflicting penalties for fraud, Justice Stephen wrote (April 9, 1881) with caustic humour:

> . . . As a bigoted Tory I approve, and sympathize with, your Radical aversion to the very name of Freedom. We are both on the side of Power, only we would give it to different people. Your friends will get it. I am happy to think they will not get much good from it.

The Bill became an Act on August 25, 1883, and in the broad is still the foundation of British law on the subject.

The Act was not final. That it could be made so no expert suggested or supposed. Chamberlain did not profess to be fully content with it. As a man with a long experience in business he knew too well the lasting nature of the difficulty frequently illustrated in a startling way down to our own times—that it is hard enough to protect some people from others, and still harder to protect some people from themselves. As the saying runs in the City, nothing can protect the "born gull" from the "born crook". All the supplementary legislation of the last fifty years has failed to devise safeguards, both knave-proof and fool-proof, against the delusions of credulity, the lures of speculation, and the ingenuities of fraud. But the Act of 1883 was then accepted and is still esteemed as an invaluable reform of a scandalous state of the law.

VII

The Patents Act of the same session went through by parallel stages and became law on the same day.[1] This also was an affair of many clauses, guided through debate by Chamberlain with the same clarity and alacrity.

Dickens had satirised the old Circumlocution system, heart-breaking to a poor inventor however gifted. Since then there had been some improvement but the procedure was still very dilatory and discouraging.

Chamberlain introduced his Bill in mid-April[2] in a speech full of good remarks. As he confessed, his own experience gave him the liveliest interest in the subject. Incidentally, at the Hyde Park Exhibition over thirty years before, it had determined the course of his own life; and since then, at Birmingham, he had been in continuous contact with patenting and patentees. "The Bill", he said, "proceeds upon the assumption that an inventor is a person to be encouraged and not repressed, for he is a creator of trade. . . . There is no article we use, there is nothing connected with the necessities of our life, or that contributes to the health or happiness or security of the population which has not at some time or other been the subject of a patentable invention."

[1] August 25, 1883.

[2] Hansard, April 16, 1883.

The new measure brought the whole question under the superintendence of the Board of Trade. Inventors were to be encouraged in two ways. First by expediting procedure; second by cheapening fees in the preliminary stages, so as to secure easily effective examination of projects submitted. So as not to shut out the poorest applicants, the charge for provisional protection was reduced from £5 to £1; and "first payment" thereafter from £20 to £3. Thus for £4, he explained, "an inventor might get a patent good for four years".

The later and larger fees for final licence would be left unchanged. This with a considered view to "weeding out useless patents". As to the duration of exclusive privilege he proposed to leave unaltered the existing term of fourteen years. For this length of protection he did not think the total fees excessive—amounting to barely over £150.

Nearly all experts warmly congratulated Chamberlain on having devised a liberal yet well-guarded solution of a problem as complex as important. The Patent Office was now adequately staffed and its whole organisation improved. As his speech announced, it began to publish an "Illustrated Journal" containing drawings of the chief inventions; and information on matters, at home and abroad, especially interesting to patentees.

When both the Bankruptcy Act and the Patents Act were safely harvested at the end of August, John Morley—who had now entered the House of Commons as Member for Newcastle [1]—sent his glad word of praise: "It has been a triumphant session for you, and therefore for your friends".

But for all the triumph there was no escape from the mingled light and shade of human things or from the bitter drop in the cup. Calumnies against Chamberlain were about to begin; and his life henceforth would never be free from their irrational virulence.

VIII

For, next, he plunged into the most stormy and at the time the most thankless struggle of his Radical career. There is no doubt that he was possessed by his vision of the "coffin ships" and by

[1] After the resignation of Ashton Dilke, Morley became member for Newcastle-on-Tyne, as a result of the by-election on February 24, 1883.

other causes of preventible loss of life at sea; and he meant to risk all in the cause of "poor Jack". In a spirit for him singularly impassioned, and when all is told we cannot wish it otherwise, he never battled harder in a true cause. Amply was he justified within a few years, though for the moment an overwhelming weight of interested anger and obloquy bore him down and threatened to sink him altogether.

Nothing in his life was braver or more humane. As warmly stirred as was Wilberforce against slavery, he counted too much upon the influence of philanthropic tradition in the semi-democratic England of that day; and he under-estimated two things—the determination and vigour of one of the most powerful interests in the land, and the extent of the bitter personal hostility he had aroused amongst Conservatives and Whigs generally by his Radical challenges.

During the preceding twenty years, since the change from wood and sail to iron and steam, insular shipping had made marvellous strides and risen to the top of its supremacy. In the age of individualism British shipowners were most individualistic; and correspondingly formidable when they acted together.[1] They were full of a "cock of the walk" spirit. They wanted to do what they liked with their own. Dealing with the varying circumstances of foreign ports everywhere, personal initiative was the breath of their life. They resented any official meddling with their business. They hated the Board of Trade as a whole, and the uncomfortable ability of its staff at that time. They loathed its Marine Department; especially one fearless and able censor, Mr. Rothery, the Wreck Commissioner. Above all, from the first, they distrusted and disliked Chamberlain because they knew him to be in contact and in sympathy with Samuel Plimsoll, the seamen's advocate and agitator against "coffin ships". The shipowners as a whole would rather have had any man at the Board of Trade than the Radical leader.

In one way their instinct was quite sound. He would indeed interfere with them and their trade as no one had dared to do before. Backed by his whole permanent staff—roused as civil

[1] Liverpool, as the present writer well remembers, did not feel itself second in vigour and pride to any other city in the world. In spirit it was like New York.

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servants rarely are in support of a political chief—he would take his own fortunes in his hands to remove the national reproach of preventible loss of life at sea, to suppress the abuses of over-insurance, and to forbid private profit out of human calamity.

The conviction of the shipping interest from the first, that Chamberlain sympathised altogether with their most vehement assailant, was quite justified. A decade before, Mr. Plimsoll, member for Derby, had become the Quixote of the sailors' cause. Convinced, firstly, that loss of ships and lives was to a serious extent unnecessary and culpable, and secondly, that a lot of dubious owners made money out of it, he flamed into an apostle. They called him frenzied. His exaggerations were sincere; without them national conscience would not have been stirred. In the summer of 1875 he made a scene in the House of Commons till then unprecedented—denouncing "shipknackers"; shouting his determination to "unmask the villains" who sent "men to their graves"; and outraging every mid-Victorian notion of parliamentary decorum. Instead of being shocked like the majority, the Radical Mayor of Birmingham had called a town's meeting to express sympathy with the devoted offender.

Chamberlain's language on this occasion explains the crisis he created when in office. "If the statements Mr. Plimsoll has made are true, I hope he will never withdraw them (loud and continued cheers). . . . I hope Mr. Plimsoll will take comfort from the expressions which are pouring in upon him from his countrymen everywhere throughout the land, assuring him of their sympathy with his burning and righteous indignation, assuring him that they incline ever to condone unparliamentary language when it is applied to unparliamentary actions (cheers)—to crimes which are un-English, unchristian, and deserve the abhorrence of every honourable citizen." (Cheers.)[1]

The shipowners remembered this. Chamberlain never swerved. With the grateful Plimsoll he remained in friendly correspondence, and entered into intimate conversation with him immediately after kissing hands in 1880. The new President of the Board of Trade was determined from the first to redress the gross wrongs of the seamen. The shipping interest wrongly thought him the mouthpiece of their disordered enemy.

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, July 23, 1875.

What they did not understand was his habit of exhaustive investigation and his power of keeping impulse in check until he felt sure of the facts. To get at the truth he spared no effort.

Immediately after taking office he secured enquiry by a Select Committee. It did useful work in a few months, but was not reappointed. The resources of the Board of Trade were none the less effective. For several years it amassed reports and returns. Chamberlain, more and more convinced in the cause he had at heart, was held up for three years by obstruction and congestion in the House of Commons.

Meanwhile, as President of the Board of Trade, his speeches were at first conciliatory. While refusing to admit that all marine disasters could be excused as the "Act of God"—in the consecrated language of the charter-parties—he expressed again and again his preference for reform by consent through the medium of a Shipping Council representing all interests — shipowners, underwriters and the Board of Trade.[1] At Newcastle, in mid-January 1884, he made his final appeal in this sense shortly before the introduction of his Bill. Even by many who were not often his eulogists this speech was recognised as a masterly exposition. By now his tone was sterner.

Though the total annual loss of about 3500 British sailors was appalling, and most of it avoidable in the opinion of his advisers, he was not accusing any man of "deliberately sending ships to sea with the intention of drowning sailors" for the sake of over-insurance money. But he did charge a minority of owners—he hoped a small minority—with neglect of precaution, owing to a monstrous state of the law such as might relax the vigilance of any class of men not being "angels from heaven".[2] There was much opposition at this Tyneside meeting. Liberals engaged in the shipping interest, with a few shining exceptions, were just as bitter as nearly all Conservatives, except some in sympathy with the Fourth Party and its new Tory democracy.

Addressing his own constituents a fortnight later he launched denunciation with intense power. Taking as his text "I accuse

[1] Speeches—March 11, 1881 (London; replying to a shipping deputation); October 27, 1881 (Liverpool); March 8, 1883 (at the Board of Trade to a deputation from the Chamber of Shipping); November 14, 1883 (at a dinner given by Trinity House, where the principal guests were Chamberlain and Count de Lesseps).

[2] Newcastle-on-Tyne, January 15, 1884.

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the law", he gave some ghastly examples of vessels criminally lost. "I have overwhelming proof in a great number of cases that the loss of a ship is an actual source of profit to the owners. . . . Let every man without distinction of party assist me . . . to put a stop to a state of things which is discreditable, deplorable and ought not to be endured." [1]

IX

The war was opened on the Merchant Shipping Bill. Within the next few weeks the fearless and detested measure was formally introduced. "The object of this Bill is to promote the security of life and property at sea, and the leading principle of the Bill is to make it the interest as well as the duty of every shipowner to bring his venture to a safe termination." [2] To Morley he writes privately: "The more I look into the question the more I am horrified at the callous cupidity which has been fostered by a bad law and is producing untold misery". [3] He often said: "I know absolutely no trade, except that of shipowners, in which it is possible for a man to lose his property and make a profit out of it". What was the use of swearing that most shipowners were good men and that the death-dealing abuses were exceptional? Murders are exceptional. Is it therefore less necessary to make them unlawful? What is the object of preventive and punitive law but to aim at the bad minority? And most severely at the fewest when they are the worst.

Before he could make his speech in vindication of the Bill he knew his coming battle—though not his campaign—to be as good as lost beforehand, and gathered up all his powers to make a supreme effort. When he proposed the Second Reading he spoke for nearly four hours in the quietest of voices without moistening his lips. This extraordinary performance [4] in a hushed House was totally unlike him. He kept out of it all "effects"—wit, satire, phrase, eloquence. He subordinated everything to the relentless statement of evidence, detailed, cumulative, damning. His method was to name ship after ship; telling how they perished, who owned them, and what fat profits under

[1] Birmingham—Members' Meeting, January 29, 1884.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum", February 19, 1884.
[3] To Morley, February 26, 1884.
[4] Hansard, May 19, 1884.

the over-insurance system were made by the death of the crews and the misery of the survivors. These grim particulars of sea-going realities were more like the note-books of such novelists as Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins and Clark Russell than like any accustomed parliamentary performance.

In the same way he called his witnesses, as it were, by multiplying quotations from expert and impartial authorities. One of those quotations must suffice here. Mr. Hollams, a man of unsurpassed experience at that time, for he had been for a generation in request on insurance litigation, summed up as follows the effect of the existing law:

> Buy your ship as cheaply as you can; equip her as poorly as you can; load her as fully as you can; insure her as highly as you can; and send her to sea. If she gets to the end of her voyage you will have made a very good thing of it; if she goes to the bottom you will have made a very much better thing of it.

Chamberlain had piled up his evidence for three hours before he came to his proposals. No man in future was to make a profit out of death and bereavement. Marine insurance was henceforth to be an honest contract for indemnity and no more. Over-insurance above all was to be suppressed as the root of the other evils —over-loading and under-manning; defective construction and equipment; hazardous running by speeding through fog, hugging the coast, shaving headlands to save time. Stricter warranty of seaworthiness was to be exacted from owners and agents. The Employers' Liability Act was to be extended to seamen. In future marine insurance cases would be much better decided without a jury by a judge sitting with assessors.

The four hours' speech was reprinted and circulated to the extent of a million copies by the National Liberal Federation. But in the parliamentary circumstances the supreme effort was in vain for the moment, though not for long.

His effective friends in the struggle were few; his opponents savage. The shipping interest rose in insurrection and organised a ruthless campaign in the press, at meetings, through the post, in the lobbies. He had, they said, cast suspicion and odium upon owners as a body. In effect, he had called some of them swindlers and murderers. Before the eyes of the world he had

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smirched the fame of British shipping. His proposals would hamper it hopelessly by comparison with its competitors. He would drive tonnage abroad. We must remember that it happened to be a time of deep depression in the industry. And who was behind Chamberlain? Was it not that frantic zealot, Samuel Plimsoll, admittedly virtuous but notoriously mad?

Even high society was disturbed, as a profane anecdote shows. One permanent official of the Board of Trade—devoted to the President as they all were—was as witty as humane; and when he met a beautiful woman, romantic in her affairs but prosaic in politics, the following dialogue occurred:

LADY: What is Chamberlain's principle in the Bill?
WIT: Prefers lives to capital.
LADY: I prefer capital; do you?
WIT: Yes; a child is easier to get than a guinea.

Letters and telegrams rained on the House of Commons urging members to reject the Bill. Shipowners, nominally Liberal like Norwood of Hull, worked their hardest to beat it. The country was otherwise engrossed by the franchise agitation and the Sudan. Public opinion was apathetic in the cause of the seamen. And, above all, "poor Jack" himself was away as usual.

Chamberlain's best friend in this desperate effort was *Punch*. Tenniel's genius kept a touch of Nelson's England when he drew ships. The cartoon of March 22, 1884, shows the President of the Board of Trade as a cherub with an eye-glass hovering over a sleeping sailor on the deck of a coffin ship—"Value £8000; Insurance £30,000". *Punch* added in another place: "Vested interests stigmatise Mr. Chamberlain's Shipping Bill as 'reckless'. So do we; only we spell it with a 'W'."

X

Behind the scenes the Ministerial situation for some months had been bitter for the Radical leader. He had no stout backing in the Cabinet. A few weeks after the introduction of his Bill, he felt that he was not to have a fair fighting chance.

As early as March 9, over two months before he moved the Second Reading, he had gone so far as to offer his resignation

THE CHERUB

Reproduced from the original drawing by Sir John Tenniel for the cartoon appearing in *Punch*, March 22, 1884, by kind permission of the Proprietors

to the Prime Minister, who had been hinting that it would be well for him to jettison a good deal of his cargo:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

40 *Prince's Gardens, March* 9, 1884.—My dear Mr. Gladstone, . . . I have come to the conclusion that there is practically no hope of a compromise. . . .

The shipowners want to stave off all legislation and they do not want to prevent over-insurance. Mr. Rathbone, the brother of the M.P. and himself a large shipowner, told me that he believed that 90 per cent of the shipowners would make a good thing at the present time by losing their ships.

In these circumstances there are three courses open:

(1) To allow the Bill to be smothered by other business and quietly to withdraw it. . . . (2) To surrender to the Opposition and to agree to refer the Bill to a Select Committee. . . . (3) The last course is the one which commends itself to me personally as the best for the Government, for the party and for the question itself. It is that I should have an early day for the Second Reading and should announce my intention to oppose reference of the Bill to a Select Committee. . . . I have a very strong case, and think I might be able to keep the majority on our side right. Still in view of the probable course of the Opposition and of the Parnellites, who will vote against the Government,[1] it is probable that I should be defeated.

Thereupon I should ask your permission to resign my office. . . . I cannot answer for the administration of the Board of Trade if the House refuses to alter a law which in my heart I believe to be drowning sailors every day.

My resignation would be good for the Party and the Government because, when Jonah had been thrown to the whale, the gale raised by the shipowners would abate. . . . It will also be good for the question at issue. It will be the starting point of an agitation. . . .

As my resignation will be a purely personal affair, it will not entail any others; and especially Dilke would remain in the Cabinet to represent the Radical section. . . .

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

10 *Downing Street, March* 10, 1884.—My dear Chamberlain, Unfortunately your letter has found me confined to bed for the moment with

[1] The Irish Members, to their credit, came round.

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a slight cold. It opens matters of extreme gravity. . . . For the present I think I had better confine myself to making it known to a few of my colleagues, unless it would be agreeable to you that I should circulate it. . . . My first impressions are: First, extreme aversion to your third alternative (resignation); secondly, a disposition to take a little time.

To this the fighting Minister replied:

I am sorry to hear of your indisposition. I leave it entirely to you to circulate my letter or to show it to a few, as you think best.

At that moment, the irruption of an unmuzzled Chamberlain into the constituencies was the very last thing the Prime Minister could desire. When they met in a few days, Gladstone was most fatherly and kind, urging the Radical leader to remain in the general interests of the Government and the party; but above all, for the sake of franchise extension. Was not this the sure instrument of future justice to the seamen and most men? The Radical leader consented to battle on—against odds growing heavier every day. In a few weeks more we find him writing again to the Prime Minister:

April 19, 1884.—I think it is now necessary to come to an early decision as to the Merchant Shipping Bill. . . . I have done everything in my power to meet reasonable objections and to mollify the violent opposition which the Bill has provoked. I fear however that nothing will satisfy the majority of the shipowners but the abandonment of the Bill and the humiliation of the Minister in charge. The bulk of this powerful trade is demoralised by long immunity and by the legal sanction given to an iniquitous practice. . . .

It was in these circumstances, fighting almost alone, deserted in effect by the Cabinet, that he moved the Second Reading and made his utmost attempt in the four hours' speech already described. No progress resulted. His colleagues were not with him, despite the strong feeling of Radicals proper and the generous support of a few independent Conservatives like Sir John Gorst of the Fourth Party.

A few weeks after, early in July, the Bill had to be withdrawn. He had felt for months that this would be the end of it for that session.

With the Franchise Bill on hand and the Egyptian Question in a chronic state of acuteness it is almost impossible to fix public attention on this question. Whatever happens it will not be allowed to drop.[1]

To complete his discomfiture in the eyes of all enemies, his Railways Bill Regulation met the same fate amidst the same public indifference. Though it was formally brought in, he did not even get a chance to explain it.

XI

This repulse was the most galling experience he had yet known. It bit into his flesh. But against what he calls the "selfish interests" he is clenched as never before: and he purposes that they shall reckon with him before all is done. He had counted too much on the power of cruel facts and humane feeling in this part of his general crusade for "life before property". From this time forth he is a far more wary and more dangerous opponent and more resolved to cast off Whig shackles at all costs. It is another of his turning-points.

Can it be said that he failed? And that the failure was due largely to a faulty method—denouncing the shipping scandals on the open platform before bringing in his Bill? Into some scathing indiscretions he was undoubtedly led by the burning vehemence of his feeling. He hated "coffin ships", no doubt, as he hated flogging and wanton or unscrupulous cruelty in every form. But apart from that he felt himself bound in conscience and honour as the Minister responsible to enter upon this struggle. If he undertook it at all, he could not fight with kid gloves. The shipping interest would have worked in the same way to kill any effectual Bill brought in by "Plimsoll's friend".

Nor in fact did he fail except in parliamentary appearances of the moment. After his terrible speech of accusation in May, not shrinking from giving instances and names, owners and underwriters were more careful. Much unseen good resulted at once from his flagellating method. And he was the father of future legislation whereby through a long series of years all his aims

[1] Chamberlain to Russell, editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post* and one of his best supporters (March 17, 1884).

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were directly or indirectly achieved with the effect of saving tens of thousands of human lives.

At his instance, when the Merchant Shipping Bill was abandoned, Gladstone appointed the famous Royal Commission, and on this body Chamberlain was a moving spirit. Its first Report in August 1887—when he had been forced to break with Liberalism—vindicated the truth of his contentions. Thereafter, measures passed by successive Governments irrespective of party provided to the utmost of parliamentary contrivance for safety at sea. In advance of all that, when he opened his campaign for the "unauthorised programme"—before the Royal Commission had begun to report—his appeal to democracy on the shipping question contained some of the most thrilling passages he ever uttered. His single-handed fight for "poor Jack" in 1884 stands to his eternal honour.[1]

XII

Throughout this year of rabid hostility even his personal honour and that of his family were attacked. Two years before, his brothers had been blackballed at the Reform Club—it was thought by Forster's friends—and stung in his staunch affections, he seldom was more wrathful in his life. He was hot in his impulse to quit the tabernacle of his party; amidst national troubles, statesmen like Hartington, Dilke and others were exercised to patch up the squabble in Pall Mall. But in 1882 defamatory hints had been only whispered in the Reform Club and elsewhere. Now, in 1884, public slander gave tongue.

In the middle of the shipping crusade he was accused in debate of using the new Bankruptcy Department of the Board of Trade for purposes of political jobbery. It was said that amongst 67 Official Receivers appointed 51 were Liberals, more or less of his

[1] This seems the most convenient place for a brief note on another subject. It fills much space in the Chamberlain Papers. He was deeply interested in the London Government Bill long pending, introduced by Harcourt at last in July 1884, carried through Second Reading, but killed like other measures by the Franchise crisis. Chamberlain circulated to the Cabinet an elaborate memorandum advocating a number of municipalities for London instead of one. Harcourt was for a single Great Council, and this the Cabinet adopted. Chamberlain, however, was strongly with the Ministers, who defeated Harcourt's wish to put the metropolitan police under the control of the Home Office.

own stripe; and that 19 of these had been election agents. Disappointed applicants were at the back of this vendetta. He was able, of course, to show that he had made no appointment for political reasons, though his departmental committee in making the selections had not been prejudiced against fit and proper persons because they were Liberals as well. It had not been the practice of Conservative Governments to neglect their friends and promote their opponents. The House after a long debate refused, though with little grace, the motion for a Committee of Enquiry. The efficiency of his Receivers proved to be exemplary and their integrity above suspicion. But the incident made more sultry his mood of gathering wrath.

A little later the *Daily News* of all journals allowed Mr. H. R. Grenfell to assail him as a person of fortune who had made wealth by monopoly—even "by most questionable dodges"—and was now setting class against class. As we have seen already in the pages dealing with the closing years of Chamberlain's business career, this misinformed letter was crushed by Midland tributes to Chamberlain's character and record; and Mr. Grenfell withdrew all his charges. But Tory controversy through this year swarmed with skits and vituperation at Chamberlain's expense. He was outrageously vilified—and chiefly as a plutocrat playing the demagogue; though he had given up the pursuit of money altogether and sacrified the certainty of vast wealth in order to devote himself body and soul to the public service. One matter nearly came into the Law Courts at last. The pamphlets and tirades of Mr. Marriott[1]—who was renouncing his Liberalism chiefly as a protest against the Caucus, and tried to constitute himself chief "Joe-baiter"—are not now worth memory; but they were worth while then when they drew this tribute from a friend:

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 24, 1883.— . . . To my disgust I received a copy of Marriott's pamphlet. . . . It is the most coarse and utterly senseless thing I ever read, and I can only suppose it is due to uncontrollable spite and malice at your success and popularity. . . . Its only effect will be to rally your friends closer to you. . . .

[1] Afterwards the Right Hon. Sir William Marriott, Judge-Advocate-General in Lord Salisbury's administrations of 1885 and 1886.

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Many thanks to you for the annual tribute of Caucus oysters. They shall be eaten before a wild turkey that Carnegie has sent from the other side of the Atlantic, and I will drink to the health of the giver who will always be the closest to me of all my friends. I am 45 to-day, and in the retrospect nothing shows more pleasantly than the evening when I paid my first visit to Southbourne, and we eyed one another politely in your drawing-room. (You were polite in those days, and had your foot in a carpet slipper.)

XIII

Chamberlain's other interests as President of the Board of Trade ranged from the English Channel to the Suez Canal.

It much concerned his department that the business community was deeply discontented with the management and charges of the narrow waterway to Asia. There was a strong demand for nothing less than a new all-British canal. The Government as a whole actually agreed with M. de Lesseps for a second and parallel canal with an increase of English influence, our Government raising the money.[1] Chamberlain and Dilke opposed the scheme, and with the decided weight of public opinion behind them they made the majority of the Cabinet give way. During subsequent negotiation, the Radical leader as representing the Board of Trade was active in securing for our shipping interests a good reduction of tolls and a larger share in the management.

By comparison the inexhaustible question of the Channel Tunnel became both a comedy and a scare. Chamberlain with a large number of his friends was invited to visit Dover; and he descended into the workings, as Lady St. Helier tells us, "to watch the great revolving drill piercing through the chalk". But neither Sir Edward Watkin's fervour nor his luncheon softened the unfavourable heart of the President of the Board of Trade—who in fact had minuted long before to Gladstone, "I do not think that any encouragement should be given to Sir E. Watkin".[2]

XIV

Chamberlain won high credit in another way often brought up against him long afterwards.

[1] *Annual Register* (1883), pp. 118-130.

[2] July 25, 1883.

In Lancashire, Mr. Farrer Ecroyd had started the neo-Protectionist agitation against "free imports without free trade" and against all theoretical dogmas forbidding in practice the economic union of the British Empire. "Fair Trade" became a very strong movement amongst the masses of Tory democracy. Against a proposed commercial treaty with France, then raising her tariffs to the further hindrance of our commerce, many Conservatives protested.

On August 12, 1881, a motion in that sense was brought up by Mr. C. T. Ritchie, member for Tower Hamlets. Him, too, we shall meet again in a strange reversal of rôles. In reply the President of the Board of Trade distinguished himself pre-eminently by a speech of devastating lucidity, as a debating effort. Seizing upon numerous contradictions in his opponents' arguments, he knocked their heads together with exhilarating vigour. And he wound up by perhaps the best short statement against a food-tax that ever was made.

"Lastly, sir, is anyone bold enough to propose that we should put taxes upon food? . . . I can conceive it just possible, although it is very improbable, that under the sting of great suffering and deceived by misrepresentations the working classes might be willing to try strange remedies, and might be foolish enough to submit for a time to a proposal to tax the food of the country; but one thing I am certain of. If this course is ever taken, and if the depression were to continue or to recur, it would be the signal for a state of things more dangerous and more disastrous than anything which has been seen in this country since the repeal of the Corn Laws."

His friends are delighted. Morley writes[1] that it is a "*great* speech", and further reports Leonard Courtney's opinion: "Universally thought excellent, and much the best effort you have yet made in the House". Simultaneously Dilke tells Harcourt that "Chamberlain should be Chancellor of the Exchequer".

Political fate has known few more impish moments of predestinate irony. Chamberlain was to be more quoted against himself than almost any man since Burke. Twenty years later the parts played in this debate will be exchanged with a vengeance. Then Ritchie, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, quite sincerely

[1] August 14, 1881.

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will stab Chamberlain in the name of Free Trade; when the defender of that doctrine in this debate—utterly changed in conviction by experience and by a vision of future inescapable alternatives—will be the protagonist of closer Imperial unity in economic affairs, and of a home tariff for the defence and development of British industry and agriculture. The sharpest arrows striking Chamberlain in his highest flight—far hence yet —will be feathered from his own wings.

Yet at this very time Chamberlain was far from being satisfied by "free imports" only—with less and less "free trade". We find him working with Dilke on this same French Treaty. They are both discontented with British helplessness against foreign tariffs under the extreme Cobdenite dogma. They want to bring down the French tariff against British goods by threatening to favour the wines of Spain, Portugal and Italy. Dilke writes:

> I have always been a reciprocitarian to this extent and was always backed in using such arguments by Chamberlain,[1] *who held the same view in a still stronger form.*[2] (The italics are the present biographer's.)

There is something stranger still. Chamberlain always acknowledged his original debt in Imperial affairs to the author of *Greater Britain*. Dilke notes, almost uncannily as it now seems:

> *April* 20, 1882.—At this moment I called attention to the bearing of our most-favoured-nation-clause treaties on the commercial condition of the British Empire generally, and pointed out that the bearing of the matter on the Colonies would become very important some day; and I found even too much support from the head of the Trade Department [Chamberlain], who was a Protectionist or at least a strong Reciprocitarian, and who at once grasped my idea by arguing that there was a chance that some day there would be formed a British Zollverein, raising discriminating duties upon foreign produce as against that of the British Empire.[3]

[1] In an emphatic letter to Gladstone (October 4, 1881) Chamberlain "backed up" Dilke when the latter in Paris, with the most masterly tenacity and skill, was making his fight for the best terms obtainable.

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 395.—Chamberlain in an undated letter of 1882 says of the Spanish tariff: "As our import from them is chiefly wine and our duties are not protectionist, there would be no objection in theory to increasing the duties on this article, while we might lower them on Italian and Colonial".

[3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 401.—Chamberlain was not at all a Protectionist in theory at this time nor for years to come; but he had his doubts about the perfection of a system of "half-free trade," and would not have shrunk from unorthodox measures to secure better terms.

As in his attitude during the first Egyptian crisis, in his South African premonitions, in his reservations regarding Irish Nationalist claims, so in his manner of thinking about economic policy the germs of his ultimate purposes were already in him. In his own department, Farrer, a high priest of fiscal orthodoxy, never thought him "sound". Chamberlain often said to the present writer that though according to his duty he did his best in the early 'eighties to defend "free imports without free trade"—and his best was brilliant in that kind—the more he had to argue for the infallibility of the doctrinaire creed, the more doubts he felt at the back of his own mind. It was long before the answers formed. In his natural way of approaching practical economics he was realistic and imaginative like other great men of action, and of abstract theory he took as little account as they.

XV

The department had humours and vexations owing to Gladstone's very curious idiosyncrasies respecting the etiquette of "honours". No recorded great man could be so obstinate and discouraging in these matters. With all the profound courtesy of his personal manners, he could be in essence ungracious to the extreme on small points; and it is impossible for the present writer not to think that some absurdly trivial affairs of this kind rankled between him and his lieutenant.

Chamberlain's loyalty to his officials was a legend. When he besought the Premier to bestow even minor honours upon them he met with some unexpected rebuffs. The most amusing case, dragging on for two years, was that of Mr. Farrer, Permanent Secretary, a civil servant of long standing and high merit. Early in 1881 his political chief asked for him the K.C.B. But it appeared that years before Mr. Farrer had refused the C.B. Gladstone did not look lightly on such aberrations. It was considered that to create the gentleman, then over sixty, a knight incontinently without first compelling him to accept the lesser grade would be an enormity—an "abusive exercise of power".[1]

"Stuff!" cried Chamberlain in the confidence of his department; "if he is fit to be made a K.C.B., he should be made one

[1] June 1881, minute on letter from Chamberlain.

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at once". But "Mr. G." was immovable. Two years later, after the success of the Bankruptcy and Patent Acts, Chamberlain returned to the charge with warm tributes to his staff, and especially to the work of the Permanent Secretary, whose claims by now were hard-earned indeed.

To the amazement of the Minister for Trade, and this time to his serious annoyance, Gladstone's sense of etiquette was still adamant. The President was resolved not to put up with it, and he now brusqued the affair:

> If I am unfortunately unable to induce you to reconsider your decision in this case, I shall be forced to conclude that I have not succeeded in gaining your confidence, and I must ask you to consider whether in this case I can continue to hold my present position with any advantage to the public service.[1]

The Prime Minister saw that something must be done, but not even now would he profane the proprieties—as that loose Conservative Disraeli had done—by making any man a K.C.B. who refused to be first a C.B. Instead Mr. Farrer was offered a baronetcy. He rightly took it with very qualified gratitude; and, stoutly refusing to pay the Heralds' College the usual fee, he remained an imperfect baronet until he became a peer.

And so their President fought for them all. His kind vigour in these matters delighted the department, but all his ways had already established him in their devotion. When it seemed likely that he would be transferred to another office, one senior amongst his staff protested, "You cannot, I am sure, look at a change of this sort through the spectacles of an old permanent civil servant. If you could you would not go". Another wrote, "From the moment of your coming the whole business of the Department received a new impulse. I am sure others have felt as I have that it has been a totally different thing". John Morley remarked[2] that if Chamberlain goes "it will cause to my certain knowledge wailing and gnashing of teeth at the B. of T." This was towards the end of 1882. When ultimately in 1885 he went out after five years' tenure, he had proved himself, in national as in municipal business, punctual, rapid, indefatigable; exact in detail, but intrepid in large thinking; doing the day's

[1] Chamberlain to Gladstone, August 16, 1883.

[2] Morley to Chamberlain, December 16, 1882.

work in its day without neglect or arrears; strict, frank and steadfast in personal relations—past dispute one of the best administrators recorded. Many persons of competent authority thought and hoped that he would return to office in a few months as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He did not return to effective office for ten years—administratively the few weeks in 1886 hardly count—and then came back in a far other and soon more renowned capacity. So little was it in mortal minds then to guess the coming revolution in the party system.

CHAPTER XX

WIDENING HORIZON: THE BOERS—EGYPT

(1880–1883)

BEFORE Majuba—Chamberlain for Retrocession—Gladstone maintains Annexation—Concession after Defeat—Seeds of Fate—South Africa and Chamberlain's Premonitions—The Egyptian Crisis—Bombardment of Alexandria and Battle of Tel-el-Kebir—Chamberlain as Palmerstonian Democrat—For Egyptian Self-Government and British Withdrawal after Intervention—John Bright's Reproaches—The Liberal Government as Lord Beaconsfield's Executors.

I

BOOK IV. 1880–83.

LOOKING back a little we must now glance rapidly over events in another quarter of the world. They played a singular part in Chamberlain's development as a national statesman. Let us turn first to the Transvaal when it seemed a very small matter, and the Prime Minister might well regard it with favour as the Montenegro of another continent.

Before the Government was formed, even Hartington as well as Gladstone and Chamberlain had encouraged Boer expectations of recovered independence. Afterwards, the Prime Minister hesitated.

Joubert and I [writes Paul Kruger] now formed new hopes, and in May 1880 wrote to Gladstone from Cape Town, laying the position before him and earnestly requesting him to do justice to the country, to repeal the annexation and to restore the Sand River Convention of 1852. We were bitterly disappointed on receiving an answer from the Liberal statesman informing us that he was unable to annul the annexation or to advise Her Majesty to abandon her suzerainty over the Transvaal.[1]

[1] *Memoirs of Paul Kruger* (1902), vol. i. p. 166.

At the very first meetings of the Cabinet, Chamberlain pressed for the complete reversal of Lord Beaconsfield's policy in all spheres and urged the Government to revoke the annexation of the Transvaal. A few weeks later, as early as June 9, 1880, he minuted keenly to the Prime Minister.

> I doubt the wisdom and the permanence of the annexation. Unless some unforeseen circumstances lead to a large immigration of Englishmen into the Transvaal, I believe the Boers will, sooner or later, worry this country into granting their independence.

Retrocession at that moment would have had moral merits not afterwards belonging to it. Unforced magnanimity might have made the whole difference to racial temper. That was the real moment of fate in South Africa.

But there were 450,000 natives in the Transvaal, ten times as many as the white population. In the debate on the Queen's Speech, "the main fact which met us", said Gladstone, "was the existence of a large native population, to whom, by the establishment of the Queen's supremacy, we hold ourselves to have given a pledge". Lord Kimberley warned the other House: "it was impossible to say what calamities our receding might not cause to the native population". Ministers ought to have thought of these things when they made their election speeches denouncing Disraeli and all his works. Deceived by reports of Boer submissiveness, solicitous for the dark masses, meaning to avoid hazards and confusions, the Liberal Government maintained the annexation of the Transvaal. They promised indeed large self-government, but even this was not promptly arranged.

Unrest was soon seething amongst the burghers. In November of 1880 a Hampden of the veld, one Bezuidenhout, refused to pay taxes to the Queen's Government, and when his wagons were seized and an official attempted to sell them by auction at Potchefstroom, armed Boers rode in and the war began. The detail is not for these pages. On the morning of February 27 the Boers crushed the little British force gathered on the top of Majuba Hill. General Colley fell. It was a sorry stain on Ministerial repute. If they did not mean to maintain the annexation, they should not have sent men to die for it. Gladstone, as in the case of Ireland, was only awakened "by the chapel bell".

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Kruger was full of contempt for troops cheaply defeated, and from that moment firmly believed that ten Boers in their every-day clothes were a match on their own ground for a hundred Britishers in uniform. The seeds of fate were planted.

II

Whether Sir Evelyn Wood or Lord Roberts should be empowered to reverse the blow and at least throw out the Boers from British soil where their Majuba victory had been won, was the question for a large part of the nation. Not for Chamberlain. In his eyes the question was whether the annexation of the Transvaal was right or wrong. He thought it wrong, and that it must be reversed without further bloodshed for the sake of avenging "the honour of the flag".[1]

The session before, his leader had invited him to act on Colonial questions as the spokesman of the Cabinet in the Commons, the Colonial Secretary being in the Lords. During August 1880 in a good fencing speech he had defended the Cabinet policy when some sullen sort of Boer acquiescence was still expected. When the war broke out in the following winter he was of another mind. He did not wait for February and Majuba. A week before Colley's first repulse at Laing's Nek, Chamberlain refused to vote against a private member's motion condemning the annexation; and walked out, like three other members of the administration —Bright himself, Dilke and Courtney. He was out and out for negotiation with the Boers; emphatically he aided Gladstone to carry that point in the Cabinet more than a week before Majuba; and after that squalid chastisement he insisted absolutely on retrocession. Otherwise he would have gone out of the Government and would not have been alone in leaving it. But his view was shared by the Premier and the majority of the Cabinet; the minority gave way.

Late in the session of 1881, Chamberlain's speech stating the case for the Government (July 25) lifted his parliamentary reputation. A chronicler of the day remarked:

> The general impression on a cursory observation of the career of the President of the Board of Trade since he entered office would be that

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

he had done less, and certainly was less heard of than might have been anticipated. Probably such a verdict would not seriously disturb Mr. Chamberlain's equanimity. He is probably one of the men who knows how to wait, and is content to pursue his course in patient tranquillity. . . . As to the speeches which Mr. Chamberlain delivered during the session they were both excellent and fully equal to the important occasions. Mr. Chamberlain states an extreme Radical principle with the tone of a man formulating an axiom which at once commands universal assent; and severe home-thrusts are delivered in the face of the enemy as though something was being said which if anything was of a complimentary character. Mr. Gladstone was not at his best in the Transvaal debate, and so a comparison between him and Mr. Chamberlain on that occasion is not fair; but it was curious to observe how the one man was irritated by the enemy while the President of the Board of Trade, though quite as aggressive, and almost as rudely interrupted, proceeded calmly in his way with his cold, clear voice as icily regular as though he were delivering a lecture.[1]

His more resonant defence of retrocession had been made already in his Birmingham address of June 7:

"It is not difficult to be wise after the event. It is not difficult to see now that we did wrong" [in not reversing annexation earlier]. "I frankly admit that we made a mistake. . . . We are a great and powerful nation. What is the use of being great and powerful if we are afraid to admit an error when we are conscious of it? Shame is not in the confession of a mistake. Shame lies only in persistency in wilful wrongdoing. . . . I appeal to the impartial public opinion of Europe and of America, which has approved of the action of the Government in preferring justice to revenge and the best interests of South Africa to the vain pursuit of military glory."

This was the frank and the right way of speaking out for those who believed that peace and righteousness had kissed each other in South Africa, but it was not Gladstone's way. With amusing perseverance in self-justification he writes at once:

I have read with pleasure what you say of the Transvaal, yet am not prepared, for myself, to concede that we made a mistake in not advising a revocation of the annexation when we came in.[2]

[1] T. P. O'Connor, *Gladstone's House of Commons*, pp. 214, 215.

[2] Gladstone to Chamberlain, June 8, 1881.

Our Radical statesman's speech at Birmingham was stirring stuff, but there was more in the case than all that. How much more he was to learn during the next years. New difficulty with the Boers constrained him to become the real originator of Warren's armed expedition.

The conditions established after Majuba never worked easily. British capitulation only after defeat did not and could not bring the healing grace of generous clemency but rather left the Dutch temperament under a fatal misimpression. The Boers were not content with what a Government, including Joseph Chamberlain, conceded—a "Transvaal State" under the Queen's suzerainty and not independent in foreign affairs. The Boers wanted absolute independence and the formal name "South African Republic". The only solution will be South African Union whether under the British flag or a hostile flag. Dragon's teeth have been sown, and one day a far bloodier conflict will arise.

We must note again that Chamberlain, though not introspective habitually and with nothing of the Hamlet in him, often had uncanny premonitions. Not at all self-conscious, he was very sub-conscious—the difference is great though not easy to define. Without seeing as clearly as Wolseley already saw that the opening of the gold-fields was bound to change the whole Transvaal problem, he recognised in his very first minute to Gladstone on the subject, the possibility of a large British immigration. And as early as autumn 1882, in a letter to Dr. Dale of all persons—a belligerent Christian ardently anxious for native interests in South Africa—our Radical speculated though with abhorrence that war with the Boers and no "little war" might become an inescapable possibility some day. But that startling letter and the circumstances of its writing belong to a later chapter.

III

The scene shifts from one end to the other of a yet unpartitioned continent. We come to the first active concern of this Joseph with Egypt. Africa continued to bring forth things new; and things obnoxious to the Liberal Government. In Imperial policy on the Nile, as in Irish coercion, the Ministry formed to reverse Disraeli's policy became his executors by an

irony of contradiction seldom seen. The Transvaal question had hardly been patched up by the Pretoria Convention when the Egyptian troubles broke out.

Chamberlain hitherto had not much heeded that question. In six months it made a new man of him. By contrast to the Transvaal affair, the Radical Minister proved a pugnacious democrat on the Egyptian issue. Loathing the thought of fighting for bondholders, when higher interests than theirs were threatened, he no longer shrank from recourse to arms. The young Palmerstonian of twenty-three, who stood up to Bright in 1859, was now twice that age, and had risen to be the Quaker veteran's more than equal colleague in a Cabinet. They were poles asunder when the issue whereon they had first differed, intervention or non-intervention, came again to the proof.

By what rapid succession of events was our Radical Minister awakened to a new sense of Imperial responsibility?

Two years had passed since Ismail's dethronement after the glittering mazes of his dance through loans to bankruptcy. His debts still loaded his former subjects now under Tewfik. The decree of the Liquidation Commission, sitting when the Liberals took office, mortgaged two-thirds of the whole revenue of the country to the bondholders and starved the home services. At this point, all Egyptians capable of a political opinion held that the Dual Control of England and France meant nothing but grinding taxation to pay foreign usurers. By reaction a movement of nationalism in the modern European sense came to birth. Further inflamed and alarmed was Moslem feeling by the French occupation of Tunis, a stroke altering the whole complexion of Mediterranean politics from Gibraltar to the Levant. With professional grievances of its own, the Egyptian army became the instrument of general discontent, and in the success of repeated outbreaks learned the power of mutiny.

Arabi, the favourite of the army, became the representative of the whole movement against foreign supremacy and foreign tribute. A mixture of ignorance and eloquence, simplicity and suspicion, with a certain ability, but more engaging than competent, at the end of 1881 he was the real master of the country and its Khedive. The Chamber of Notables was preparing to attack the basis of Dual Control by claiming full power over the

Budget. At the same time Gambetta had taken office in France and formed *le Grand Ministère*, hurried so quickly from ambitions to ashes. In the interests both of French suzerainty in Tunis and of Egypt's creditors—and dreading perhaps above all an understanding between the Egyptian Nationalists and the Sultan of Turkey—Gambetta resolved upon reasserting Dual Control at Cairo by undertaking with England a joint expedition; and with his impetuous *entrain* he pulled in his wake our amiable and witty, but not efficacious Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville.

By the fateful Joint Note of January 9, 1882, England and France announced that they would uphold the Khedive's authority—and in effect the existing financial settlement—against all subversive attempts "internal or external". Egyptian defiance of the Note forced its fulfilment. This kind of support made Tewfik too visibly a puppet, and morally destroyed the authority it intended to maintain. Arabi and other ringleaders had mingled reasons to fear for their lives. Forbidden to touch the Budget, the Chamber of Notables was deprived of the chief object of its existence. All discontented elements were thrown together into a cauldron. Yet this witches' brew was no sooner seething than *le Grand Ministère* fell in Paris within three weeks after the Joint Note to Cairo. By his proposals for electoral revision in France, Gambetta only put new arguments into the mouths of all who professed to fear that he aimed at virtual dictatorship. The power of his eloquence in defending himself only made his personal ascendancy more alarming, and combined his opponents for his overthrow. But his Egyptian policy was one cause of Gambetta's disaster. Hopeless confusions in French and British policy ensued while Egypt plunged to calamity.

IV

When this imbroglio began Chamberlain misliked it quite as much as the Transvaal entanglement or the Irish misery. Had not the bondholders like ordinary investors taken their risks with their profits? He objected to armed interference in their favour, and his sympathies were with the mass of the Egyptian people. In a subsequent record of his impressions he notes that the discontents were natural:

Extortion was practised on a large scale and in every department of the Government. The unfortunate fellaheen were burthened with excessive taxation rendered more onerous by the arbitrary way in which it was collected. Public works were suffered to get into disrepair and even the system of irrigation, on which the life of the country depends, was allowed to fall into the greatest disorder.[1]

On January 7, 1882, when a Cabinet was held on the Joint Note, Chamberlain demurred, but was "in a minority":

> My view was that we had not sufficient information to appreciate properly the so-called revolutionary movement. It might be the legitimate expression of discontent and of resistance to oppression. If so, it ought to be guided and not repressed.

At the same time there was no alternative to Dual Control, more and more threatened by "Arabi the Egyptian", who now became dictator under the name of Minister of War, while the Nationalist movement showed a menacing anti-foreign temper.

Chamberlain held that by some means Dual Control must be maintained. But all means failed. The British Cabinet was divided; French policy shifted every day. Five months of delay —delay again as in Ireland and South Africa—exhibited a spectacle of cross-purposes and see-saw, shuffle and drift. In the February Cabinets, Hartington alone was for Anglo-French intervention. Gladstone and others were in favour on guarded terms of Turkish military intervention as a sad evil, but the least. For weeks the French thought it the worst. Then, in the middle of May they came round to the plan of employing the Sultan's troops backed by an Anglo-French fleet.

On Derby day, May 18, Gladstone prevented debonair Lord Granville from going to Epsom as usual, and the Cabinet decided to invoke the Turk immediately.[2] Next, the allied squadrons entered the port of Alexandria. The sight of the warships without a military force inflamed defiance and fanaticism. Arabi, dismissed from office for a few days, was reinstated by a humiliated Khedive living under threat of death. Arabi was more than ever the master of the palace and the country. M. de Freycinet—Gambetta's successor—veered miserably and depre-

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 458.

cated action. The offended Sultan dallied with intent; willing to act as an acknowledged suzerain but not as a catspaw for Anglo-French convenience. These jarring associates offered him no real extension of his power, but stipulated for strict restraints. No more furtive game of unavowed cross-purposes had ever discredited European diplomacy in the East. Events were precipitated.

V

Relying on the French to thwart Turkish intervention and refuse their own, Arabi began to throw up earthworks against the British fleet and strengthen his batteries to command the harbour. The Cabinet had been urgently warned that the populace might fall upon Christians and Europeans at any moment. On Sunday, June 11, the Alexandrian riots flamed out to the old Moslem cry, "Kill! Kill!". About a dozen Europeans were slaughtered; the British Consul, dragged out of his carriage, was severely beaten. The Anglo-French fleet looked on.

When this news reached the Government it roused in Chamberlain the born man of decision. He formed his own conviction that the hour had come to act, and sternly; that Britain without more shilly-shally must act alone if others would not join her in time. The Radical leader knew well that by no means was this so small and simple a case as the Transvaal yet seemed. Egypt was bound to fall under some foreign influence. As President of the Board of Trade he was especially concerned for the Canal giving passage from the Mediterranean to the Asiatic seas and to India. This waterway seemed still a very new thing in the world, and all ideas or imaginations connected with it were fresh. Like the Cabinet generally, he believed that Arabi was the instigating villain of the outbreak; though to-day the case seems rather to have been one of spontaneous combustion amongst an excited mob. He records:

> By this time I had come to the opinion that action had become inevitable and accordingly I joined Hartington in pressing for active measures. At the same time, however, I desired to base intervention entirely on the necessity of keeping faith with the Khedive, obtaining reparation for the massacres, and securing the safety of the Suez Canal. I desired to separate these grounds entirely from the claims of the bond-

holders which I thought should stand on their merits and not be supported by the armed intervention of a European Power. I had come to the conclusion (chiefly owing to his action after he had attained to power) that Arabi was only a military adventurer and that there was no national party in the true sense of the word. His chief object seemed to me to be the increase of the numbers and pay of the army, and especially of the officers, and it was evident that his uncontrolled supremacy would very shortly bring about bankruptcy and anarchy.[1]

After the riots Europeans fled from Alexandria. It was an exodus. Panic seized all Christians remaining. Gladstone, presiding over the Cabinet table at frequent meetings in No. 10 Downing Street, beheld a spectacle novel indeed—the "Robespierre of the Midlands" joining hands with the chief of the Whigs; even exceeding Hartington in insistence on punishment of the military junta and reparations for the massacre. This was in mid-June. John Bright always thought that Chamberlain did the historic deed.

Beauchamp Seymour had telegraphed to ask permission to bombard some time before. At last it was Chamberlain who insisted on his being allowed to do it.[2]

Lord Granville's comment, in his glancing way, a week later, is as well known as inaccurate:

June 22, 1882.—We have had several Cabinets more or less formal about Egypt. Bright of course the most peaceable. Chamberlain almost the greatest Jingo.[3]

This by itself creates a misleading impression. He was not a Jingo then, and as we shall see he never was. He was always for doing the right thing as he saw it, without fear at a pinch. Real fighters of his stuff rarely are fire-eaters. The Cabinets had been far from harmonious. Hartington thought that even this Cabinet, so often creaking in every joint of its construction, had never been so near to coming to pieces. Chamberlain, it is true, was pressing for an Anglo-French expedition to guard the Canal and to suppress Arabi, whom he thought a military usurper

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[2] Conversation with Bright in Wilfrid Scawen Blunt's *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt*, p. 374.

[3] Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Life of Lord Granville*, vol. ii. p. 265.

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exploiting a popular movement; but at the same time he was strongly for Egyptian self-government.

On June 21, three weeks before the bombardment of Alexandria, the Cabinet adopted Chamberlain's minute as a basis of instructions to Lord Dufferin; and nothing could be less like a Jingo nor more like a Liberal statesman than the passages which carried Gladstone's support:

CHAMBERLAIN AND EGYPT

June 21.— . . . I think that Liberal opinion in the country will be extremely restive at the idea of armed intervention either for the maintenance of the control in the interests of the bondholders or for the enforcement of restrictions on the right of the Egyptian people to manage their own affairs. . . . If the people of Egypt prefer native administration with all its consequences to the inflexible severity and honesty of European control, it is not England's business nor right to force on them an unpopular system which could only be permanently maintained against their wishes by practically assuming the government of the country. . . . Intervention should be directed not to impose on Egypt institutions of our choice but to secure for the Egyptian people a free choice for themselves so far as this may not be inconsistent with the permanent interests of other Powers. . . .

VI

Public anger at home and the pressure of the Egyptian emergency itself force Gladstone's reluctant hands. The British Admiral, Sir Beauchamp Seymour, receives instructions to stop the further fortification of Alexandria. If Arabi resists, destroy his earthworks and silence his batteries. This was on Monday, July 3. During the rest of that week Ministerial distractions, discords, miseries are a theme for pathos. Even this Cabinet of all the discords has not known the like. Loathing what he is driven to do, Gladstone talks of resignation and almost seems to mean it. Bright will follow him.

In that case Chamberlain and Dilke will go out on general Liberal grounds and particularly for Irish reasons, though in their Egyptian views they differ from Gladstone and Bright. On Friday, Dilke records:

I saw Childers, who had walked home with Hartington at seven . . . he had urged Hartington not to form a weak Whig administration . . . if Chamberlain would stay he, Childers, would go on, but . . . to go on without Chamberlain would be fatal . . . far better to let the Tories come in. . . . At ten o'clock Grosvenor came and told me that he thought that Mr. Gladstone would stay on. Chamberlain, who still thought that Mr. Gladstone would resign, told Hartington that in the event of the formation of a new Liberal Ministry he should insist that Goschen should not be put in, and that the vacancies should be filled up by myself, Courtney and Trevelyan. At midnight the storm had blown over.[1]

Gladstone thinks better of it, and now is irrevocably involved. On Sunday, July 9, Arabi mounts more artillery against the fleet. Sir Beauchamp Seymour's orders come into play. If Arabi will not obey, the guns of the warships must speak. On Monday the British Admiral gives his twenty-four hours' warning.

The sequel occurring under a Liberal Government, ranks in its ultimate consequences as a major historical event in world-politics. On Tuesday, July 11, Alexandria was bombarded by the British fleet alone, the French ships having steamed away to Port Said. By continued muddle no sufficient landing force was available. While part of the city was given up to flame and pillage, Arabi's army escaped. Gladstone was now belligerent. Bright left the Cabinet in horror. He afterwards stated that Chamberlain's insistence had decided the Government when, a week before, the Admiral's repeated request for fighting instructions had been granted at last.[2]

But we must remember what was the real position of Bright's Radical colleague. Bright had no constructive policy whatever for Egypt as it was. Chamberlain stood equally for suppressing the military usurpation and restoring self-government without much regard to the interests of the bondholders. No thought of permanent occupation entered his head. As little as the Prime Minister did he realise that Egypt was almost as much for Arabi

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. i. p. 447 (July 7, 1884).

[2] *The Diaries of John Bright* (p. 485), with obvious allusion to Chamberlain: "July 8 . . . painful to observe how much of the 'Jingo' or war spirit can be shown by certain members of a Liberal Cabinet".

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as Ireland was for Parnell. Had he understood this, history perhaps might have been broadly changed.

Amidst excitement at home the Government's whole scheme was now altered out of recognition. The French alliance was at an end through no fault of ours. Chamberlain, like Hartington, now desired an understanding with Germany before further intervention. Strong necessity overrode all diplomatic qualms. Gladstone, with his ultra-microscopic power of seeing distinctions invisible to other men, still maintained after the bombardment that he was not at war with Egypt; none the less all the hesitations and procrastinations had only committed him more deeply to war with the Egyptians. The Cabinet on July 20 resolved to send out Lord Wolseley and a big army. A few days later the President of the Board of Trade with effect defended in the House of Commons that far-reaching course:

"It is impossible to allow the interests of this country in Egypt to be put in danger by a military revolt which it is in the power of Her Majesty's Government to put down. They think it their duty to interfere, but it is for the sole purpose of putting down that revolt and liberating the national sentiment. . . . When we have performed that duty—we shall be satisfied without seeking any advantage for ourselves" (July 25).

Public feeling now ran full current for the Government. With the vote of credit—the use of Cyprus as a place of arms—the mustering and sailing of Indian as well as British troops—it was all, as the vulgar said, "like Dizzy's days". After a few weeks of martial manœuvres, Lord Wolseley on September 13 crushed Arabi by one blow. Tel-el-Kebir was one of the neatest battles in the record of minor campaigns. By all the mockery of party politics Gladstone, as Disraeli's executor, found his Government more generally popular for a moment than at any time since it was formed.[1]

VII

Chamberlain knew well that Radicalism proper felt less happy and he was himself not at ease. In arms Britain has won a flashing success on the Nile. What shall we do with it? Dual control is dead for ever. Britain alone stands responsible in Egypt.

[1] *Annual Register* (1882), p. 157.

Chamberlain demands, above all, that Tel-el-Kebir shall prove something better than a bondholders' victory.

When the autumn Cabinets meet to consider the future of Egypt he soon sacrifices his fleeting favour with the Whig section. On October 18 he lays before his colleagues a long minute, not "Jingo" but to the extreme democratic:

> . . . There is great anxiety lest, after all, the bondholders should too evidently be the only persons who have profited by the war, and lest phrases which have been used concerning the extension of Egyptian liberties, and Egypt for the Egyptians, should prove to have no practical meaning. . . . We have in Egypt interests and duties. The interests are a fair guarantee for the peace and order of the country, and the security of the Suez Canal and our route to India. The duty cast upon us, as the Liberal Government of a free nation, is to secure to the Egyptian people the greatest possible development of representative institutions.

The hardy document goes on to advocate the utmost degree of Egyptian self-government:

> It is said the fellaheen are not fitted for representation. I should like to know any case in the history of any nation when the unrepresented classes have not been met with the same objection by those who have arrogated to themselves the right of disposing of their destinies. At the present moment it is the stock argument of the Tories with regard to the agricultural labourers. . . . If full privileges were reserved to the Chamber, there would appear to be no objection to allowing the Khedive, if he desired it, to appoint an Englishman as Minister of Finance, but the appointment must be revocable by the Khedive and not subject to the approval of the English Government. . . . The repudiation of the debt would in the special circumstances of Egypt be an evident source of danger which could not escape the consideration of the popular representatives. But in any and in every case I hold that we ought to lay it down as in our opinion a principle worthy of acknowledgment, that the relations of the bondholders to Egypt concern the parties and the parties only, and ought no more to be the subject of international interference than similar relations between the Governments and bondholders of the United States, of Spain or of Mexico. It would at all times be the duty of the English diplomatic agent to represent to the Egyptian Government the nature and the gravity of the interests at stake, and his repre-

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sentations would in all human probability be effective; but the payment of the debt should be the free act of the Egyptian Government and people and not the result of internal compulsion. . . .

Four days afterwards he writes downright to Dilke—a well-known letter, showing how Cabinet Ministers love one another.[1]

October 22.—Lord Granville's proposals are really childishly insincere. . . . The interference, the confusion of interests, remain where they are. Nothing is done to "develop the institutions", to "promote the liberties", to give "Egypt to the Egyptians"—in fact, to carry out a single one of the fine phrases with which we went to war. I doubt if you and I can stand this. . . . English Liberal opinion will say: "You have made Finance and the interests of the bondholders the keynote of your policy . . . and you have done nothing to relieve this country from the embarrassments in which the unrighteous interference with the internal affairs of Egypt has involved us". Will you send my minute to Harcourt—or better, if you have time, see him with it and discuss the position. If he is sound I think Mr. Gladstone and Lord Northbrook may be counted on. Otherwise the game is up. My gout is better, d——n it, and I hope I may get to London in time for the Council on Tuesday.

Evidently the abolition of all control, British as well as Dual, was implied in this vehement effort to make Egyptian nationalism a working reality subject only to drastic demilitarisation for the safety of the Canal. These premature ideas—revived by events forty years after—were voted down by the majority of the Cabinet. With sharp sallies he kept up the struggle, writing to the Prime Minister:

There are the strongest objections to the proposal that England should give a sole and individual guarantee to Egypt against attack by any other power. . . . I submit that if we are convinced that the Control is bad we should propose to abolish it frankly and not attempt to deceive other nations by restoring it for our special advantage under another name.[2]

At the same time Chamberlain was unbending against the idea

[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, October 22, 1882.

[2] October 22, 1882. These sentences are from a very long and elaborate comment, on Lord Granville's draft dispatch, sent to Gladstone when Chamberlain was debarred by a very sharp attack of gout from attending the Cabinet.

of allowing any other Power to meddle in Egypt. He scouted the suggestion of executing Arabi, though Gladstone himself dallied with that Punic vision.[1] Chamberlain insisted that the nationalist ex-dictator should be allowed to go free anywhere outside Egypt instead of being interned in Ceylon. The Radical in the Cabinet had shown himself to be a man of force where the honour and rights of his country were involved in these transactions; there, he was an Englishman bred in a generation whose fathers belonged to the time of Trafalgar and Waterloo; but he never was touched then or later by the ignoble hatreds of "Jingoism". This we shall surely find as his life unfolds.

Twenty years after, he felt just as magnanimously towards the Boers after the South African War as he now felt towards Arabi.

Chamberlain and Bright had it out a little later. For some months it had not been easy to restrain Bright. Before Tel-el-Kebir he had denounced the Government in a "savage letter", which, says Chamberlain, "Schnadhorst and Co. succeeded in suppressing". Towards the end of the year the Minister for Trade in the course of his great speech—it strictly deserved that abused epithet—at Ashton-under-Lyne entered amongst other topics into a vindication of the Government's Egyptian policy, and he took up the very ground that as a young Palmerstonian he had defended against Bright nearly a quarter of a century before:

"I can say for myself that I have always protested in the strongest terms against the policy of non-intervention or peace at any price, which I have believed to be an unworthy and ignoble doctrine for any great nation to hold. I have always thought that a great nation like an individual had duties and responsibilities to its neighbours, and that it could not wrap itself up in a policy of selfish isolation and say that nothing concerned it unless its material interests were directly attacked. . . ."[2]

True that he went on in magnanimous terms to repudiate the idea of annexing Egypt or of establishing a permanent protectorate, or of indefinite occupation in any shape or form. Our duty there was to establish representative institutions: "Then, with an army and a police force moderate in number but suffi-

[1] Gladstone to Bright, Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, vol. iii. pp. 85-86.

[2] Speech at Ashton-under-Lyne, December 19, 1882.

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cient for the internal security and order of the country, with the tribunals reformed and remodelled and justice generally administered both to Europeans and natives alike, and with the public service thrown open freely to every native of merit and capacity —we shall have secured Egypt for the Egyptians; and we shall retire, having accomplished our task".

But Bright ignored this latter strain, and fastening upon the reference to "peace at any price" as a doctrine "unworthy and ignoble", felt it as an oblique assault on himself. Hearing of this, Chamberlain wrote to Rochdale explaining that he had been "thinking exclusively of certain Tory comments"; animadversion on his late colleague—who, right or wrong, had resigned for conscience' sake and lifelong principle—had never entered into his mind.[1] Touched to the quick, not to be soothed nor smoothed so easily, the old lion-heart of pacifism discharged his moral wrath on the head of the younger man, who coincided with him on some things but not on others and had never been his disciple:

BRIGHT TO CHAMBERLAIN

One Ash, Rochdale, January 4, 1883.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, I never thought that any word of yours was directed against me, but what you said at Ashton shows how great is the difference between us. . . . You believe the policy of non-intervention "to be an unworthy and ignoble doctrine", tho' it is a doctrine held by Washington and to which arbitration and Christianity are evidently tending. You speak of the "honour and interests of England" as justifying intervention and you refer further on to "certain stock arguments of despotism"—are not your words of the stock arguments of the Jingo School? I have heard them for forty years in the House of Commons. They are the words of Palmerston throughout his mischievous career, and from William the 3rd to our own time they have been spoken in defence of all the crimes which have built up the Debt and wasted the wealth and the blood of our people. You speak of the critical time when the ships went to Alexandria—but you will remember that the only reason given in, and to, the Cabinet was that there was danger to English subjects, not that the Forts were to be bombarded and war to be begun. I agree with you that the question was not sufficiently discussed, and I think we left the matter too easily in

[1] Chamberlain to Bright, December 31, 1882.

the hands of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville. . . . I prefer to treat the Egyptian incident rather as a deplorable blunder than as a crime. In this only does it differ, in my judgment, from the worst doings of Palmerston and the more recent scandals of Beaconsfield.

Contrary to Chamberlain's wish, though partly as a result of his action, sole British control and occupation were established in this autumn of 1882, and by the Liberal Government formed against Imperialism in 1880. This far surpassed ordinary comedies of political contradiction turning on the electioneering speeches of Oppositions and their subsequent conduct in office. Amongst cases of the kind this one, when we think of how the diabolical Disraeli and his "Tory bandits" were execrated three years before, seems extravaganza and almost burlesque. Force might be no remedy in theory, but in practice it was the instrument used in Egypt as in Ireland.

The Nile, the Pyramids and the Sphinx made a legendary addition to the British Empire. There had been nothing like it since Clive. More by accident than design the worst peril had been escaped. Bismarck speculated that an Anglo-French occupation with its sure sequel of bitter discord might easily have made Egypt a Schleswig-Holstein for the two Western Powers now dissociated. France had thrown away her heart's desire, and, blaming us, entered upon twenty years of hostility. Following the French seizure of Tunis, the British occupation of Egypt gave a strong impetus to the new movement of expansion by all the Powers, including Germany.

In fact, another step towards the Great War of 1914 had been taken. And at the very moment when Tel-el-Kebir seemed in its way a "battle without a morrow" the Mahdist storm was gathering rapidly in the Sudan, while neither the Liberal Cabinet nor Gordon could yet imagine what was very soon to come.

Though futurity was as thickly veiled from Chamberlain as from Gladstone and Bismarck themselves, the Radical Minister was cast for destinies very different and much wider than he as yet proposes to himself. With all sincerity of conviction he expects a British evacuation of Egypt in "a year or two at the outside". His reminiscences of his feeling in the early part of 1883,

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just before darker riddles of the Sphinx were propounded, are very frank.

There is no doubt that at this time the Egyptian intervention was unpopular with the majority of the Liberal party, and nothing but Mr. Gladstone's personal influence could have secured its permanence. If Mr. Bright had led an agitation against it, I believe he would have been able to destroy the Government. There was an uneasy feeling that the forces of Great Britain were being used to save the pockets of the bondholders. The disparity between the English and the Egyptian armies destroyed any enthusiasm for our victory at Tel-el-Kebir, and there was, accordingly, a general desire that we should come away as quickly as possible, and serious doubt whether we ought ever to have gone. In this matter, however, I sided with Hartington rather than with the dissatisfied Radicals, who were represented in the Cabinet throughout the discussions of this [1882] and subsequent years by Sir William Harcourt. There is no doubt, however, that in the early stage of our occupation we were all desirous of a speedy evacuation, and believed that the conditions we had laid down would be accomplished in the course of a year or two at the outside.[1]

Liberal and Radical Ministers as yet did not and could not realise that their new responsibilities stretched away down the Nile for two thousand miles to a region called the Sudan. They had not yet heard of a Mahdi; nor of a British soldier called Hicks Pasha; and so far as they knew vaguely about a military mystic called General Gordon, his name was connected with a past epic in China and suggested no bearing whatever on future events.

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK V.

1884–1885

CHAPTER XXI

THE FRANCHISE STRUGGLE AND THE FALL OF THE WHIGS—TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

(1884)

OPEN Conflict—Abuse and Retaliation—Ireland and the Franchise—The Battle with the Peers—"Bend or Break"—The Queen and the Radical—Form and Power of Chamberlain's Speeches—The Aston Riots: A Serious Affair—Lord Randolph and "The Badger"—A Victory called Compromise—Radical Dreams.

I

WHEN the battle of the franchise was fought out in 1884, Chamberlain as a leader on the popular side was as conspicuous in the forefront as Brougham and Bright had been in the two former crises of Reform. In all minds the issues now went deeper, for this time it was not only a question of more or less democracy, but a question concerning imminently the structure of the United Kingdom as completed by Pitt. The Radical statesman still believed that internal alterations in one wing of the edifice would be sufficient.

Well remembered by many still living, this year of 1884—the prelude to things still more extraordinary—was as critical in Imperial and foreign affairs as turbulent in domestic. If democratic feeling was stirred up, a new Imperial spirit was roused no less.

The year began with uncompromising challenges on the electoral question, and ended with an agreed revolution. Always in the thick of the fray, urging on the Radical movement, Chamberlain from the first was the chief mark for Conservative assault. Mild Sir Stafford Northcote cried in advance of the main battle: "If the country is to be brought to agree to an identical franchise

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based on household suffrage we shall give Mr. Chamberlain all he wants, and we shall repent our folly as the trees in the fable repented of having given the woodman a handle for his axes". Another moderate, Mr. W. H. Smith, darkly suggested that if Chamberlain's "auxiliaries" were brought by the million into the electorate they might "devaluate" the existing votes of other people. Mr. Marriott, already mentioned as a sedulous enemy of the Radical leader, continued to depict him as a rich sybarite masquerading as a jacobin and manipulating a sinister Caucus in the interests of his own ambition. Mr. Marriott proclaimed that "it was impossible for him any longer to support a Cabinet in which Mr. Chamberlain was a leading influence". Thereupon, changing his party and resigning his seat, this assailant, edifying to relate, was re-elected for Brighton by an increased majority.

A popular Tory cartoon showed the Birmingham horse as the plunger of the Ministerial four-in-hand, and added: "If they don't get rid of him he'll get rid of them". Amidst the rancour of the shipping controversy he found but feeble support on his own side, and many Whig members were outright mutineers. Though *Punch* had stood well by him, coarser caricature showed him as the sea-sick passenger.[1]

Steeled by adversity and abuse in the spring of 1884, the Radical leader became the more steady and relentless in his major strategy. He and his nearest friends were possessed by one heartening conviction. In spite of all difficulties at home and abroad Liberalism by enlarging the electorate would double its strength and overwhelm its opponents. "As long as we keep the Franchise Bill driving on we are in the best position, in or out, that a party ever was in, in our time." So buoyantly wrote[2] from Dublin Castle, a gloomy place, Chamberlain's old friend, Sir George Trevelyan, who was himself years before the real pioneer of wider suffrage in the counties.

II

At the end of February Gladstone found himself able at last to bring in the great and long-delayed Bill, and he introduced it by an exalted and skilful oration. The President of the Board of Trade did not intervene until March 27, when he spoke

[1] *Moonshine*, March 15, 1884. [2] January 16, 1884.

on the Second Reading. By comparison with his colleagues he spoke literally with a vengeance—imperturbable in manner, vehement in suggestion. Lord Randolph had maintained that the people were indifferent to a forced agitation: there had been no menacing gatherings; the railings of Hyde Park were intact. The Radical riposted. What could be more fatal than for Conservatives to argue that violence must be shown to prove the wisdom of reform? Equal franchise must be conceded to Ireland, whatever the consequences. On the main theme—the vote, the labourer and the land—he attacked Conservative thought itself:

"The interests of the agricultural labourers have been too long neglected. What has happened in consequence of the fact that the agricultural labourers have had no voice in this House? They have been robbed of their lands. They have been robbed of their rights in the commons. They have been robbed of their open spaces. I do not say intentionally, but in ignorance of their rights and interests, for which, unfortunately, they have had no spokesman in the House. It might be said that these proceedings, which I have not characterised in language a whit too strong, are now come to an end; not a bit of it. They are going on still. The agricultural labourers are still being robbed. You cannot go into a single country lane in which you won't find that the land-owners on each side of the road have enclosed or are enclosing lands which for centuries belonged to the people."[1]

This is not his best manner of speaking, but there is living energy in his matter, and we see what forces he is setting himself to arouse. His words are addressed less to the House than to the cottages, powerless up to now, where the traditional feeling of deprivation and wrong had been, as Chamberlain believed, too patiently endured. He had been saying so for a dozen years. Most members on this occasion thought him more aggressive than persuasive. He was not thinking of them and looked further; his incitement of the coming voters was deliberate. On every side—at this embittering phase of his effort for the saving of life in the Merchant Service—the selfish power of "vested interests" under the existing system seemed to him to be a curse of land and sea; of town and country; of the slum-dweller and the agricultural labourer. Goschen cried that all those who used this sort

[1] House of Commons, March 27, 1884.

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of argument sought to heap further coals on a democratic fire which was big enough already. Lord Salisbury said before Parliament met, "We are on an inclined plane leading from the position of Lord Hartington to that of Mr. Chamberlain and so on to the depths over which Mr. Henry George rules supreme" (Dorchester, January 16).

On the morning before the Radical leader was to speak the Prime Minister had gently admonished him to curb himself:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Coombe Warren, March 27, 1884.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, I understand you are to speak in the debate to-night; and as, in the matter of the franchise my views, within the walls of the Cabinet, have approximated to yours more than to some other shades, I think it only fair to Hartington to say that, as far as I can judge from the report of his speech, I think he has kept good faith and something more in his references to Ireland and redistribution, and that I hope *we* shall do all in our power to maintain the harmony thus established. I feel this the more because I think Goschen (knowingly or not) made it as difficult for him as he could to get through that difficult part of his work without exhibiting some open seams. I hope the wheels are working smoothly for the Merchant Shipping Bill.—Sincerely yours,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

Perhaps this excellent letter arrived too late for its purpose. Perhaps it came to hand in time but was an irritant. For the Shipping Bill the wheels were not working smoothly; rather they were by now like the celebrated wheels that "fell off" the chariot.[1] Less than three weeks before, Chamberlain had wished to resign that he might be more free to fight for the seamen and for the whole Radical programme. He had been persuaded to remain in the interests of the Franchise Bill. He had no intention of allowing himself to be half-gagged on that of all questions. Despite occasional agreement on principles, if seldom on methods—and although the younger man desired genuinely, if not effusively, to stand well with his mentor—between these two there is dis-

[1] Thurloe's *Dispatches*, vol. i. p. 767.—John Maidston describing events just before the Restoration and the failure of Monk's opponents—"their wheeles fell off and left them on the ground".

affinity of temperaments and a certain lucklessness in small things. CHAP. XXI. ÆT. 48.

At the New Year he had repeated through Lord Granville his readiness to go out at any moment rather than renounce his liberty of speech on franchise issues; but he now assures the Prime Minister that he has no desire to renew friction in the Cabinet.

III

The Bill, much detained, need not detain us here. The red-letter day for the Liberals, and above all for Home Rulers, was May 20. The Conservatives some days before had moved the exclusion of Ireland. In vain did Plunket denounce the madness of giving increased power to those who wished to break up the unity of the Empire. As vainly did Lord Claud Hamilton prophesy that the Parnellites with eighty votes after the next election would hold the fate of parties in their hands and force Home Rule. Lord Randolph Churchill with scathing wit ridiculed his leaders and advised the Conservatives to withdraw their motion.

Parnell had said plainly of the approaching situation: "If we cannot rule ourselves we can at least cause them to be ruled as we choose". On all mechanical calculation his phalanx in the next House would be something over eighty with the new franchise; but only something under eighty without it, unless the total Irish representation were indeed reduced to a strictly proportionate figure; and this no responsible British politician proposed. He affected calm indifference, masking his fixed passion. Since making the Kilmainham treaty with Chamberlain he had waited for this very day and knew that if it went well—and his private secret were kept—nothing but some combination between the British parties could stop him; and any effective combination in that sense never had seemed more unthinkable. The Irish leader was already warning his followers in Great Britain to rely on their own leverage in the constituencies, not on sentiment about British democracy. To play off the two "historic parties" against each other was the fixed aim of his strategy.

On May 20 the motion to exclude Ireland was rejected by no less than three hundred and thirty-two votes to one hundred and thirty-seven; some Conservatives going with the Government,

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while many took no part in the division. The number of Nationalist electors was increased at a stroke from less than two hundred thousand to over six hundred thousand.

For over twelve months, no Liberal leader had been quite so insistent and persistent as Chamberlain in advocating Irish equality. Neither he nor any man in the House of Commons that day could begin to guess the political future and the fates.

On June 26 the Third Reading was carried. Gladstone launched his warning to the Peers against courting the most dangerous crisis since 1832. When the Radical benches behind shouted themselves hoarse in response, it was one of the happiest moments yet known in this Government by the Minister for Trade. Then came an odd sequel. There was no division; the Conservatives left the House in a body, and Liberal "Ayes" pealed across the floor to vacant benches before the Speaker declared the Bill carried *nem. con.*[1]

For nearly twelve years the Radical leader had dreamed of this moment. Ever since 1872 he had believed that enfranchisement of the agricultural labourer was the key to full democratic victory. Through all that time Trevelyan, the legislative pioneer of this cause, had been one of his friends. Girded and equipped for the impending campaign in the constituencies against the Peers, Chamberlain of all men was the most eager for that battle. On July 8 the House of Lords repudiated the fixed Caucus principle "Franchise First" and hung up the Bill indefinitely; pending Ministerial surrender to what was called the double-barrelled policy of Reform with simultaneous Redistribution. Otherwise, said Lord Salisbury in effect, some days later, Parliament would become Mr. Chamberlain's registration machine. The House "is the most servile House of Commons that ever existed in Westminster—the most servile to the Prime Minister, the most servile to the Caucus".[2] His hearers volleyed their cheers.

On July 10 Gladstone called his supporters together at the Foreign Office. The Government decided to abandon all its other Bills; a massacre of the innocents, and the Board of Trade had to yield its own progeny to the sacrifice. Parliament was to be quickly prorogued. A new session would be held in the autumn to send up the Franchise Bill once more to the House of Lords.

[1] *Annual Register* (1884), p. 137. [2] At Sheffield, July 22, 1884.

Conflict is to rage through the recess. The people are to be mobilised at once against the Peers.

IV

Instantly, on the suspension of the Bill, John Morley signalled for fighting instructions. He meant to play his own marked part in this fight, and did. "People are writing me about the *direction* of the coming agitation. What is to be the watchword?"[1] There had been a coolness between these friends on the Egyptian crisis, but at once they met again. There was no doubt in Chamberlain's mind about the watchword. He had given it months before. It was the fight of the "Peers against the People", and the Lords must "bend or break". Morley improved on this with "Mend them or end them".

Through the strident confusion of the ensuing months, we must fix our attention on Chamberlain's part. It was his firm belief that "the Peers would yield only to fear"; and that they would reject the Bill again in the autumn unless overawed by national agitation in the spirit of 1831 and 1832.[2] He further held that to stir the masses his incitements must be hot and strong at any risk of offence to the Whigs. He now showed that his platform-power was nearing its height, fully attained in the following year. His perfected ability in parliamentary debate was only reached much later.

Well in advance of the crisis, in his address to his constituents at the beginning of the year,[3] he had used these terms:

"There is one thing about which I am in no doubt whatever, and that is that if this Bill which will enfranchise two millions of people who are now knocking at the portals of the Constitution, and who are as orderly, as industrious and as intelligent as any two millions within its pale . . . if this great act of justice is frustrated by Lord Salisbury and the hereditary branch of the Legislature, then the Government may appeal with a clear conscience to the people against the Peers, and for my part there is no question within the whole range of English politics on which I would more cheerfully consult the opinion of the constituencies".

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, July 9, 1884.
[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[3] Birmingham, January 29, 1884.

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Now, the issue of the "People against the Peers" had been fully challenged when the House of Lords flung up the Bill and he brought to the fight his own utmost energies and the whole power of the Caucus.

The detail of his speeches is not for these pages. They are worth the attention of anyone who desires to study closely what we may call the technique of democratic agitation. We shall be more concerned in this personal narrative with consequences and difficulties unknown to the country at the time. But the general character and effect of the speeches must be indicated. Opening his own campaign at the Devonshire Club, he declared that nothing was surer than coming victory for "the supremacy of popular rights over personal privilege". In the vein of Timon towards Alcibiades—"Go on and prosper for thou wilt ruin them all"—he affected to encourage Salisbury. "A Radical in disguise who conceals under an air of patrician arrogance his deep contempt for his order and his secret designs for its humiliation."[1]

Next came the vast gathering in the open air at Birmingham. Old men who had marched in 1832 were in this host computed to number two hundred thousand persons. Vividly must it have reminded Chamberlain himself of the Brooklands concourse in 1866 and his own political awakening. In the evening at Bingley Hall[2] Chamberlain spoke after Bright, and with far more effect on the audience. An acute impression of his force is given by a witness, then an admirer, who became hostile before he wrote down a memory of the scene:

> His face I thought disagreeable as I saw it for the first time close at hand, his mouth taking on a sneer more readily than a smile. The tones of biting sarcasm in his tremendous indictment of the Peers gave force to the oration but did not endear the man.[3]

His townsmen, perhaps better judges, not seeing him "for the first time" did not see him so. He rose and spoke and ended amidst unbounded enthusiasm, and amongst the accents of his "tremendous indictment" were these:

"The House of Lords courts investigation into its past history.

[1] House dinner of the Devonshire Club, July 23, 1884.

[2] Birmingham, August 4.

[3] Rev. W. Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, p. 35.

Investigation it shall have. It has protected every abuse and sheltered every privilege. . . . It has denied justice and delayed reform. It is irresponsible without independence, obstinate without courage, arbitrary without judgment and arrogant without knowledge. . . . The 'divine right of Kings'—that was a dangerous delusion; but the 'divine right' of peers is a ridiculous figment. . . . We will never be the only race in the civilised world subservient to the insolent pretensions of an hereditary caste."

This was at least the masculine English of invective; and he meant every word of it, but it made Conservatism foam. His next big speech was at Hanley. Dilke, after a former warning that the Whigs were weakening, telegraphed: "Speak as strongly as possible to-night and to-morrow". In that sense Chamberlain easily reached expectation. No public building was big enough to hold his crowds at Hanley. "It is said that the Lords will not give way. Then I say neither will the people submit"; "a free people must know no other master than its intelligent resolve".[1]

But after this came an interlude of garish melodrama and it killed heroics on both sides. At Bingley Hall Chamberlain had reminded his audience that in 1832 a hundred thousand Midland men were sworn to march on London at need. "If we are commencing this great conflict with temper and moderation, it would be a mistake to suppose that we are less earnest or less resolute than our forefathers." Lord Salisbury, harking back to this two months after, expressed the hope that any march on London would be headed by the Birmingham fire-eater himself. "My impression is that those who will have to receive him will well be able to give a very good account of him, and that Mr. Chamberlain will return from his adventure with a broken head if nothing worse."[2] Lord Salisbury having reduced it to this, the Radical was on the same level when he answered in Wales.[3] In case of a Birmingham march on London let Lord Salisbury lead the opposing array—"In that case if my head is broken it will be broken in very good company. . . . I would advise him to try another experiment. . . . He has had picnics at Hatfield, he has had picnics at Knebworth, and picnics at half the noblemen's seats in the country. Now let him try a picnic in Hyde Park.

[1] Hanley, October 7, 1884.
[2] At Kelso, October 11, 1884.
[3] Newtown, October 7, 1884.

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I will promise him that he will have a larger meeting than he ever addressed and that it will be quite unnecessary for him to go to the expense of any fireworks." Hatfield and Highbury alike show how near to Charles Dickens was the age in general, but Gladstone was framed on earlier traditions, and his public dignity never deteriorated any more than Peel's or Pitt's.

Two days later, at Denbigh, Chamberlain recovered his best style of biting felicity in satire. A meeting of ten thousand filled a marquee near the ruins of Denbigh Castle. He extolled the peers as "ancient monuments", but mocked them as hereditary legislators:

"I have no desire to see a dull uniformity of social life. I am rather thankful than otherwise to gentlemen who will take the trouble to wear robes and coronets and who will keep up a certain state of splendour which is very pleasant to look upon. (Hear, hear.) They are ancient monuments (loud laughter), and I should be sorry to deface them. (Laughter.) But then, gentlemen, I don't admit that we can build upon these interesting ruins the foundations of our government. (Hear, hear.) I cannot allow that these antiquities should control the destinies of a free empire." (Cheers.)[1]

Again this is excellent speaking for his purpose. No one in the last half-century has hit quite so well the reasonable mean between the old studied rhetoric and the latter-day colloquialism of the platform.

This suggests a further reflection upon his method. Chamberlain practised preparation until he always seemed not to have prepared. Long after, he thought this self-discipline excessive. It is an interesting question. He pruned his sanguine temperament too much, admiring lucidity and compression above all things and fearing exuberance. Rigorous habits of self-control and self-compulsion had become second nature in his earlier life. But for his rigid practice of elimination, the frank humanities that his closest friends knew and loved might have been more often expressed. He encased, as it were, in the metallic armour of his utterances a nature very different from what he seemed. It is as possible that with more amenity in his public speaking he would have had less power.

[1] Denbigh, October 20, 1884.

V

While making the agitation boil against the Peers, he got into hot water himself. Already he was execrated by Tories and Whigs, reprobated generally by moderate and elderly persons.

Now Majesty frowned. While speeches were raging in the country the Court was bent on compromise. In their hearts the Prime Minister and the majority of his colleagues desired the same thing, though not the name. In the early days of the crisis (August 9) the Cabinet, under pressure from the Court, prevented our extremist from taking the chair at a meeting at the Agricultural Hall[1] to denounce the Lords. Gladstone sought vainly to restrain him:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

July 26.—Upon examining your speech[2] with my best spectacles I find a single passage which I should like to refer to you, as there are a few words in it, those about the "future prospects" of the House of Lords, which I rather think may have been spoken inadvertently. I understood you most kindly and frankly to say that you accepted my statement at the Foreign Office as fairly indicating the range of discussion within which we should at the present stage of the controversy endeavour to confine ourselves. But certainly a main part of my purpose in that statement was to shut out the point of future prospects, and I hope that when we meet on Monday you may give me word to assure me that I was not misunderstood.

The reply shows no malleable mood:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

July 29.—I readily accept the terms of your letter. . . . The only allusion I made to "future prospects" was in connection with the remark that Lord Salisbury was forcing on public attention the position of the House of Lords; and that its past history, present actions and future prospects would be the subject of discussion during the next few months. I did not myself discuss the question nor offer any opinion with regard to it.

A few days later, after the Birmingham meeting, his ally in

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 64.

[2] At the Devonshire Club, July 23.

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the Cabinet warned him of the Queen's heavy displeasure. The dialogue lends itself to Boswellised form without changing a word:[1]

CHAMBERLAIN: She may, if she likes, dismiss me, in which case I will lead an agitation against the Lords in the country.

DILKE: Yes, but you cannot go alone.

CHAMBERLAIN: I am not going, but perhaps she can dismiss me. What then? I am not going to tie my tongue.

DILKE: In that case, it would surely be even more essential than usual that I should go too.

The pair maintained themselves in the Cabinet by making common cause even when they did not agree. A few weeks before, Dilke had been the Minister in danger, when refusing to vote against women's suffrage—opposed by the rest of the Cabinet, by some on principle, by others as foreign to the matter in hand and perilous to the Bill. "But for Chamberlain's strong stand, this affair", writes Dilke, "would have forced me to leave the Government. I had so strong an opinion in favour of women's suffrage that I could not undertake to vote against it even when proposed as an amendment to a great Government Bill."[2] Hartington, he says, wanted him turned out. Chamberlain told the Cabinet that though differing deeply from his friend on the merits of the question he would stand by Dilke at any cost. At this, they recognised that the offender must remain. His ally wrote: "It is settled." Dilke replied: "I would not have asked you to stand by me, for I have no constitutional case, and your conduct in so doing could not be defended. I always count on your friendship but this would have been too much." Chamberlain rejoined: "We are both right. You could not ask me, but if you had been requested to resign I should have gone too." This again was heroic friendship in politics but no less an instance of cool sagacity in keeping the alliance impregnable. Either of them might need its benefit at any moment.

Now again two had to be reckoned with in a more serious

[1] The words themselves are in Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 65. The date was August 5.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 6.—The Government unexpectedly had refused to allow Women's Franchise to be treated as an open question, and declared that a vote for it would be equivalent to a vote against the Bill.

dilemma, and this time the threatened man was Chamberlain. It is of some importance from the standpoint of constitutional history, as well as in connection with the franchise struggle, to examine the attitude of Her Majesty towards her President of the Board of Trade. At the outset she had heartily disliked his admission to the Cabinet. More and more of late she had regarded him as a dangerous demagogue.[1] Her anger a year before, after his imprudent fling about the absence from John Bright's jubilee of monarchial recognition, had been intelligible. Now with less reason, on account of his legitimate force as a fighting statesman in a fierce party contest, she visited him with the full weight of her censures and on his account made the Prime Minister's life a burthen.

"Mend them or end them" was the watchword of the popular Liberal agitation. Though Morley had found the phrase, Chamberlain had been pioneer of its spirit, and was now the outstanding advocate of its purpose. The Queen abhorred it. At the very outset of the agitation she had sought to check the Radical leader after his Devonshire Club speech.

> The Queen will yield to no one in TRUE LIBERAL FEELING, but not to destructive, and she calls upon Mr. Gladstone to *restrain, as he can,* some of his wild colleagues and followers.[2]

How Gladstone tried on that occasion and how little yielding was the answer we have seen. The truth must be said. Chamberlain was no more inclined to submit to Queen Victoria's ideas of free opinion and expression than was Wilkes himself—or Rockingham, Burke and Fox, for that matter—to submit to George the Third; and not only that. He was determined to resist if necessary what he thought the harassing tyranny to which Gladstone wearily deferred.

VI

The next and worse crisis broke out in the autumn. We know how, on October 7, Chamberlain addressed and delighted his mass meeting at Hanley.

It was a long and brilliant fighting speech without a slack

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria,* Second Series, vol. ii. p. 522 (July 25).
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 253.

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word in it from beginning to end, packed with telling phrases, scornful of the pretensions of any hereditary legislature to dictate to a free people; but there was not one word of coarse abuse. On the contrary, he said for the first time in effect that if Tories, more moderate than Lord Salisbury, desired "a fair scheme" of redistribution, instead of some ingenious manipulation of the constituencies in the interests of their own party, it might be possible to meet them.

Mingling praise and warning, the Prime Minister wrote to Chamberlain on the eve of the Hanley meeting:

October 6, 1884.—I am extremely sorry to have missed seeing you in London; viewing the immense interests that are suspended upon the right course of the Franchise Bill and question. I see that Salisbury by his declaration in *The Times* of Saturday, that the Lords are to contend for the simultaneous passing of the two Bills, has given you an excellent subject for denunciation, and you may safely denounce him to your heart's content.

But I certainly hope that you will leave us all elbow room on other questions which *may* arise. If you have seen my letters (virtually) to the Queen, I do not think you will have found reason for alarm in them. I am sorry that Hartington the other day used the *word* compromise, a word which has never passed my lips, though I believe he meant nothing wrong. If we could find any way which, though surrendering nothing substantial, would build a bridge for honourable and moderate men to retreat by, I am sure you would not object to it. . . .

Immediately after the response Gladstone commended his lieutenant:

October 8, 1884.—I must now write a line to *thank* you for the skill and moderation with which, according to the report in *The Times*, you handled yesterday towards the close of your very able speech the subject of so-called compromise.

But full was the cup of Royal wrath and brimming over. The Queen telegraphed to Downing Street that she was "shocked"[1] at the Hanley speech and followed up the attack:

October 9, 1884.—I wrote to him [Mr. Gladstone] to-day, calling his attention to a speech of Mr. Chamberlain's, and saying it was impossible

[1] Dilke to Chamberlain, October 21, 1884.

for the Government to expect any success being come to if a Cabinet Minister held such language.[1]

The Prime Minister defended his lieutenant, to whom, by his letters just quoted, he was bound. But then the Radical leader and Lord Salisbury came like two quarrelling stage villains to the talk about "breaking heads"—and the very ugly affair of the Aston Riot occurred just after. Her Majesty now suggested the extreme penalty.

October 22, 1884.—The Queen must again call Mr. Gladstone's attention to Mr. Chamberlain's speeches. He approves of the *disgraceful* riot at Birmingham![2] If a Cabinet Minister makes use of such language and sets the Prime Minister's injunctions at defiance he ought *not* to *remain* in the *Cabinet*. His language if not disavowed justifies the *worst apprehensions* of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister answered this by a cipher telegram:

Concurring in your Majesty's regret and disapprobation of language used, Mr. Gladstone on becoming acquainted with it last Tuesday at once adopted measures which he hopes will have a good result.[3]

In fact, our Radical had already received from his ally in the Cabinet an urgent letter:

DILKE TO CHAMBERLAIN

October 21, 1884.—Mr. G. sent for me the moment he reached town today. . . . He then said that he wished to be entirely loyal to you and to support you firmly with the Queen *should* she object to your last speech now. But that for this purpose he wanted to feel that he was on safe ground. That he much admired your last speeches, but that the passage about heading the march to fight Salisbury, though provoked by Salisbury's wicked and unjustifiable words, was not, he thought, a passage which could be defended as coming from a Cabinet Minister. He wishes to get it qualified in order to be able to defend your speeches as a whole.

He therefore asks through me as your most intimate friend, in order that the asking may not be formal, that you should qualify the passage. I said that you were not going to speak. He replied that you might get a Quaker friend to write to you to tell you that some had thought that

[1] The Queen's Journal for October 9, 1884. *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 548.

[2] He did not.

[3] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 555.

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you advised broken heads; in order that you should declare in a letter, which might be printed with the other, that you were shocked to hear that such an interpretation as that of incitement to violence should be placed on words which were only a fair and obvious reply to Salisbury's monstrous violence. I did not say so but I should do this myself.

P.S.—Of course in any case I make common cause.

Chamberlain was not a good, because not a willing, hand at explaining himself away. He tried, but at this serious hour his attempt was diverting. To a Nonconformist friend—who was not a Quaker—he wrote a few stiff lines. He said in effect that his words, misrepresented as an incitement to violence, were only intended to expose the absurdity of Lord Salisbury's challenges, and he added dourly: "In order that I may give no countenance for possible misunderstanding I shall refrain from any further rejoinder though the provocation is great and the occasion tempting". Far was this indeed from what the head of the Government had requested for mollifying the sovereign to whom he lamented: "That letter does not come up to Mr. Gladstone's expectations and desires".[1] He asked Dilke, who transmitted the question, "Can nothing more be done?" Chamberlain answered, "I cannot and *will not* do more". Her Majesty launched upon the hapless Prime Minister her direst rebuke:

October 27, 1884.—It is, the Queen thinks, absolutely necessary for the honour of the Government that Mr. Gladstone should take a firm stand and separate his name from Mr. Chamberlain, with which unfortunately it is too often, wrongly no doubt, connected. Mr. Chamberlain *must* restrain his language, or *not* remain in the Cabinet. In any other Cabinet such freedom of language has not been tolerated.[2]

Dilke's diary records the next passage:

On the 28th, late in the evening, Mr. Gladstone sent for me about the Chamberlain matter, and said of the Queen, "She not only attacks him but me through him, and says I pay a great deal too much attention to him". When Chamberlain and I went home, as we almost always did, together in one cab, he broke out, evidently much worried and excited, against Mr. Gladstone. Next day I warned Mr. Gladstone that it would not take much to make a serious row.[3]

[1] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 557.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 558.

[3] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 70.

That warning brought about a tacit truce, and it was high time. Chamberlain had neither said nor hinted anything against the monarchy in his impugned speeches. At Hanley he had, by Gladstone's acknowledgment, pointed out the possibility of a fair arrangement between the parties, and we shall see that as a Minister he was working for it sanely according to the sovereign's wise intention. But before peace was certain, and while his opponents were still up in arms, he was resolved that his own weapons should not be blunted. He was beginning to think that the attitude of George the Third's granddaughter towards him was a case of George the Third and Fox over again; and rather than submit to this he was undoubtedly determined to leave the Government and to take public issue on the constitutional conditions of modern politics. Well indeed that this was averted. The squall just over was not to be the last of its kind; but for the time Court and Cabinet had to take him as he was.

VII

Chamberlain was all the more exercised in himself and hardened in his political humour because at this very time he was involved in an uglier episode by the Aston Riot and his flaring quarrel with Lord Randolph. They had long been, as soon again, not only mutually admiring statesmen fighting similar personal battles on opposite sides, but friends sincerely attached. A fascinating hostess liked to welcome at the Churchills' house in Charles Street, despite the scandal to the Duke of Marlborough, the "Corsican Brothers" of Tory imagination. No two types were more opposite in most ways than Chamberlain and Churchill, but each stimulated the other in a common aptitude for audacity, and each was struggling with an Old Gang.

Above all, as a frank imitator of the Birmingham school Lord Randolph this year had paid Chamberlain a flamboyant tribute, without mentioning him.

> The Caucus may be perhaps a name of evil sound and omen in the ears of aristocratic or privileged classes, but it is undeniably the only form of political organisation which can collect, guide and control for common objects large masses of electors, and there is nothing in this

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particular form of political combination which is in the least repugnant to the working classes in this country.[1]

The risen hope of Tory democracy thought that the secret of power for his party and himself was to lead and popularise the method of "Caucus cut Caucus". The year before, Birmingham itself had been a happy scene for his purpose when he carried with him the annual meeting of the Conservative Association and conquered a position enabling him to engage with confidence in a decisive struggle with his titular leaders. Then he was chosen as a candidate for Birmingham to the rapture of its Tory-democratic masses, rapidly growing in spite of the original Caucus, but to the belligerent scorn of dominating Radicalism.

Next, Lord Randolph on reform took a line in favour of Irish equality, not distinguishable from Radicalism itself. The climax came while the Franchise Bill was in mid-course. To Chamberlain's delight the Tory democrat, by the coup of his life, in May 1884 challenged official Conservatism and overthrew it, resigning for a hazardous moment the chairmanship of his National Union only to be reinstalled as its head,[2] and as effective co-leader of his party. Modern politics have known nothing at all so swift and flashing as the meteoric romance of Lord Randolph's career in those days.

Chamberlain openly envied a method and a spirit so much after his own heart, and undoubtedly was spurred by the example to assert himself on his own side in the name of popular opinion despite Whig dudgeon, the displeasure of the Crown and Gladstone's remonstrances. Lord Randolph, holding up the original Caucus as a model institution for a free country, exalted its leader by implication. The issue of the struggle with the "Old Gang", on the Conservative side, was in doubt for a few days. It is odd to think that a slight swerve in the course of circumstances might easily have thrown these two together on the Radical side.

In the pitched battle of the recess Lord Randolph was full-blooded in his fight for the Peers. Popular Toryism determined to hold a gigantic demonstration in Aston Park of all places. At

[1] Winston Spencer Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906), vol. i. p. 540 (Lord Randolph Churchill to Lord Salisbury, April 3, 1884).

[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 331.

the first news of the invasion of their sacred purlieus in a cause so insolently profane, Birmingham Radicalism became molten with ire; and resolved to overwhelm any "Tory attempt" to misrepresent upon that issue the historic tradition of the town.

That this movement in its first origin was spontaneous there is no doubt. Gladstone himself had said that if the Lords did not give way there would be "storm and tempest". Lord Salisbury continued to point out that there were none of the usual evidences of a violent demand; thus implying that while the people were quiet the Peers would be strong. Small wonder that, as early as August 14, we find Chamberlain writing in a white heat to Morley:

> The Tories will not be allowed to hold their meeting here in October. That is certain and there will be a blazing row. Milk and water won't carry it. The Lords will only yield to fear. Therefore to your tents, O Israel.

But for all that it is certain that he did not plan or intend the outrageous sequel. Even Mr. Marriott did not contend that he was stupid.

The Conservatives issued tickets. Radicals applied for them in large numbers, hoping to carry an adverse vote. The Conservatives stopped the supply. A small and select Radical conspiracy then forged its own supply, imitating exactly the orange colour and type and duplicating genuine numbers. On both sides temper ran dangerously high. The Conservatives announced that any attempt to interfere with the comfort of the proceedings would be "vigorously suppressed". The stewards, says the grave local annalist, were not only some hundreds in number but of "powerful physique and pugnacious disposition".[1]

On the great and disreputable day, October 13, while the Conservatives poured into the grounds, the rival crowd held its meeting just outside the wall. Many Liberals, the pink of respectability, had closed their works to let their men counter-demonstrate. Now the mischief began. The rougher sort of reformers began to clamber over the brick wall; then they battered a breach in it; and through the gap, yards wide, the unruly horde rushed in amongst "the Conservative Opposition". After that,

[1] Dent, *The Making of Birmingham.*

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two furious mobs grappled promiscuously, yelling, pummelling, whirling sticks and chairs. Several of the Conservative platforms were stormed and one of them collapsed; riot and wreckage ended in a wild evacuation of the field by both sides. Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord Randolph Churchill were hurried away by their friends from howling pursuers. Some humorous ruffians of the reforming persuasion remained to perpetrate a last indignity when they seized the Conservative fireworks and set them off before dark with the venerable image of Sir Stafford upside down.

It was not denied that Chamberlain, like the mass of angry Liberals in Birmingham, wanted a counter-demonstration; but it is certain that he knew nothing about the forged tickets—for weeks afterwards he refused to believe in them—and it is as certain that he never anticipated the battering of the walls. He gave general fighting instructions to Caucus headquarters in Birmingham, but did not supervise details. These had been taken in hand by various zealots of the Liberal Association, and they had gone much too far. No one had foreseen a riot of this kind. Schnadhorst was blamed for excess of zeal and accused of conniving at the manufacture of the false tickets in the hope of carrying a vote against the Peers at the Tory meeting. Now the Liberal Association was put to "great expense especially after the riots".[1] Awkward witnesses were got out of the way. The whole affair was a ghastly blunder. The nation rang with it. It gave a forward swing to Tory democracy in Birmingham and helped Conservatism throughout the country. It cast a cloud on Chamberlain's name, and following the Hanley speech it imperilled yet more seriously his position as a Minister.

VIII

When Parliament met a few days later Lord Randolph Churchill, moving a vote of censure (October 30) on Chamberlain's conduct throughout the recess, vehemently maintained that no Minister of the Crown had ever used language so flagrant and that Irish members had been sent to prison for less. The accuser

[1] The late C. A. Vince to the present writer. Vince, afterwards long and intimately associated with Chamberlain, believed that Schnadhorst made the mistake.

fortunately was no exemplar of verbal moderation; pot scolded kettle. None the less, had the vote of censure been carried the President of the Board of Trade would have had to resign.

Always best in a fight corner, he took the offensive with imperturbable skill. Unruffled by whole arrow-flights of hostile interruptions, he recited the most inflammatory passages from Lord Randolph's and Lord Salisbury's rhetoric. Moreover, he produced surprising crops of affidavits purporting to show that the Tory stewards and their hired roughs had been the first to use physical violence. Sir Charles Dilke and Mr. Gladstone came to his aid. But the vote of censure was only rejected by a majority of thirty-six.

It was a close shave as it was. But had Lord Randolph held his hand for a fortnight longer Chamberlain almost certainly would have been overthrown. The surprising affidavits had been furnished by Schnadhorst without a hint as to their dubious origin. They were soon exposed as for the most part the false witness of unsavoury persons. Schnadhorst maintained that he had not meant them to be read. His relations with his real chief, though politically active, had never been personally intimate; and they were henceforth carried on with a certain chill.

The Aston Riot damaged Chamberlain at the time, and it was long before he heard the last of it. The Caucus was attacked by the Conservative press as never before—as an engine of dark tyranny manipulated from his "palace at Birmingham" by a "Caucus King" who toiled not neither did he spin.

Lord Randolph rose to one of his best passages of imaginative denunciation—and in that vein he has had no later equal—so circumstantial though lurid seemed the tale. He depicted the Birmingham system as a Tsarist despotism—ruling every public function with "all the resources of terror and intimidation"; dispensing an enormous patronage; maintaining twenty-five thousand servants; but employing none but the blindly docile as *tchinovniks* of the Caucus. In reality "the Caucus owns the gasworks". It owned the waterworks, the lunatic asylums. What did it not own? The lord of Highbury was exhibited as the nefarious though secluded autocrat of this ruthless regime.[1]

There were some hints of truth in the extravagant caricature.

[1] *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. i. p. 365.

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As Montesquieu suggests, "When has any established power existed without abuse?" And when, we may add, has there been a pin to choose between the parties in using patronage to reward and nourish support? But while the indictment was a fine flight of travesty, it was not better than the letter of a few months before to Lord Salisbury. Then Lord Randolph had held up to admiration the vigorous popular method of the Caucus by comparison with the Conservative party's "present effete system of wire-pulling and secret organisation"; and added that Caucus was only "a name of evil sound and omen in the ears of aristocratic or privileged classes". Chamberlain, as we have seen, especially in his correspondence with Morley, thought rather that he had brought more air and pure water and light, more health and pleasure into the lives of the masses; that he had multiplied schools but reduced death and disease; that he had created the "Birmingham system" to crush stubborn abuses, and to make majority-rule an efficient means of working for the "greatest good of the greatest number".

We must remind ourselves once more that the energy of his effort in 1884 to enlarge the electoral system and so to change the whole working of the parliamentary machine sprang from his desire to do for the nation what he had done for his town.

To this acrid passage between Chamberlain and Churchill there was a generous sequel. At heart the two men were always drawn to each other. Revelling in general battle, but hating personal estrangement from the few he liked, Chamberlain offered his friendship "*sans rancune*", as he put it, to Lord Randolph a few weeks later; when the latter, strained by fatigue, was about to leave for a holiday in India. The reply was quick and warm:

> I like to think that it is neither impossible nor improbable [said the Tory democrat] that political circumstances may from time to time find us again in agreement, and although your position and power will be far above mine, I shall be on the look-out for those occasions.[1]

"He remained to the end of his life", says Lady Randolph, "an ardent admirer and friend of Mr. Chamberlain." But of what their lives were indeed to be, their triumphs and their tragedies in unexpected order nothing did they know.

[1] *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. i. p. 372 (November 27, 1884).

Chamberlain made it up as handsomely with another member of the Fourth Party. When harassed in the Aston debate by Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, he had called that accomplished person Lord Randolph's "jackal". This fell with particular horror on Gladstone's ear, who was much edified when his colleague at bay came as near to apologising for this savage snap as he ever came in this struggle to apologising for anything. Very soon he was gaily reconciled with Drummond Wolff, the placable diplomat of the Fourth Party, and they went arm-in-arm.

Throughout this year Chamberlain had to meet one dead-set after another; he thrived on it; nothing could down him. Lord Randolph's phrase about "drawing the badger" had been the cue for cartoons on both sides, but the Birmingham animal, Morley put it, was "the wariest, toughest and most powerful badger ever known". He was more and other than that. No one was less like the burrowing kind however desperate in defence. If we must go to Buffon for comparisons, he is of a larger species, lithe and sinewy; he rather seeks his quarry than shuns his trackers; nor will any single assailant ever bring him low until at long last fate overtakes him another way.

IX

Chamberlain might have saved a good deal of his energy and exposed himself less dangerously in this fight had he guessed the inner workings of Gladstone's mind. Now, as on a greater occasion soon to come, he did not realise that his leader's intentions were to be found in his qualifications and not in what appeared to be his main proposition. Though to Chamberlain, as we have seen, the Prime Minister could protest truly that "compromise" as a word "has never passed my lips", he was preparing soundly for the thing.

The eruption of meetings and oratory had raged for three months. The Caucus had never been so energetic in demonstrations. Liberals claimed to have held one thousand five hundred meetings against two hundred for the Peers. They claimed further that their numbers attending were ten to one. Conservatives answered that the proportion was only two to one. The truth was somewhere between. Against the House of Lords

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the popular majority was heavy enough. Before Parliament met the drama had become a solemn pantomime sustained with difficulty. The spirit of war evaporated and lassitude followed the universal instinct that after much ado a settlement was inevitable. In its spirit one of the best of great constitutional settlements, it was one of the most humdrum in method.

The House of Commons reassembled on October 23 to send up the Bill again on the formula of "Franchise First". By disputing it again the Peers, in theory, would imperil their legislative lives. Within a month the formula dear to Liberalism in general, but especially to Radicalism and the Caucus, was known to be fudge. Not "Franchise First" but concurrent Redistribution of seats, as the Conservatives demanded, was to be the basis of agreement. A Redistribution Bill, not to be altered by the House of Commons, had been privately negotiated with the Conservative leaders, and they had secured themselves against any General Election before both Bills became law.

Chamberlain was at first a reluctant contributor to a useful comedy, and his part may be lightly told. Like most advanced Liberals, when the campaign began he wanted to "clip the claws" of the Upper Chamber once for all by limiting it to a temporary veto. He believed that nothing but a threat to the legislative privileges of the House of Lords would prevent the Peers from rejecting the Bill a second time and forcing a General Election on the old franchise. And he abhorred the suggestion that the hereditary Peers should supervise—of all things—the rearrangement of the constituencies electing the House of Commons. He did not dream that Gladstone was as sagely anxious for this latter solution as Lord Hartington himself, and was working for it with the Queen. His first inkling that compromise was in the air, though not on the lips, came in a letter from Dilke:

August 27, 1884.—You ought to know of the following curious intrigue. On Thursday, 21st, I was in town for the day. Harty sent for me that he might see what I thought of a compromise with the Lords on the basis of Lord Cowper's letter in *The Times*—introduction of the Redistribution Bill in November. He might have known what I should think without asking me! In the *Daily News* of Friday, 22nd, was a violent leader stating that several members of the Cabinet (no doubt

Mr. G., Lord Granville and Hartington—for the latter had read me a despondent letter from Mr. G. and had sounded Lord G.) were in favour of the compromise and denouncing it. If I had spoken or written to anybody I should have thought the leader came from me, but I had not.

For weeks Chamberlain did not realise that even Dilke was undergoing a modification of mind. Yet again Chamberlain is ready to quit the Cabinet, and John Morley execrates the notion of "compromise". But they both dislike it less when they understand it better.

CHAMBERLAIN, MORLEY, DILKE, GLADSTONE

October 1.—*Morley to J. C.*—How disgusting this readiness on the part of our men to talk about compromise. Thank God, Salisbury is infatuated enough not to listen. If Mr. G. can hit upon a good plan, all right.

October 3.—*J. C. to Dilke.*— . . . Can it be true that Mr. G. contemplates surrender? I find it difficult, nay, impossible of belief. But if it be so, you and I must resign. You have my full powers to announce my secession with your own. . . . I incline to anticipate matters in my speech at Stoke, and at end to say that I see no compromise possible which is not surrender . . . that Mr. G. is not the man to put his hand to the plough and turn back, etc., etc. . . . Shall I say it? Reply by post if this reaches you in time. If not, telegraph "yes" or "no".

October 3.—*Dilke to J. C.*— . . . Let me know at once what you see as to this damned compromise Cabinet . . . which is fixed for the day of your speech. You'd better write to Mr. G. to say you'll resign if he gives in, and then not come to the Cabinet, I think.

October 4.—*Gladstone to Dilke.*—Please let us speak this evening. I do not understand the grounds of Chamberlain's alarm. At what time is he to speak?

October 7.—*Dilke to J. C.*—I've now telegraphed to you Yes!—*i.e.* to speak as strongly as possible to-night.

On the strength of this it was that Chamberlain made the Hanley speech and got himself into so much trouble with the Queen, though he had left a loophole for peace at Gladstone's direct request.

Then the whole outward scene of politics was transformed by a newspaper revelation. The *Standard* published in detail the

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Ministerial plan of Redistribution chiefly framed by Dilke. Though it did not meet all the objections of Conservatives, it removed their worst apprehensions. Chamberlain blazed:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

October 9.—*J. C. to Dilke.*—Who is the traitor? Are we to admit the accuracy of the account of what are we to say? It is an abominable business. I assume it is a theft in the Printing Office. . . .

October 10.—*Dilke to J. C.*—I did not telegraph or write about the *Standard* business because I had much to do and knew you had not to speak. . . . Childers is going to sack all the Queen's printers, I think. . . . The things were first offered to Edward Levy Lawson [1] who refused them and wrote to the Queen's printers, so we've good evidence. The *Globe* and *Evening News* say I gave them to the *Standard*!

October 10.—*J. C. to Dilke.*—If the Mem. was printed at F.O., I should be inclined to make a clean sweep of the existing staff, and send every man from the highest to the lowest to the right about unless they can point out the thief. It is not certain that the publication will do any harm. . . . The view taken here is—a capital scheme, though we should like to see it still further enlarged.

October 11.—*Dilke to J. C.*— . . . None of my papers . . . got out. What got out was everything from the Queen's printers.

Mr. Gladstone in his matchless way might still deplore the crude conduct of Hartington in speaking publicly of "compromise", and might call it "a word which has never passed my lips", but compromise was the Prime Minister's object as it was the Queen's. Even Chamberlain at Hanley suggested that if the Lords could bring themselves to be reasonable about Redistribution, peace might be made. Not believing in their reasonableness, he would have preferred a fight to a finish for the purpose of limiting once for all the legislative veto of the hereditary House.

X

Three weeks later, at the end of October, direct negotiations began between the rival party leaders.[2] In the Cabinet, Chamber-

[1] Of the *Daily Telegraph*—afterwards the first Lord Burnham.

[2] The course of all these complicated events is best followed in Mr. Buckle's invaluable edition of *Queen Victoria's Letters* (1879–1885), vol. iii. pp. 559-584.

lain stood on guard, and remarked in his compact way that Lord Salisbury's first idea of compromise meant "Tory minority represented in towns and Liberal minority extinguished in counties". Her Majesty's practical wisdom was perfect at this time. In spite of his condemned speeches Chamberlain was sounded like other important persons.

. . .

In November Sir Henry Ponsonby called on me at the Board of Trade and said the Queen desired to know my opinion on the situation. I said that unless the Lords gave way I believed there would be riots and serious outbreaks in many parts of the Kingdom, and I gave him, in confirmation of this opinion, some statements which I had heard in the course of the recent campaign from large manufacturers and others well acquainted with the prevalent temper of the working classes. Sir Henry told me that he had heard the same thing from other quarters.[1]

Proving less conservative than Gladstone, Lord Salisbury at length secured the acceptance of his firm condition—it still governs our electoral system—that single-member constituencies should be the broad general rule of rearrangement. That principle undoubtedly is favourable to Conservatism in what are called residential districts. Chamberlain's recollection here is closely confirmed in Queen Victoria's *Letters*, by Sir Henry Ponsonby, whose account, however, is dated October 24.[2] At this date Chamberlain's difficulties with the Queen were at the very height. Sir Henry's visit must have helped to compose the situation. Chamberlain, of course, would have preferred double-member divisions; but yielded with good sense while more moderate Ministers were still kicking.

Dilke records the decisive scene on the real day of settlement:

November 27.—Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville, Hartington, I and Chamberlain met before the Cabinet at eleven o'clock, and kept the Cabinet waiting. . . . I announced at the Cabinet that the Tories proposed and we accepted single-member districts universally in counties. . . . Hartington . . . was hostile to the single-member system . . . Childers talked about resigning, and Grosvenor was most hostile. We had the enormous advantage, however, that Chamberlain and I and Mr. Gladstone were the only three people who understood the subject, so that

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[2] *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 556.

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the others were unable to fight except in the form known as swearing at large. I was sent off from the Cabinet to Lord Salisbury to tell him that we could agree. At three o'clock we had a further conference with the Conservative leaders, and came to an agreement on my base, Chamberlain, who was somewhat hostile, yielding to me, I going in and out to him, for he was at Downing Street in another room.[1]

The settlement is assured by the Radical leader's assent, and at a late hour he speeds the news to his other friend:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

November 27, *Midnight.*—The agreement has come off—satisfactorily on the whole.

Minority representation is smashed.

No reduction in Irish representation.

No grouping.

Single member districts almost universal.

This will be unpopular but paves the way for equal value to the vote.

Single electoral districts will soon be equal. Meanwhile total disfranchisement of all constituencies under 15,000.

One member for all two-seated places between 15,000 and 50,000.

Not bad for a Tory Bill!

Against what they thought discreditable acceptance of a drawn battle many Radicals protested. The consent of Chamberlain and Dilke was cited to quiet these murmurers. The former put it to Morley:

I agree about the Lords. If anyone says "end them" I will roar ditto. Only I want to point out, not necessarily in public, that they are weaker now than before they gave up all that was essential and valuable to them in the recent controversy. *Il faut se soumettre ou se démettre.* They have submitted.[2]

In fact, the efforts of the Radical Ministers for two years had triumphed. The Peers gained nothing in substance. The electorate had been increased from 3,000,000 to 5,000,000. The lines of Redistribution were not the slightest obstacle to any strong impulse of popular opinion. Britain as a whole, in town and country alike, became a real though limited democracy.

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. pp. 76-78.
[2] Chamberlain to Morley, December 20, 1884.

Above all, the change meant the fall of the historic Whigs. That patrician caste could not be again a controlling or nullifying factor in the Liberal party. The future of "the Whigs" must mean their absorption by "the Tories". The Radical leader, like Dilke and Morley and many another, believed that the paralysis of the Cabinet of 1880 on social reform could not be repeated in any future Liberal Government. How could he guess what the next Liberal Government would be like little more than twelve months hence, or to what purposes devoted? To Courtenay Ilbert at the end of 1884 Chamberlain writes with ardour: "A revolution more important and more far-reaching than any previously accomplished in English history has been peacefully effected".

The closing year with all its exertions and vicissitudes, its daring and its hazards, had established Chamberlain as the undisputed leader of advanced opinion, and therefore, as then it seemed, of the coming generation. Nonconformists had thrilled to the passage of his Denbigh speech when he claimed that his descent from one of the ejected clergy of 1662 was as good as the pedigree of any peer. Seeing attainable visions and dreaming achievable dreams, he confidently regarded himself and Dilke as the heirs to power at no distant date, and as the organisers not alone of social reform but also of a stronger yet liberalised Empire. He had no doubt of it. Older men thought that these visions were certainties. The veteran father of the Caucus and historian of *The Radical Party in Parliament*, William Harris, expected a purely Radical Cabinet in a year or two; and the entrance of British democracy into early possession of the Promised Land.

CHAPTER XXII

FORESHADOWINGS: SOUTH AFRICA—RADICALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY—GORDON

(1884–1885)

BOERS and Natives — Chamberlain initiates the Bechuanaland Expedition—Its Success—The Transvaal and German Expansion—Cameroons and New Guinea—A New Era of World Policy—"Standing up to Bismarck"—The Cabinet and Gordon—Chamberlain's Part in the Responsibility—"How can we survive it?"—Radical Imperialism—"The Coming Colonial Secretary".

I

BOOK V. 1884–85.

WE must turn for an interval to more distant themes—South Africa, German expansion, Egypt. Distant themes, but each of them destined to be as fateful at home as abroad. Their germinal significance at this time in relation to the crises and catastrophes of many years afterwards must be made plain in advance.

We have seen that the Minister for Trade throughout the life of the Government was its chief spokesman on the Treasury Bench for South African affairs. He explains his singular combination of duties and one important result:

> It is true that I have been charged by my colleagues to speak for them in reference to South African affairs. The Under-Secretary of State replies always for the Department, but it is my duty to speak for the Cabinet. I have always taken great interest in the subject and have followed the details more closely perhaps than any other Minister.[1]

Though all for the retrocession of the Transvaal after Majuba, he deeply regretted that the country had not been handed back

[1] Chamberlain to R. W. Dale, November 27, 1884.

as he advised before the Boer rising and a British defeat. The skirmish was insignificant as a military event, but Chamberlain less than three years after saw that the moral consequences were already dangerous and might in the end be fatal.

Ignorant backveldters thought they had beaten the British army. Mr. Kruger and the strong Afrikanders wished to throw off the Queen's suzerainty in order to extend their territories in several directions—from ocean to ocean and northwards—and to treat directly with foreign Powers. On the other hand, the British in Cape Colony, and especially in Natal, regarded the settlement after Majuba as a surrender, and denounced it as a betrayal. The possibilities of huge mischief in the future began to show.

Within one year after the retrocession renewed trouble appeared. Defying the Pretoria Convention on territory where Livingstone and Moffat had laboured, Boer freebooters broke in amongst the nearest Bechuana tribes, whom we were pledged to protect, seized their pastures and rode roughshod over them. In 1882 the filibusters set up their little "republics" of Stellaland and Goshen on British ground.

They reckoned without one man, a Scot. That redoubtable missionary, John Mackenzie, who had succeeded Livingstone, came home determined to rouse public opinion, and began his long campaign. At first it might well have seemed a forlorn hope; but rarely has any single effort of this kind met with equal success. One of his early meetings was held in the Town Hall, Birmingham, when Dr. Dale himself moved the resolution trusting that the British Government "will firmly discharge the responsibilities which they have undertaken in protection of the native races on the Transvaal border".[1]

Dale wrote to his friend, the President of the Board of Trade. No Minister felt more strongly on the native question and on this part of it. He replied in a letter of astonishing prescience in some respects:

September 14, 1882.—MY DEAR DALE—I am in receipt of the resolution of the public meeting called by the London Missionary Society, and will give its contents careful consideration. If I had known of it before I

[1] John Mackenzie, *Austral Africa: Losing It or Ruling It*, vol. i. p. 142.

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would have asked Lord Kimberley yesterday as to the exact position of affairs. . . . If the strict execution of the Convention is pressed home, we must not conceal from ourselves the probability that we may be engaged in a Boer War, the most costly, unsatisfactory and difficult of all the little wars which we can possibly undertake. The circumstances attending the surrender of the Transvaal have no doubt given the Boers an excessive opinion of their power. In the event of a new conflict they would probably secure the assistance of the Orange Free State, and the sympathy of the Dutch and possibly Germany. . . . I have always hoped that, as the natives enormously outnumber the Boers, being in the proportion of 15 or 20 to one, the latter, when left alone, would be compelled to come to terms with their neighbours and to treat them with ordinary fairness. If this should not be the case, our position is a serious one, and although I do not say that we are necessarily to stand aloof, still the greatest caution ought to be observed, and I should be reluctant to press matters to the utmost unless it became imperatively necessary; and even then I should feel the gravest anxiety as to the result.

Some foreshadowings in this letter are nothing less than extraordinary.

He went slowly, just as he was to do many years later. He was only at the beginning of his instruction in the Bechuanaland affair. He did not yet understand the meaning of the republics of Stellaland and Goshen established on British territory; nor that tribe after tribe would be conquered were we impotent to protect them. When he grasped this reality his whole attitude changed and he took the lead in insisting that the Government must face its duty.

II

As early as the spring of 1883 Chamberlain told his colleagues that the bitter cry of the Bechuana must be heard. Definitely he proposed an expedition to save the two chiefs, Montsioa and Mankoroane, and expel the freebooters. He failed to carry the Cabinet. Eighteen months passed. The Boers became more confident, the scandal more glaring, and at length more dangerous.

Kruger, on his visit to England, obtained the London Convention—ominously signed on the third anniversary of Majuba.

Though it did not give him the complete independence he desired, it gave him much and strengthened his stubborn ambition.[1] To his grim pleasure a few months later Germany occupied South-West Africa[2] after unbelievable evasion and vacillation—not Chamberlain's fault—on the part of this singular British Government, especially Lord Granville and Lord Derby, in dealing with Bismarck.[3] Immediately afterwards the Boers went too far. At least the new Convention had strictly defined their boundaries. In spite of it the Boers meant, if they could, to push by degrees through Zululand to the sea, on one side; and on the other side to work across Bechuanaland and link up with the new German possession. That Protectorate was no sooner established than in Bechuanaland the freebooters from the Transvaal, still trying to keep a lawless grip of their petty but symbolical Republics in the British sphere, fell upon the chief Montsioa. Commandant Joubert himself led the attack. Next a Boer proclamation announced that Montsioa, a British subject, and his country were placed under the protection of the Transvaal.[4]

All this went on outside the Transvaal boundaries as recently limited by the London Convention.

Chamberlain followed these transactions with gathering anxiety and ire. When full official accounts of the climax of encroachment in Bechuanaland reached Downing Street, he

[1] February 27, 1884.

[2] August 1884.

[3] Chamberlain and Dilke raged against the disastrous foreign policy and Colonial policy of Granville and Derby. They thought it calculated to leave us not a friend in Europe; and especially deplored the attitude of sulks and feebleness on the new issue of German colonization. About this time, Count Herbert Bismarck, writing from Mar Lodge (September 24, 1884), sends his father an interesting but coloured account of a conversation with Chamberlain, whom he knew well. The Minister for Trade is interpreted as saying: "For us the whole of South Africa is simply a burden; if I had had to deal with you I should have said that we would have seen with pleasure Germany establishing herself in Africa. . . . I would tell that thorny Colony straight out, 'Take care of yourself and declare your independence if you want to'. All we want is Cape Town and the Bay for a coaling station. We can do without the rest; we should be better off" (*Die Grosse Politik*, vol. iv. p. 83). It is certain that Count Herbert did not quite comprehend details and proportions. Chamberlain thought that Dutch and British were in league to "eliminate the Imperial factor" and to thwart its policy for the natives; and from this time, on that account, dates his dislike of Rhodes. Just after this talk, events deeply changed the South African situation and altered Chamberlain's mind, as these pages will soon show. German diplomacy never understood that the staggering frankness of Chamberlain's private conversation, and its violent interjections concerning men and things, went with a cool, managing mind.

[4] September 1884.

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framed and circulated to the Cabinet a minute so trenchant and convincing that he carried his policy at a stroke.

CHAMBERLAIN, THE CABINET AND SOUTH AFRICA

I have come, most reluctantly, to the conclusion that the limits of patience and forbearance have been reached in this matter, and that the time has come when more decisive steps must be taken. . . .

It appears to me that whatever may be the excuses now made by the authorities of the South African Republic, there is really no doubt that they have connived at a flagrant and deliberate breach of the Convention of 1884. It must be borne in mind that this breach follows on a similar disregard of the previous Convention of Pretoria; and I can conceive of no position more humiliating than that of the British Government continually making new treaties as, one after the other, the old ones are violated. . . . In defending the London Convention the Government definitely undertook the obligation of protecting Montsioa and Mankoroane from further interference. . . . We also fully discussed the question of the trade route [to the north from the Cape to Central Africa] and peremptorily declined to surrender its control to the Boers. . . . It seems to me on the whole that we cannot escape the responsibility of enforcing the Convention as against these marauders. We may take the South African Republic at its word and assume that they are not committed either to the acts of the invaders or to the Provisional Protectorate which they have most unwarrantably assumed. . . . I should be inclined, therefore, to authorise Sir Hercules Robinson to inform the Government of the Cape Colony that Her Majesty's Government are prepared, if they are assured of the hearty co-operation of the Colony, to maintain the trade route to the interior, and the rights of the Government and of the native tribes under the Convention of London. I think that the force now in South Africa ought to be immediately strengthened. . . . (J. C., 1/10/84.)

That settled it and led to drastic measures. He was prevented from attending the next Cabinet. But amongst his papers are minutes in his support by important colleagues.

I was not present when it (the minute) was discussed, but Dilke informed me that although Harcourt strongly dissented from my views the

rest of the Cabinet came over to them, including Lord Derby and Mr. Gladstone, and it was decided to send an expedition.[1]

It was time. Britain's name and repute were never lower in South Africa than at that moment. Both were raised again with signal rapidity.

No less was he aware that for a limited purpose vigilant restraint was as much required as firm nerve. To Dr. Dale he said:

> If we had to deal with the Boers alone our task would be a simple and comparatively easy one; but we are on the edge of a precipice and a false step might precipitate South Africa into a race war.[2]

Early in November he announced the determination of the Government at all risks to carry out their obligations to the native chiefs; and a little later, in the debate on the colonial estimates, he enforced the case. His policy on this occasion was as fortunate as circumspect and resolute. Sir Charles Warren with four thousand men marched into Bechuanaland, swept out the marauders and restored the chiefs without losing a single life or firing a shot.

> This was probably due [commented Chamberlain some years afterwards [3]] to the overwhelming force employed; it involved large expenditure; it was certainly wiser and cheaper than any intervention which by its weakness would have provoked opposition.

For all that, the causes of further conflict in the future deepened and spread, though through no man's full intention. In this very year the gold-mines, as Lord Wolseley had prophesied, were being opened in the Transvaal; Lord Derby's ambiguous vagueness upon the suzerainty had deepened the impression of British weakness; President Kruger had been received on the European continent like an independent ruler; the Boer policy of linking up with German interests had begun. The whole situation was bound to become untenable, and South Africa in the long run would have to be united under the British flag or another.

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". 1884.
[2] Chamberlain to Dale, October 17,
[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

III

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Meanwhile an epoch-making movement, small as its beginnings seemed, was in train. It has been mentioned, but must be glanced at in another aspect. While Britain was doubly distracted by the franchise agitation and the Sudan entanglement, Bismarck entered into the scramble for Africa. The grudging and dawdling attitude of Lord Granville and Lord Derby was an irreparable blunder of British policy; and did more than anything so far to rouse against it a German spirit of contempt and dislike. France was hostile and England isolated.

Amongst their colleagues the two Radical Ministers were least to blame. With his two principal friends Chamberlain keenly discussed the whole range of colonial and foreign policy. Since 1880 his mind had been growing; it never stopped growing. He not only read *The Expansion of England*, when that notable book appeared in 1883; it left a profound impression; he sent his son Austen to Cambridge because the author, Professor Seeley, was there. From Paris, Morley often sent him deft sketches of French statesmen and affairs, and repeats his idea that Clemenceau with all his gifts and honesty will prove "a light-weight" by comparison with Gambetta.[1] To Morley, at the end of 1883, Chamberlain writes when engaged on planning the "Radical Programme":

> When you have any spare time will you think over and jot down some ideas on Radical foreign and colonial policy. . . . Have we any duties outside the strictest self-defence? Are these interests to be protected even at the cost of war? What are they? What is the Radical policy on the Eastern question? What about Belgium?[2]

The last a probing query as time proved. But, a few months after, abstract principles were of little avail to the Cabinet. Mismanagement drove its two allied Radicals to despair. In July 1884 the Germans hoisted their flag over the Cameroons five days before a British mission arrived. Dilke writes to Chamberlain:

[1] Morley to Chamberlain, January 2, 1883.

[2] Chamberlain to Morley, November 29, 1883.

The Cameroons! I annexed them at the F.O. three years ago, and I fancy you annexed them in a Committee of Cabinet about one and a half years ago. Why, then, does Bismarck get them after all?[1]

Chamberlain answers from Leipzig:

As you say, we decided to assume the Protectorate eighteen months ago and I thought it was all settled. If the Board of Trade and Local Government Board managed their business after the fashion of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, you and I would deserve to be hung.[2]

A letter from Lord Kimberley, Secretary for India, is a delightful illustration of the manner in which Imperial affairs were then being conducted:

September 25, 1884.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—I was as much surprised as you were at the German annexation of the Cameroons. After the decision of the Committee I thought the matter was settled, and as I have more than enough to do with India, I gave it no further thought. I am quite ignorant of the reason why our decision was not acted upon. "Too late", I fear, may be the explanation.

It is important to glance here at the antecedent relations between the two "men of the future" and German policy. Their French sympathies and friendships were well known and disliked in Berlin. Any confidences made to them might be passed on to Paris. When Bismarck resists Italy's desire to communicate fully to England the terms of the Triple Alliance, he "entirely shares the view that it is impossible to trust the discretion of the present English Cabinet, and this even more on Chamberlain's account than on Dilke's" (May Day, 1882).[3] About two years afterwards the tone changed when Bismarck's general support of England in Egypt against French hostility was none the less useful at the moment because of its far-looking Machiavellian purpose. Count Herbert Bismarck, who is on intimate terms with Chamberlain and likes to draw him out—never realising how utterly different is his power of action from his incautious private talk—sends the Iron Chancellor a long account of a conversation in July 1884. The Minister for Trade is reported in this manner:

[1] Dilke to Chamberlain, August 28, 1884.

[2] Chamberlain to Dilke, September 12, 1884.

[3] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. iii. p. 238.

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"You know we are not a warlike nation.... We are going far to satisfy France, but if she is determined to make our situation in Egypt impossible then we shall not shrink from fighting. . . ." I have allowed myself to repeat Mr. Chamberlain's remarks pretty fully, because in my estimate they are characteristic of this the most influential of English Ministers. So far as I am able to judge them, they show an amazing lack of political judgment and an astonishing want of knowledge of the relative conditions of power in Europe and of the possible combinations.[1] It appears to me especially interesting that this incarnate representative of the commercial class and of free trade from a purely cosmopolitan point of view, makes mention to a foreigner of the possibility of a war with France.

This is yet another sign that the younger English Radicals are less Gallophile, and as factors in politics more adaptable than the old school represented in the Cabinet by Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville.

Finally Chamberlain enquired about your Serene Highness's [Bismarck's] present feeling towards England, and with reference to the handling of oversea questions expressed himself disparagingly about the Foreign Office and its management. He remarked, "Prince Bismarck has rendered us such great service that I only wish he could be convinced that towards no Power are we so glad to be friendly as towards Germany. Without Germany's favourable attitude we would have fallen into great difficulties, and I most deeply regret if clumsiness on our part has put him out with us for a moment. Let us hope we can now regard this feeling as removed".[2]

In the early autumn following, during a holiday in Saxony and Austria, the Radical leader had another conversation with Herbert Bismarck and was amazed to learn that the Iron Chancellor's dispatches to Whitehall during the Colonial controversy were still left unanswered for weeks! Worse followed. A little later, the same two had another talk when Count Herbert returned to England. He himself had written in English a long and important letter to Lord Granville some weeks before and had received no reply. Taking just offence at this, he gave other

[1] This was precisely the overweening attitude of the Wilhelmstrasse towards Chamberlain when from 1898 to 1901 he made his great efforts for an Anglo-German Alliance, which might have saved the world's peace.

[2] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. iv. pp. 75-76 (July 9, 1884).

instances of evasion and neglect, and reports the result to the Wilhelmstrasse:

Mar Lodge, September 24, 1884.— . . . Most of these matters of fact were new to Mr. Chamberlain, and he accompanied them with outbursts little flattering to some of his colleagues. When I said to him that the repeated proofs of the insincere attitude of the English Cabinet would force us to look elsewhere for support, and if once our lines began to diverge, it would not be easy to come together again, he became serious and said: "It is simply mad for English foreign policy needlessly to provoke Germany, with whom we could so easily be good friends. . . . I and my nearest adherents want to stand on good terms with Germany and it is very easy. After all you have said to me, I perfectly understand that your Government at present is out of humour with us, and I shall try to mend it. . . ."[1]

He and Dilke did try, but they could not give energy or foresight to British foreign policy. As this difficult year wore on, Chamberlain, who had much more at the back of his mind than the Bismarcks supposed, became as tired of German baiting and badgering as of French menaces. But it must be truly said of him that whatever his other faults he did not know how to fear the face of man and was no more daunted by the Iron Chancellor than by Gladstone—or the Queen. When he thought that the overshadowing man of Europe was becoming too arrogant he was all for standing up to him:

TO DILKE

December 29, 1884.—As to German annexation in New Guinea. I understood Bismarck asked, "What are you going to take?" We said, "We think of taking all". He said, "You ought to have the South but we may have some claims in the North". We thereupon took the South, and said we would discuss anything further with him. Now, without waiting for discussion, he has taken the North. This is very sharp practice, and if I am right I should tell Bismarck so in the plainest terms diplomatic usage permits. I don't care the least about New Guinea and I am not afraid of German colonisation, but I don't like to be cheeked by Bismarck or anyone else, and I should let Bismarck know that if he is finally re-

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. iv. pp. 83-85.—What Chamberlain actually said in English is never easy to gather from German paraphrases.

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solved to be unfriendly we accept the position and will pay him out whenever opportunity arises.

The language is strong but the fibre is tough. Bismarck would have understood it thoroughly, and had he known that this spirit was bound in the end to represent the feeling and will of Great Britain, immeasurable misfortunes might have been spared. Even Morley, though opposed to active defence in any quarter, was roused in opinion, and writes at this time, "I am watching the duel between Bismarck and Mr. G. The British public won't let their Minister be bullied even by Bismarck." The Iron Chancellor in fact did much to create a new Imperialism in Britain and Greater Britain.

Forster was promoting the Imperial Federation League. There is not a word to show that on this subject the Radical Ministers—the author of *Greater Britain* and his ally so recently stirred by Seeley's *Expansion of England*—were out of sympathy with the general feeling of their old antagonist, although it was beyond their ideas of immediate method. When on November 4 —in this year of democratic victory but of incompetence and calamity in Imperial and foreign policy—Chamberlain spoke at the laying of the foundation stone of the National Liberal Club, he was received with long cheers, with waving of hats and handkerchiefs; and his words closed upon a new note. He said that the results of the Reform Bill of 1884 would broaden and strengthen "the foundations of our Empire".

IV

The composite psychology of Gladstone's second Government is without parallel as a study in elusiveness, but nothing in it is so mystifying as the complex tragedy symbolised by a single name—Gordon. The more we know of that terrible passage the harder is it to believe. As in *The Ring and the Book*, the present writer is bound from another standpoint altogether to tell again a story so often told. The present version has three uses. It throws some new light upon Radical views of foreign and Imperial policy; upon the workings of the Cabinet system and of the party system in the same connection; and upon Chamberlain's

defects and qualities as at this time one of the keenest party men in the chronicles of British politics. It must not be pretended that the subject of this book was never blinded by party zeal and its bias.

Gordon was sent out without Chamberlain's knowledge. It is certain that had he been more in charge something would have been attempted in time. But he does not play the part we might expect from the man of decision after the bombardment of Alexandria and in the later dispatch of the Warren expedition. Gladstone, never more possessed by his own idea nor convinced of its righteousness, must bear most of the censure. But as no Minister resigned, some share of the discredit must be borne by every Minister, including Hartington, who cannot be entirely exculpated, though he comes out best. The episode was the least satisfactory in Chamberlain's life as a statesman and he never cared to dwell upon it afterwards.[1]

We must look forward to one marked incident before we go back a little. A Cabinet on April 2, 1884, found itself confronted by the danger of bankruptcy in Egypt and committed to continued occupation of that country as distinguished from the Sudan. At the end of the discussions, Chamberlain said to the Premier, "Is there anything else?" "No", said Mr. Gladstone; "we have done our Egyptian business and we are an Egyptian Government."[2] The remark was belated and the more revealing. For eighteen months since Tel-el-Kebir they had been in truth an Egyptian Government in spite of themselves. Since then there had been no paramount authority but their own in the Khedive's immense and convulsed dominion, stretching from the Mediterranean to the equatorial lakes. Wielding a reluctant power, and discharging, they thought, a temporary duty, Ministers tried to dodge their real responsibility, partly in hope of speedy escape from it, partly in dread of becoming more deeply engaged. In some general intentions they were tolerably at one; but on ideas concerning time and method their dissensions were incurable. Harassing and paralysing each other, adjourning and procrastinating, the jarring elements of the Cabinet were held together by their alternating successes in mutual frustration. To the dis-

[1] Few copies of the letters interchanged at this time between him and Dilke exist amongst the Chamberlain Papers.

[2] Dilke's notes in his *Life*, vol. ii. p. 46.

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cordant nature of the Cabinet itself with the inexplicable personality of a chief who seemed at this phase to combine a will of adamant with fluidities unfathomable—to all this was due, through the fate of its victim, a grim sequel and a personal legend leaving an immortal impression.

V

In former pages we have followed the Radical leader's activities in the Cabinet on Egyptian affairs, and we have noted his clearness of mind in all connections.

In justice to him at the outset of a new and darker chapter of events, we must understand his conceptions before the Sudanese crisis. It is his own testimony that after Tel-el-Kebir "we were all desirous of a speedy evacuation and believed that the conditions we had laid down would be accomplished in the course of a year or two at the outside".[1] In this spirit he spoke towards the close of 1882.[2] He repudiated indefinite occupation on the Nile. Already the Empire was huge enough. "We think our possessions are sufficiently ample, our duties and our responsibilities too onerous and complicated. We think that to govern well and wisely the peoples who already own our sway is a task for the most magnificent ambition and the most exalted patriotism." Ridiculing sympathy with the bondholders by comparison with the fellaheen, he advocated the whole policy of "Egypt for the Egyptians" and British withdrawal after establishing self-government.

Above all, perhaps, he was anxious by this course to restore friendship with France. "I say that anything which tends to separate these two great neighbours is a misfortune for both." Later, in the spring of 1883, before events took a worse turn in the Sudan, his views are perspicuously stated in a letter to John Morley for communication to Clemenceau who had been misled by gossip about Chamberlain's "jingoism".

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

March 31, 1883.— . . . You know how far I am a Jingo. I certainly considered that intervention in Egypt had become a matter of necessity

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum", as already quoted.

[2] Speech at Ashton-under-Lyne, December 19, 1882.

after the bombardment, and I did not oppose the bombardment in view of the continued efforts to arm the forts. But I have never changed my mind that, having intervened, it is our business to come away as quickly as we possibly can. We cannot leave anarchy behind us, and we have to see that our interference has produced some real benefit for the Egyptian people; but when we have established the best institutions for guaranteeing their liberties and securing the administration of justice, which the circumstances of the case permit, we shall have discharged our obligations and exhausted our rights, and shall then be entitled to leave Egypt to the Egyptians.[1]

No one in fact was more utterly opposed than Chamberlain to a permanent Protectorate or to harsh taxation of the people in order to pay full interest to the bondholders.

In the latter part of 1883 it was decided that the British troops should leave Cairo, and that the garrison of Egypt should be materially reduced in preparation for a speedy evacuation of the country.[2]

So man proposes. This was just before the breaking of another storm. Ministers had not perceived the gathering of the clouds. Too remote up to now from their daily purview was the Sudan. From India Sir Evelyn Baring arrived in Cairo on September 11, 1883, to begin his long career as Pharaoh in disguise. He was appointed—certainly in the view not only of all Radicals but of most Liberals at home—to conduct peacefully the expected transition from British control to Egyptian independence on a constitutional basis. But just three days before Baring's arrival at Cairo, Hicks Pasha—prefiguring Gordon—had started on his march across the desert towards Kordofan.

Two years earlier a boat-builder's son at Dongola had revealed himself as a new and last prophet of Islam inspired to convert mankind, and destroy unbelievers before the end of the world and the Judgment Day. Already widely renowned for eloquence and sanctity—tall and pleasing, a gentleman in presence and manners[3]—the Mahdi could preach and incite like Peter the

[1] After this, the leaders of English and French Radicalism were closer than ever. In a conversation (May Day, 1923) Lord Morley remarked to the present writer: "Clemenceau was after Chamberlain's heart; he used to say that if he and Clemenceau could ever be in power together on opposite sides of the Channel, great things might be done".

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[3] Major F. R. Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Sudan* (*1891*), p. 13.

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Hermit. The miraculous claim of this born leader gained upon the Sudanese peoples, who still believed implicitly in the boundless power of spiritual magic. Religious fanaticism fired revolt against Egyptian misrule and its pitiless tax-gatherers. By his first conquests, Mohammed Ahmed worked wonders. He besieged and took El Obeid, capital of Kordofan, and the rumour of the feat ran far and wide amongst the tribes.

Then, on behalf of the British Government—already "an Egyptian Government" in spite of itself—Lord Granville permitted what he ought to have forbidden. Hicks Pasha, a retired British officer with an honourable record—he is unfairly called a soldier of fortune—was appointed to command in the Sudan and to put down the Mahdi's revolt. His Egyptian force, called an army, was little better than a uniformed rabble. At first he had some success on the eastern side of the White Nile, and never ought to have been allowed to advance westward of Khartoum. Early in September, poor Hicks and his 10,000 stumbled into the wilderness. Shadowed as they moved, dogged to their doom, the wells stopped up behind them, lured on far past escape, they were ambushed "in the depths of a huge forest some thirty miles south of El Obeid", and exterminated (November 5). With half the Sudan in his hands and sure of the rest, well equipped with captured munitions, the Prophet was now an Arab Emperor. Khartoum itself, long threatened, was in danger, and other garrisons were isolated amidst a surge of wild fighters exalted by religious frenzy and political hatred to a courage of fanaticism as desperate as ever has been known. Hundreds of thousands were in arms.

News that Hicks and his medley were annihilated reached London on November 22, 1883. For over a fortnight already the Mahdist movement in the Sudan had been spreading like flame. The Egyptian garrisons were all in peril. Nothing but action by the real "Egyptian Government" could save them. For nearly two months the Liberal Cabinet ruminated, but did nothing. Bent as they had been just before upon reduced garrisons and withdrawal from Egypt proper "in the course of a year or two at the outside", they were feverishly anxious to cut loose from the whole Sudanese entanglement, and on the cheapest terms compatible with humanity.

How to do it? Sir Evelyn Baring advised that

> the policy of complete abandonment is, on the whole, the best of which the circumstances admit; but I am not sure if the extreme difficulty of carrying it out, or the consequences to which it must inevitably lead, are fully appreciated at home.[1]

Orders were given at last to the Khedive's administration, but responsibility in proportion was not faced. A week after the New Year of 1884, Cherif Pasha, then Prime Minister, resigned rather than consent to abandonment; and next day a Christian, Nubar Pasha, took office to carry it out.[2]

> From this time the sole object which we had in view [records Chamberlain] was the safe withdrawal of the garrisons, and with this obligation it became necessary to countermand the order for the reduction of the [British] Egyptian garrison.[3]

This obligation of safe withdrawal it was already too late to discharge in its entirety. On the Red Sea side, Baker's native troops were routed; Tokar and Sinkat fell.

VI

Here what at first sight may seem a digression becomes essential in Chamberlain's biography. Otherwise it would be impossible to understand how our Radical statesman's confident dream of Egyptian self-government disappeared, and how his true instinct for action was hampered by his desire to emancipate Egypt and appease the enmity of France. As the sequel will have an immense effect on the fortunes of parties and on the creation of a new Imperialism, and will do much indirectly towards revolutionising his personal career, some momentous proceedings involving him with the rest of the Government must be explained.

No one outside the Sudan could quite realise at the year's turn from 1883 to 1884 that withdrawal of the Khedive's troops and others with women and children, stores and transport, from a number of posts widely apart in a region seething with insurrection, was bound to be an operation as encumbered and

[1] Lord Cromer, *Modern Egypt* (1908), vol. i. p. 374 (Baring to Granville, December 23, 1883.)

[2] January 7 and 8, 1884.

[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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hazardous as any effort of its kind recorded—not feasible at all in truth unless covered by powerful reinforcements. But evident was it at least that a commander of no ordinary mark was desirable. We can now see that what Gladstone's Government desired was a man who might do the maximum of work with the minimum of means.

As soon as the news of disaster to Hicks was known in London a name was mentioned—"Chinese Gordon". Not only had he put down in his early manhood the Taiping rebellion, but he had already been the best despot of the whole Sudan who ever ruled there. He had traversed every part of it. Lord Granville at once wrote to Gladstone:

> Do you see any objection to using Gordon in some way? He has an immense name in Egypt—he is popular at home. He is a strong but very sensible opponent of slavery. He has a small bee in his bonnet.[1]

The Prime Minister made no demur.

The Khedive's Ministers shrank at first, as any Moslem Ministers might, from sending one supposed to be something of a Christian Mahdi to cope with a Mohammedan Prophet. Baring had more personal objections to Gordon's "erratic character",[2] but did not adhere to them.

Nothing could attract Gordon on his part to such a mission. Nothing could bring him to it but a call to duty answered at severe sacrifice. The King of the Belgians at this moment wished to make him Commander, second to Stanley, in the Congo State. There, assured of means and support, with scope for all his qualities, he would have every chance to achieve great things; to crown the fame he had already won in Asia and Africa; and after that to live long. The British Government, it is true, frowned on the Congo plan. At this, Gordon travelled from Palestine to consult King Leopold in Brussels, and resolved to accept the Congo mission even if thankless authority at home forced him to leave the Queen's army.[3] At this news, national indignation broke out in newspapers, now rightly informed of the size and peril of the practical task in the Sudan.

Gordon for a moment thought his engagement to King Leopold

[1] Fitzmaurice, *Life of the Second Earl Granville*, vol. ii. p. 381 (November 27, 1883).

[2] *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. p. 426.

[3] Bernard M. Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, pp. 212 and 217.

irrevocable. He had his regrets for what might have been on the Nile. But much that he could have done if appointed immediately after the wiping-out of Hicks's army, it was already too late to do.[1] His genius was for attack, not for evacuation and retreat. It is a pity for ever that when his own instinct was dead against returning to the Nile he was not allowed to take service on the Congo.

In three days he was induced. On Saturday, January 12, his inner voice said "No". On Sunday Lord Wolseley telegraphed summoning him to the War Office. There, on Tuesday, January 15, the call of duty was directly addressed to him. And in a mild way impossible to decline. He is asked to go to Suakim to enquire and advise without prejudice to his service afterwards under King Leopold and Stanley. In this there is nothing against his inner voice. Inevitably he accepts. Who would not? "I understand H.M.G. only wish me to report and are in no way bound to me."[2] Next day (Wednesday, January 16) Baring, now knowing the Sudanese emergency to be urgent, desperate, and seeing no less that War Office, Foreign Office and public opinion at home desired Gordon, withdrew his objection to that "erratic character" in a very adroit private telegram to the Foreign Secretary:

> Gordon would be the best man if he will pledge himself to carry out the policy of withdrawing from the Sudan as quickly as is possible consistently with saving life. . . . I would rather have him than anyone else, provided there is a perfectly clear understanding with him as to what his position is to be and what line of policy he is to carry out. Otherwise not. . . . Whoever goes should be distinctly warned that he will undertake a service of great difficulty and danger.[3]

Every word here is qualified with acute prudence. Yet this message changes the whole proposition from a mission of enquiry—with a view to recommendations not binding the British Government—to the actual conduct of extensive and perilous operations. A world's difference lies between the two concepts.

When the bigger suggestion is under consideration in London

[1] He wrote to Sir Samuel Baker from Brussels: "I will not go to the Sudan, for I feel it is too late" (Allen, p. 211).

[2] *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 418.

[3] Lord Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, pp. 426-427 (January 16, 1884).

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on the Wednesday, Gordon knows nothing of it. He is on his way to Brussels, where he tells the disappointed King that the call of duty at home will delay his appearance on the Congo, but only for a few months.[1] Next day again (Thursday, January 17) he opens at Brussels Wolseley's telegram, "Come to London by evening train". He little knows that his vision of life and hope in King Leopold's new empire is postponed not for a few months but for eternity; and that instead he has received his death-warrant. An overnight journey brings him back to Knightsbridge early next morning. Wolseley takes him to the War Office in the afternoon to settle with four Cabinet Ministers gathered there in a manner better described presently in connection with the resumed narrative of Chamberlain's part in the Government.

That same Friday evening Gordon leaves London, and he never will see it again. Arriving at Charing Cross with a small bag, he has forgotten money. Wolseley presses a small sum on him as the train goes out. Let us anticipate, to fix the central motive of the theme ensuing. So this famous British soldier, a mystical genius in his way, departs on his "service of great difficulty and danger". Just twelve months and some days later his severed head, fixed between the branches of a tree at Omdurman, was stoned by all who passed.[2]

VII

From this we must confine ourselves as closely as possible to the Radical leader's part in the intricacies of the tragedy. We shall see at least that there was a moment when his personal suggestion to send Dilke to Cairo might have cleared up fatal misunderstandings and saved all.

During the five days' transactions, which resulted in sending Gordon not to the Congo but to the Nile, Chamberlain was not in London and had nothing to do with them. Partly he was addressing meetings in Newcastle-on-Tyne, to Morley's delight. Then he went to Birmingham, and like the majority of the Cabinet, was not consulted about Gordon's hurried appointment[3] and the ambiguous terms. If the root of the evil was the choice of the

[1] Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 227.
[2] Wingate, p. 172
[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". —"We agree that a majority of the Cabinet were not morally responsible for sending out Gordon" (*Life of Lord Granville*, vol. ii. p. 384).

wrong man—as Gladstone and Cromer, like others, came to say in their common excuse in spite of their diametrical disagreement about other matters—then the Minister for Trade was free from initial sin.

On the day after Gordon left London, a happy letter came to Highbury:

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

January 19, 1884.— . . . I need not renew my thanks to you for your visit to Newcastle. It has done me infinite service. It has given your name fresh importance in an important district. And the shipping speech has made an impression on the public mind which will help you powerfully. How keen a pleasure it has been to me to find myself at your side on the platform, you will guess.

We must remember that through the extraordinary twelve months to come, the Radical leader's mind is concentrated, and necessarily, not on the Sudan but at first on his own perilous struggle for the seamen against the shipping interests; and next, on the franchise agitation which he regards as the crucial struggle for democracy.

The Ministers who "engaged Gordon", as we may say, were Hartington, Granville, Northbrook and Dilke. Granville confesses fairly:

I am sure that Hartington would freely acknowledge that the main responsibility for sending out Gordon rests upon the four Cabinet Ministers who met in his room.[1]

Chamberlain was not there. Had he been there his definite mind might have prevented the original muddle concerning Gordon's instructions.

That soldier very soon was to be accused—and the chief cause of his death was the extent of belief in the charge—of disobeying the instructions given to him by a few of the Cabinet on Friday, January 18. What were his instructions? Of his several terse accounts the briefest is the best, and it was set down on the day after the meeting at the War Office: "Ministers said they were determined to evacuate and would I go out and superintend it? I said 'Yes'".[2] His confidence misled the quartette of Ministers in Hart-

[1] *Life of Earl Granville*, vol. ii. p. 400.

[2] Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 229.

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ington's room; and further misled their colleagues—the Prime Minister above all, but Chamberlain too—to whom afterwards they communicated their impressions. Their general notion was that Gordon should go to Suakim and report in the first instance on the "best mode"—Granville's word—of evacuation.

Yes; but there was another clause. It seemed secondary. It proved in fact to be the core of the commission, the origin of the tragedy and of all the subsequent controversy to this day.

> You will consider yourself authorised and instructed to perform such other duties as the Egyptian Government may desire to entrust to you and as may be communicated to you by Sir Evelyn Baring.[1]

Thinking rapidly as he travelled, Gordon telegraphed to Granville that he should be appointed Governor-General "for the time necessary to accomplish the evacuation". If empowered to proclaim the restored liberties of the Sudan, he would arrange with the tribes. The Cabinet (January 22) made no objection to these suggestions; Baring approved them—except on one vital point—and was authorised "to settle the terms".

For this purpose, Gordon was briefly directed by the Home Government to call at Cairo, which he had not wished to visit. He still supposed his goal to be the Red Sea coast of the Sudan. But at Cairo on January 25 the whole nature of his mission was transformed by the authorised but fatal interference of the British Resident. Gordon was to go up the Nile to Khartoum itself, and from that centre he as Governor-General was to direct and conduct the evacuation of the whole Sudan.[2]

> It may take a few months to carry it out with safety. . . . You are therefore given full discretionary power to retain the troops for such reasonable period as you may think necessary, in order that the abandonment of the country may be accomplished with the least possible risk to life and property.

These are Gordon's instructions binding and final. They were beyond doubt the chief cause of disaster. So far from disobeying such instructions he died for trying to obey them. Equally the

[1] Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 233.
[2] Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. pp. 444-447; Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 245.

reverse of the truth is the old charge that he altered his route. It was altered for him.[1]

Owing to the extent of the authority and discretion they had given to Baring, the full responsibility of the British Cabinet to which the subject of this biography belonged cannot be denied; and was explicitly acknowledged:

> Her Majesty's Government, bearing in mind the exigencies of the occasion, concurred in these instructions, which virtually altered General Gordon's mission from one of advice to that of executing or at least directing the evacuation not only of Khartoum, but of the whole Sudan.[2]

If abandonment of the Sudan were the sole object, there was no occasion for any mission. The garrisons and all others there had only to be left simply, if perhaps shamefully, to their fate. The first duty expressly laid on Gordon—and none could be more bounden and sacred—was to extricate, and with utmost regard to the safety of life and property, those soldiers and civilians of whom as Governor-General he now became the head in the name of both Britain and Egypt.

VIII

Against this background Chamberlain's own action in the Government may be judged. His speech at Newcastle a few nights before Gordon left Victoria repeated with earnest eloquence his doctrine of Egyptian self-government and British retirement at the earliest practicable moment. "We cannot leave Egypt to anarchy; but on the other hand we do not and we ought not to withdraw from any of the assurances we have given."[3]

[1] *Modern Egypt*, p. 441, where Lord Cromer writes: "If I had not interfered as regards General Gordon's route . . . the course of history in the Sudan would have been changed and many valuable lives, including probably that of General Gordon himself, would have been saved".

[2] Allen, p. 245 (H.M. Government to Sir Evelyn Baring, March 28, 1884).

[3] Newcastle-on-Tyne, January 15, 1884.—The day before this speech, on January 14, Chamberlain wrote to Bright a chastened letter seeming to regret his part in bringing about the bombardment of Alexandria and the occupation of Egypt. "I am afraid you were right and we were wrong. I wish with all my heart that you had pressed your views more decidedly—even to the point of resignation—in the earliest stages. . . . We see now the evils of interference, but it is impossible to say what the results of a different course would have been—both in Egypt and on public opinion here. I think I shall end by joining the Peace Society after all, though it will go against the grain of my unregenerate nature. . . ." Bright re-

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For the abandonment of the Sudan he stood as strongly as Gladstone or Baring.

While Gordon was half-way to Khartoum the Mahdists massacred the garrison of Sinkat; near Tokar, Baker's demoralised rabble was swept away by Osman Digna. Though soon full of doubt about the Governor-General's proceedings, Chamberlain was not the man to leave an envoy altogether in the lurch. Gladstone's section of the Cabinet thought that for an agent guilty in their fallacious view of disobedience nothing should be done. Chamberlain joins with Hartington, who is prompted by the War Office, and feels that something will have to be done (February 7): ". . . At night Hartington, Chamberlain and I met in Hartington's room and decided to press for relief of Gordon."[1] Next day Chamberlain wrote to his friend:

> I should like to telegraph to Baring, "If you think that employment of British troops could relieve beleaguered garrisons in Sudan without danger to order in Egypt you are authorised to concert measures with Evelyn Wood".

At a Cabinet on this proposition, Chamberlain and others were for trying to help Khartoum by a demonstration at Suakim. Gladstone and Lord Granville scouted it. A few days later they had to acquiesce.

On February 18 the new Governor-General reached Khartoum; and realised that he had undertaken an impossible task—at least with the resources at his disposal. Already he saw too well that the Sudan emergency was far more menacing than he had supposed in London when the self-confidence of the man of a hundred adventures had misled the politicians.

Only desperate remedies swiftly taken could avail. There was no possible hope of success unless Gordon was allowed to manage the evacuation in his own way like a general in battle. It was war. The garrisons could only get out by fighting. Cromwell's maxim was in place: "neglect no means". Gordon asked for the

plied with majestic tartness (January 18, 1884): "You were not free from excitement, and when Granville joined the fever you said no word in aid of my view. I told the Cabinet that they had lost their heads. If the reins had not been handed over to the ruffians of the Fleet who were eager for war . . . there would have been no war, no bombardment, no city in flames, no thousands of men slaughtered. . . . The past is past, but it leaves an ugly future—and for 'Radical' members of the Cabinet an awkward one to discuss".

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 35.

assistance of a man whose son he had shot—Zebehr, the prince of slave-traders,[1] but a great captain by Arab reckoning, and the only man who might hold and rule the Eastern Sudan—at least to an extent, and for a time, sufficient to enable Gordon to bring out all those he was expressly charged to save. Though the proposition seemed the extreme of audacity it was the best chance. "The boldest measures are the safest." Everyone now owns that Gordon was simply right when he said, "If you do not send Zebehr you have no chance of getting the garrisons away". Thus for some weeks he asked. He roused Baring, his temperamental opposite, to emphatic support. That a Government in Downing Street rejected the advice of both Gordon and Baring is one of the facts requiring no comment.

The Cabinet as a whole refused. It must be recorded that Chamberlain, not to his praise, like Dilke and even Hartington, was in the ill-omened majority against their commander in Khartoum and their agent in Cairo. They thought that if they sanctioned Zebehr, the House of Commons would overthrow them at once. Already the bray of Exeter Hall was loud against the slave-trader—though the accepted policy of abandoning the Sudan meant the unlimited revival of the slave-trade. Others said that if Zebehr went he would take Gordon's life; but Gordon's own judgment about his own life ought to have been accepted. Singular to say, Gladstone, confined to his bed at this time, was in favour of Zebehr. "He thinks it very likely that we cannot make the House swallow Zebehr but he thinks *he* could."[2] Heroic thought, but would he have fulfilled it were he well? No one can say. What he thought that he, and no one else, could do he did not attempt. The scales were turned gravely against Gordon. If they refused him Zebehr, they ought to have sent troops to Berber, as he asked just before being shut in.

This was towards the middle of March. By then Khartoum was invested and the marvellous ten months' defence began. Ministerial notions in London are already shattered by the tempestuous force of the Mahdi's fanatics. Unless powerful reinforcements are sent no garrison can be brought away. More

[1] "Zobeir, without doubt, was the greatest slave-hunter who ever existed . . . the most able man in the Soudan . . . a capital general" (Gordon, quoted by Lord Cromer in *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. p. 455).

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 42.

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frankly than any other Minister Chamberlain confesses the gloom and helplessness of the Government as a whole at this moment—the end of their first phase in Gordon's affair:

March 20, 1884.—*To J. T. Bunce.*— . . . The position of General Gordon is, I am afraid, rather critical, but our advices are that he has six months' provisions and is not, therefore, in any immediate danger. As regards the remaining garrisons in the Sudan, they might surrender and their lives would be spared. In any case, they are too far off for rescue by force of arms to be possible.

These last sentences, abandoning as the whole Cabinet did—and as now was necessary—the original duty impressed on Gordon of bringing away all the garrisons, disclose the chasm of misunderstanding between Ministers as a whole and their Governor-General in the Sudan. They, like the unfortunate garrisons, were "too far off". They did not understand the plain and ordinary meaning of a soldier's honour. It was no question of one incalculable man's Quixotic fantasy. Any stolid Dobbin would have felt and done the same.

Gordon's final and binding instructions, according to Baring's draft, include the following words:

Some 10,000 to 15,000 people will wish to move northwards from Khartoum only when the Egyptian garrison is withdrawn. These people are native Christians, Egyptian employés, their wives and children, etc. . . . No effort should be spared to ensure the retreat both of these people and of the Egyptian garrison without loss of life.[1]

Under these instructions his obligation of honour was as clear as possible, and no Government could absolve from it. He arrived in Khartoum as Commander-in-Chief of all the garrisons. He would not save himself by deserting them. Upon what principles of military honour could he have deserted, for instance, the garrisons of Senaar and Kassala, who held out for months after he was killed? If indeed you send out a soldier to run away from those at whose head you have placed him, you must not send a Gordon.

IX

A few days before the Mahdists closed upon and isolated Khartoum, Chamberlain had an idea. If adopted at once it might have

[1] Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. pp. 444-445.

saved all. The fog of politics was thicker than the "fog of war" described by military historians. He tried to clear it up.

Downing Street and Cairo were no longer at one. Between the Government and Gordon disastrous misunderstandings had arisen. Arrived at the centre of peril, finding himself in presence of the unforeseen, the Governor-General began by endeavours to extricate the garrisons and civilians in accordance with his instructions. He saw in one week that it could not be done by peaceable methods, and not at all unless in one way or another his hands were strengthened. Though a "genius of intuition", perfectly shrewd in discernment, and as practical as bold in suggestion, he was already harassed from morning to night by his duties and anxieties, and undeniably failed to explain himself in connected language of the parliamentary or departmental kind. His words, like Cromwell's, were like intermittent flashes out of obscurity.

At the end of February and the beginning of March his interjections seemed violent and outrageous. When he proclaimed that British troops were on their way and would arrive at Khartoum in a few days, he was not lying. Reasoning like a soldier, he might well assume that Graham's victorious force, after clearing the Suakim district, must be advancing on Berber if the deliverance of the garrisons before abandonment of the country was in fact the object of British policy, as Baring had stated. At the same time he received the first refusal of his request for Zebehr. Instantly he saw the deadly implication for his mission, and telegraphed the fiery answer: "Of course my duty is evacuation. . . . Mahdi must be smashed up!"

He was telling Ministers how to enable him to accomplish the task of saving and evacuating the garrisons if they meant it, as he could not but assume. If they would not send him Zebehr he could succeed only by fighting his way out, and for that he must have reinforcements, Indian or British.

But all the warning and advice only caused moral disruption between Khartoum and Downing Street. The Government thought him wild and wicked—a man flagrantly violating and reversing his instructions, wantonly plunging into complications instead of coming away. Most Ministers, Chamberlain and Dilke included, like most of the Liberal party, were done with Gordon

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in their hearts. This indignant prejudice becomes from now onward the mainspring of the tragedy. "Wireless", if available in those days, would have prevented it.

Dilke notes that "Gordon had frightened us out of our wits".[1] We may be sure that his political twin shared his alarm. To consider this astounding disobedience the Cabinet met on March 5. Once more they refused Zebehr and did not face any alternative.

Just before, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, usually in touch with Highbury, had advocated retaining Khartoum "as an outwork of Upper Egypt and the strategic key to the higher waters of the Nile".[2]

Chamberlain suggested sending Dilke to Egypt.[3] The latter was the very man for a mission of clarification on behalf of the Cabinet. Other Ministers did not think so. Chamberlain's suggestion fell to the ground. No Minister was sent to Cairo. The error could not be repaired, for within a week after Khartoum was surrounded. Gordon thought his cause betrayed by cowardly politicians. The politicians thought themselves duped by a mad and bad soldier. Not only Gladstone but Chamberlain and Dilke just as much were persuaded that the man engaged to get them out of the Sudan was working to draw them into it —to sink them in a quicksand.

On March 11 the Cabinet, including Chamberlain, met again. They were worse than helpless. This is a date as critical as any in the controversy. That it was the blackest day might be argued. Not mainly because Zebehr was vetoed once for all, as already recorded. This time they had received Gordon's delayed and fateful telegram, closing half the controversy about his instructions: "If you do not send Zebehr you have no chance of getting the garrisons away".[4]

Doubtless the prophetic certainty of this message could not be fully realised by any Minister. Not one of them could visualise the military and human realities two thousand miles away. But the majority of the Cabinet were now in possession of their full

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 40.

[2] Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 297.

[3] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 41.—"Chamberlain then suggested that I should go to Egypt: Hartington evidently thought that somebody should go, and thought he had better go himself. Lord Granville would not have either, as might have been expected" (March 5, 1884).

[4] Allen, p. 296 (Gordon to Baring, March 8).

case against Gordon. They had his opinion about the alternative —"smashing the Mahdi" or sacrificing the garrisons he had been sent to extricate.

They could have repudiated Gordon's ideas and recalled him. They could have accepted his ideas and supported him. They did neither. This is the definition of their responsibility henceforward. They continued him when their theory of his disobedience was complete. Then with what right thereafter did they justify themselves against the soldier in peril? The accusation of wilful disobedience against Don Quixote at Khartoum was baseless, as we know now. Believing it, they condoned it. There was no possible excuse after March 11 for defending themselves in party contest at home by aspersing the Governor-General of the Sudan, whom they did not dismiss.

From mid-March Baring began to speak more and more plainly and unpalatably on the necessity of rescue for the sake of honour and statesmanship. Gladstone to his credit was not wholly disinclined to send cavalry to Berber. But this Cabinet could not be brought to a common mind on anything. Towards the end of March, when neither Chamberlain nor Gladstone were present, a Cabinet refused all immediate succour. Harcourt threatened to resign if an autumn expedition were prepared, Selborne if it were not.[1] April and May were the ominous periods of dissension and paralysis.

Chamberlain writes to Dilke: "Once more Hartington and you and I are at opposite poles. For one, I do not need to be forced any further in the direction of Protectorate" (April 2). And then as to the growing feeling in favour of an autumn expedition: "I believe it will come to this in the end". He was more and more for it with Hartington's group against Gladstone and Harcourt. And yet not for a large army on Hartington's lines, which might well, he thought, commit us to permanent reoccupation of the Sudan whether we liked it or not. There the Government was split and cross-split. The lesser complications were as stubborn as the larger.

In mid-April Baring sent the gravest warning against further delay in organising an autumn expedition. Vainly was the prophecy addressed to alienated minds. By this time the

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 45.

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large majority of Ministers—Chamberlain being just as bad as Gladstone and most of the Liberal party—were furious with Gordon. The defender of Khartoum, seeing too well that he was deserted, telegraphed that, if his post became untenable, "I shall retire to the Equator and leave you the indelible disgrace of abandoning the garrisons". Indelible disgrace! What was this but injuring the Liberal party itself, playing into the hands of the Tories and the Peers, jeopardising the Franchise Bill and the whole prospect of democracy. No one felt this more wrathfully than Chamberlain. The theory of Gordon's malign disobedience now became a Liberal obsession. They said and believed that Gordon wilfully refused to answer Ministerial messages—which he never received at all or not for months.

And was it not all his own fault? Had he not, for instance, as Lord Morley says, on his way to Khartoum made known to the Mudir of Berber the intended abandonment of the Sudan?[1] It was the truth. That was his mission. He was instructed to proclaim it. Evacuation would be a huge public fact. What was the use of pretending to make it for another fortnight the *secret de Polichinelle*?

Inevitably now the Sudan controversy became a party struggle in the hottest sense. The feeling of Conservatives was genuine but it could not be disinterested. They exploited Gordon as much as Liberals denounced him. Each of them drove nails into his coffin.

Public indignation, however, amongst Whigs as well as Conservatives ran high and became dangerous to the Government. At the beginning of May the Opposition gave notice of a Vote of Censure, certain to be powerfully supported on the Ministerial benches. The Cabinet, of course, resolved to meet the attack in a fighting spirit and to deny everything. Chamberlain's party-feeling on the eve of the pitched battle of debate blazed up in a confidential message to the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*. The explosive tone of his private letter helps us to understand the notions and passions of the time. After we are shocked, we must read to the end:

TO J. T. BUNCE

May 11.—What madness it is! . . . And what for? To fight against the "rebels" to whom the country belongs and to whom we have decided

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 161.

to abandon it. Are we to bring away the garrison of Khartoum? We do not know that it wants to come or that it might not instantly make terms with the Mahdi. . . . Then are we to go after the other garrisons? If not, why not as much as Khartoum? If we do, we must reconquer the Sudan—a task as serious as the reconquest of India after the Mutiny. When it is done, what next? We are pledged to hand it back to the very people from whom we shall have conquered it. The fact is that the "rebels" in the Sudan are the only people who are honestly carrying out the policy of the British Government and Gordon himself is the real "False prophet". . . . All this excitement is got up to force us to a Protectorate—which means annexation, English guarantee for the bondholders' debts, and in the long run war with France. Whoever else may do this I will have no part in it. Fortunately, Mr. Gladstone is quite firm.[1]

These were indeed Gladstone's sentiments exposed in blunt language. Methods totally defeated purposes. Liberal failure, giving an immense stimulus to the new Imperialism, helped to prepare for the Radical advocate of evacuation a destiny the very opposite of what he now conceived. Yet we must note seriously that when Chamberlain, Dilke and Morley resisted deeper commitments and longed to cut loose from the whole Egyptian entanglement, they did believe that Hartington's opposite policy would end either in war with France or in a lasting enmity—odious in the light of their own political and private sympathies—with the Third Republic. If the Egyptian Question did not in fact lead to war with France, it placed the diplomacy of Europe more than ever at Bismarck's mercy, and played a definite part in leading to the Great War thirty years later.

In mid-May the debate on the Vote of Censure raged for several nights. Gladstone failed for once—"a weak speech with brilliant flashes".[2] Indirectly he attacked Gordon for disobedience and hallucination. But he extolled the Sudanese insurgents, and suggested that to send any large force against them would be iniquitous war against a people "rightly struggling to be free".[3] Heavily damaged by Forster's and other speeches on their

[1] Morley remarked less than a fortnight earlier that if Gordon's "death had happened two months ago it would have turned out the Ministry. Now people are tired of Gordon" (quoted by Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 336).

[2] T. P. O'Connor, *Gladstone's House of Commons*, p. 414.

[3] Quoted by Allen, *Gordon and the Sudan*, p. 338.

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own side of the House, Ministers only escaped by a majority of 28. Chamberlain did not intervene. His four hours' speech on the Shipping Bill was pending. Dilke excelled in solidity and tact.

The division would have been narrower still but for Hartington's pledge that while enquiry into the subject of an expedition was necessary, the country would "grudge no sacrifice to save the life and honour of General Gordon".

At home this appeared to close the first phase of the Gordon controversy. But in the very week following, on May 26, the Mahdists stormed Berber, junction of the Nile and Red Sea routes and key of the country. Gordon in March had urged its occupation. Another of the garrisons for which we had made a besieged and unrelieved Governor-General responsible was put to the sword. Massacre lasted two days.[1] It would now be a far more formidable enterprise to reach Gordon by either of the routes through Berber. But the definite news of its fall did not reach London until a month later, towards the end of June. The position now was that, short of a reconquest of the Sudan contemplated by no one, Gordon's mission outside Khartoum was hopeless; the prospect, there, for himself and his people desperate; while the Cabinet chaffered and dawdled. Gladstone for his part awaited the last moment of proved necessity. Such proofs in military matters are apt to come too late for saving preparation.

We must turn our attention for a while to intervening aspects of Chamberlain's career as connected with Egypt.

X

A disturbance of friendship just at this phase gives us a more human insight into the heart of our man.

Remember again that Chamberlain at the very moment when the question of Zebehr was most acute tendered his resignation on the Shipping Bill and for some time afterwards was fighting for his political life. He never was more raw in his mood and unlike his earlier and his later self. At this of all times when he most needed friendship, he was painfully at variance with Morley.

[1] Wingate, p. 121.

Subdued acrimony creeps for the first time into their correspondence, and at last open reproach breaks out.

The man of letters, now Member for Newcastle, had become a favourite platform speaker at Caucus gatherings and other Liberal meetings. He had high ambitions of his own, and was already spoken of as destined for the Cabinet. To him Chamberlain had written a short while before the quarrel: "I do not know what I should do without the one or two warm friends I have been happy enough to find on a journey which has not been quite so fortunate as casual observers suppose".[1] Morley had rejoiced when the Radical leader agreed to support him in Newcastle. "You are a downright good friend."[2] Presently he adds that Chamberlain "will always be the closest to me of all my friends".[3] Now, alas, they differed sharply for months, and at length for a few weeks miserably. If Hartington on the Egyptian Question was too dogged for the Radical leader's taste, Morley seemed too weak and impracticable. But his criticisms in debate were damaging the Government, and especially amongst the extreme Radicals who usually looked to Chamberlain himself.

The Minister attempted what is called a straight talk, and spared no candour towards a very sensitive man far from meek in self-estimate, who was entitled to his independence and had learned much of it from his mentor. Morley replied in the well-known letter published in his *Recollections*:

> I fear that I cannot come to dine with you. . . . I wish I could have come; for one of your drastic desserts like the one you regaled me with last Thursday must, I fancy, be very good for one: so wholesome, if not very nice to the palate; such an infallible specific against vanity, undue self-esteem, and the other morbid growths of that queer thing, the human mind. The next morning to restore myself I hastened to read *Cicero de Amicitia, Seneca de Ira, Boethius de Consolatione Philosophiae*. . . .[4]

The irritated scholar, whose literary elaboration here rather defeats his irony, overwhelms the practical man with academic allusions. Chamberlain only wanted to make it up. "Needless to say he was prompt to own his sin and offered to apologise at any

[1] December 26, 1883.
[2] October 27, 1883.
[3] Christmas, 1883.
[4] Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 159.—He does not give the date. It was June 15, 1884.

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time, in any place and in any language I pleased."[1] In a few days they were again like brothers. Though Morley's wound healed, it must have left a scar. With all his less assertive manner and less masterful capacity in politics, Morley meant to be his own man. Jars will recur.

XI

Distractions and anxieties conspired to leave the Government little time for thinking of Khartoum. While the Franchise crisis approached, bankruptcy threatened Egypt. The Cabinet was absorbed by financial discussions in view of the negotiations for a Conference of the Powers on the law of liquidation. The two Radical allies were accustomed on these occasions in the Cabinet room to pass notes to each other along the table, and for once Chamberlain jotted rhymes, as in his very early days:

> Here lies Mr. G— who has left us repining
> While he is, no doubt, still engaged in refining;
> And explaining distinctions to Peter and Paul,
> Who faintly protest that distinctions so small
> Were never submitted to saints to perplex them,
> Until the Prime Minister came up to vex them.[2]

"*Le revenu c'est l'état.*" The whole future of Egypt was staked on its finances. Chamberlain as always was for relieving the country at the expense of the bondholders, and he was almost ready to resign if the coupon were not cut.

On the political side in connection with the coming Conference his equal purpose was to restore friendship with France by a doubled assurance of British withdrawal before long from the Nile. He vigorously backed Dilke's idea of creating under international guarantee a neutralised Egypt. Chamberlain put it in a way even more vivid now than then. "To make Egypt the 'Belgium of the East' is an object easily popularised. The phrase will carry the proposal" (May 22).[3] Later, the delegates of the Powers met in London at the end of June and held sittings through July. When the difficulties of arriving at any tolerable arrangement with Paris seemed hopeless, Chamberlain, with

[1] Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 159.—This looks as though Chamberlain's ample amends were made in writing, but nothing to this effect is to be found amongst Chamberlain's papers.

[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 51.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 52.

Dilke and others, was very strongly in favour of forcing French hands by threatening the bankruptcy of Egypt.

For the first time he began to fear that a sane and peaceable settlement with France might not be possible, though he would not gladly let go a hope which for so long had been sanguine and tenacious. One side, and only one side, of his frame of mind is described in another passage of the letter already quoted from Count Herbert Bismarck to his father. The French press was full of Anglophobia and threats:

July 9, 1884.—The most important point in the present negotiations for a settlement [concerning Egyptian finance and the Powers] Chamberlain considers must be a French undertaking never to occupy Egypt. . . . "In 1882 we only went to Egypt to keep the French out, and had we been sure of them we never would have done it. That security is what we want now to reach; if every other European Power is restrained from military occupation we need not worry ourselves about internal disorders. . . . But if we cannot arrive at this guarantee nor come to any settlement, then we cannot withdraw from Egypt meanwhile. As for the French, I cannot conceive them declaring war against us on this ground; it would be absolutely grotesque if they meant to attack us because we refuse to collect rents for them."

To encourage Chamberlain in this idea I gave it as my view that in no case would a Republican Government conjure up a great war on such frivolous grounds. . . . This was decidedly agreeable to Chamberlain's ears. His comb rose, so to speak, he leaned back comfortably, and said, "You know we are not a warlike nation, but if the French at last become too aggressive and arrogant we have no need to flinch from war. We are going far to satisfy France, but if she is determined to make our situation in Egypt impossible then we shall not shrink from fighting." [1]

Herbert Bismarck was dealing, in fact, with a much bigger man than himself, and with one who knew how to keep a very cool head despite the sulphur with which he liked to flavour his private remarks. He was never more bent on exhausting every reasonable effort to come to terms with France.

The Financial Conference broke down on August 2; the Powers dispersed without having been able to arrive at any arrangement;

[1] *Die Grosse Politik*, vol. iv. pp. 75-76.—A few of these words have been quoted on page 496, but they are necessary here to the effect of the whole passage.

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and once more Britain was left to deal alone with an Egypt drifting to insolvency and with darkening crisis in the Sudan. Immediately afterwards, Chamberlain submitted in draft to the Cabinet a circular to the Powers. This drastic document proposed as an act of justice to the Egyptian people the temporary suspension of payments to the bondholders, but offered a British withdrawal from Egypt in return for an international guarantee of neutrality on the Belgian model.

In this dispatch I proposed to call attention to the failure of the Conference and to the present position of Egyptian finance. The Egyptian Treasury was empty, the liabilities on the floating debt falling due, the indemnities not paid and there were not sufficient funds even to meet the current expenses of administration. . . . Her Majesty's Government . . . were not prepared to act as instruments to extort from the Egyptian people taxation which after full enquiry they believed the country could not justly be called upon to endure.

They have therefore come to the conclusion that they ought not to use their influence to prevent the Egyptian Government from suspending the law of liquidation. . . .

In making this communication, the Government would take the opportunity of renewing the assurances already given that their presence in Egypt is not dictated by any exclusive interest and that it was their earnest desire to terminate it at the earliest possible date.

They had three objects in view: the peace and good government of the country; the security of the Suez Canal, and the protection of Egypt against foreign aggression.

They believed the second of these objects might be secured by proposals for the neutrality of the country already submitted to the Powers.

As regards the other two objects, they still thought that any arrangement similar in principle to the international agreement affecting Belgium might provide the necessary guarantees, and they were ready to concert with the Powers the details of such an agreement. It would at the same time relieve them from a responsibility which they had undertaken in no selfish spirit, and offer a reasonable prospect of orderly and settled government in Egypt under the protection of the European Concert.[1]

Chamberlain set some store by this draft. Gladstone was favourably impressed by it, and told Lord Northbrook that he

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

thought it very clear and well put. Nothing came of it. Its author stoically notes: "It was impossible to get it or any other definite policy unanimously accepted by the Cabinet".[1]

Lord Northbrook, instead was sent to Cairo on yet another mission to enquire and report. He too failed; largely owing to "the Radical Opposition" within the Cabinet. He suggested in September a large Egyptian loan guaranteed by the British Government without any attempt to fix an approximate date for British withdrawal. Chamberlain resists almost to the point of resignation. He writes to Dilke:

Leipzig, September 12, 1884.— . . . About Northbrook's mission . . . if he gives way I do not think we can stand it. Your report alarms me. I wish I had got it earlier, and I would have waited to see N. at Vienna, where I was a day or two before him.

When he returns he will soon find that Northbrook refuses to consider "the present creditors of Egypt as Shylocks who deserve no consideration".[2] Chamberlain is keen to squeeze them, Shylocks or not, to lighten the load on the villages; and he fights tooth and nail against guaranteeing any Egyptian loan without cutting down the bondholders' receipts and cutting short the occupation. Gladstone and Harcourt sided with the Radical pair, and Northbrook's plan was defeated—not wisely, as Lord Cromer thought.[3] Towards the end of the year Chamberlain remarks to his ally in the Cabinet: "If the Powers are going to be nasty—let us insist on bankruptcy and come away at once, and leave them to settle with the creditors".[4]

The compulsion of events very soon became too much for them all. England was established in Egypt for the rest of Chamberlain's lifetime, and some day a Government in which he is a principal will reconquer the Sudan.

XII

We must resume the question of Downing Street and Khartoum. Gordon knew little and cared less about the Financial Conference that failed. In fact, it was a further injury to his

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
[2] Northbrook to Granville, Report, November 20, 1884.
[3] *Modern Egypt*, vol. ii. p. 371.
[4] Chamberlain to Dilke, December 29, 1884.

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fortunes. Very possibly it took away the last opportunities of rescue with honour. The reason is that for three months the Conference had preoccupied the Prime Minister and his colleagues.

Upon the habits of this Cabinet in the interval we have ironic marginalia:

> DILKE: We have always two subjects, (*a*) Conference, (*b*) Gordon.
>
> CHAMBERLAIN: The first always taking up two or three hours, and the second five minutes at the fag-end of business.[1]

Hartington made the same complaint:

> At the last Cabinet when it [the army of rescue] was mentioned, summoned, as I hoped, to decide on it, I got five minutes at the fag-end and was as usual put off. Another fortnight has passed and the end of the session is approaching. I cannot be responsible for the military policy in Egypt under such conditions.[2]

Chamberlain has left a more general remembrance of the "Conference period" from May to August:

> There is no doubt that throughout this period the Government had no settled policy, but adopted its decisions from time to time without attempting to look forward. . . . Harcourt strongly advocated what was known as the policy of "scuttle", and on several occasions threatened to leave the Cabinet if any definite steps were proposed to carry assistance to Gordon or to the garrisons. Lord Granville was not equal to the emergency. He wanted clearness of view and strength to press the conclusions at which he arrived. Mr. Gladstone never seemed to bend his mind to the position. Ordinarily he allowed discussion to go on and reserved his own opinion till the last and then endeavoured to harmonise the discordant views of his Cabinet. The result was a policy of drifting which fairly laid the Government open to the censure of its opponents.[3]

Yet just before the end of June the Cabinet learned for sure that Berber had been stormed a month before. The Mahdists were across both routes to Khartoum. Gordon was cut off from all certain communication with the outer world. The defender, so far as he was heard from, stung Ministers by his contempt, yet

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 57.

[2] *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, vol. i. pp. 465, 466 (Hartington to Granville, July 15, 1884).

[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

lulled them by his skill in holding out. This, as he rightly believed, would force them to act sometime. But when?

At the end of May, Hartington, Minister for War, requested the construction of a light railway from Suakim towards Berber. Separating himself on this matter from Dilke, who at the moment was for postponing, Chamberlain supported the immediate construction of the first section of the line. Whig and Radical were defeated together. Gladstone, after the Whitsuntide holidays, fell on the project with all his force, and destroyed it.—"The laying of any rails for a permanent way would be a great and serious measure, especially if, as I incline to think, the chances of an expedition thus far are not increasing." [1]

The battle of the routes was decided altogether against the Suakim-Berber track, though Lord Roberts, who never boasted, was sure he could have mastered it with Indian troops. The Nile was now accepted as the route of advance—in case of an expedition. For action a large majority of Ministers, including Chamberlain and Dilke, declared at last on July 25. Until the very end of that month Gladstone resisted any expedition; therefore welcomed every inconclusive result in Cabinet; and—not through inattention but conviction—sought further to procrastinate. Then Hartington at last, and heavily, put down his foot. He and the Lord Chancellor (Selborne) would resign at once unless serious preparations for an expedition to Khartoum were sanctioned by the Government.[2] Nothing but this ultimatum could have made Gladstone act; he thundered and yielded. Hartington, seeing what his views were, ought to have put down his foot more than a month before. Something definite had now to be done. But again, what?

Chamberlain repeatedly urged that a thousand picked men should be placed at the disposal of a promising young officer, Kitchener by name, who was scouting on the Sudan frontier. Had the Radical leader's idea been adopted in time a larger force if necessary could have been pushed up in support of the mobile legion. A veteran of famous Sudanese experience, Sir Samuel Baker, believed that a small column under Kitchener would have relieved Khartoum if launched much earlier than

[1] *Life of Devonshire*, vol. i. p. 465 (first week of July 1884).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 476 (Hartington to Granville, July 31).

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the date we have reached, the end of July 1884. Now, what Chamberlain proposed was by itself too little and too late. But too elaborate and too late was the plan adopted instead.

When the Powers adjourned indefinitely their negotiations on Egyptian finance, Gladstone's mind became free just when Hartington's was determined. The Prime Minister at last moved[1] the vote of credit for delivering Khartoum. But it was August. Gordon had not six months to live. Efficient action ought to have been taken three months before. Now the War Office, through Hartington, committed the Government to what the Radical Ministers loathed—an army under Wolseley. Something more speedy and daring in the spirit of Lord Roberts was the better chance.

Chamberlain and Dilke, when the decision was carried above their heads, continued to criticise Hartington's and Wolseley's ponderous undertaking more on the score of its size than of its slowness. Plainly the two Radical allies dreaded above all things any measures which might possibly result in reoccupation of the Sudan, with consequent hindrance to their own policy of early exit from Egypt and settlement with France—especially in view of Bismarck's colonial aggressiveness towards Britain in these very months. The case of Gordon and the garrisons never was their first consideration. Like Gladstone, they were out of touch with one of the most powerful and generous impulses of national feeling known in England during the nineteenth century.

XIII

Lord Cromer, who himself made one of the capital blunders, is largely his own witness. His evidence, whether against Ministers or their victim and his, is not invulnerable. But he says one last word in the controversy. "The only chance of success lay in following his [Gordon's] advice and adopting such measures as he thought most likely to conduce to the accomplishment of his task".[2] Before Gordon was shut up he rapidly suggested one plan after another, and all were vetoed. They rejected his advice, forbade his measures, did not recall him when he had lost their confidence, yet would not reinforce him. They failed to recall him

[1] August 5, 1884.

[2] *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. p. 452.

when they held that he was perverting his mission by talking of "smashing the Mahdi"—though this only meant fighting for life where he stood when the Mahdi's aim was "smashing Gordon".

The expert Parliamentarians could easily convict the man of action of a thousand verbal inconsistencies; but Gordon's vision of practical alternatives was essentially sane. He suggested desperate remedies because, looking with his own eyes at his own situation, he saw that nothing less would serve.

They had to do the biggest thing at last, but fate echoed Gordon's question and still echoes: "If it is right to send up an expedition now, why was it not right to send it before?" [1]

For coping with those derangements of the time-table and those unpredictable obstacles which are apt to hinder the most precise plans, Lord Wolseley and his staff had no margin when the relieving army began to move up the Nile. In Khartoum, after nearly a year of wonderful leadership, "the inhabitants and the soldiers had to eat dogs, donkeys, skins of animals, gum and palm fibre; and famine prevailed". In the days before the end "many died of hunger, and corpses filled the streets; no one had even energy to bury them".[2] The Mahdist tactics since the siege of El Obeid two years before were to exhaust a garrison and postpone assault. For some weeks it had been in the Prophet's power to take Khartoum by storm. Roused by the tardy approach of the English, the besiegers broke into the spent town before sunrise of January 26. Dressed in his white uniform and standing calm, Gordon in his last moments saw the Arab mass breaking in at the foot of the stairs, and crowding upwards with swords and spears. Then they killed him and cut off his head. Forty-eight hours after, Wilson arrived with the steamers. Through twenty weeks and more from the refusal of Zebehr to the belated decision for a real war of rescue, how many Cabinet meetings had shuffled Gordon's business into the last five minutes and adjourned!

On Thursday, February 5, the news reached Gladstone at Holker, and he bore it with impassive stoicism. Chamberlain exclaims to Morley: "The stars in their courses fight against us. The whole business has been unfortunate from beginning to

[1] Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, vol. i. p. 592 (Gordon on November 8, 1884).

[2] Wingate, p. 166, citing Journal of Bordeini Bey.

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end."[1] And later: "I cannot see how we can survive it". But the two friends rasp instead of consoling each other. Morley, inexorable in doctrine and unsoftened in his reprobation of Gordon, is for scuttle without a pang. For the moment it seems certain that the Government will be forced by the nation to execute Gordon's policy of "smashing the Mahdi". Chamberlain expostulates with his friend: "Your policy is Utopian". Morley answers with corrosive bitterness:

> The word has no terrors for me, even from a member of the Cabinet whose success as practical and non-Utopian statesman is so dazzling. It cuts me to the heart to find myself at variance with you.[2]

The Minister more provocative in earlier encounters is the gentler this time:

> I did not mean to use the word "Utopian" in any unkind sense. . . . We must retake Khartoum even if we leave it again immediately. I am ready to protest and resign if necessary rather than commit myself to any permanent occupation, or war of conquest properly so called.[3]

The irony of the sequel belongs to the next chapter.

The Reform Bill inaugurating full democracy was now law, and Redistribution was substantially agreed. Hartington seemed certain, on one issue or another, to join the Conservatives in the near future. In domestic policy apart from Ireland Gladstone —as Lord Bath had discerned years before—was a majestic Conservative, invaluable to that side on the "social question". Chamberlain, by confident and powerful initiative on the platform and in the Cabinet, promised to alter the whole spirit and direction of British politics. But again, many men, hitherto Liberal on the whole, were made Conservative for life by Gordon's death; it left an ineffaceable impression upon numbers of young minds; by its effect on the borough elections later in the year, it had its part in preventing Liberalism from gaining any majority independent of Parnell, and so helped to frustrate the Radical hopes that Chamberlain was then building on the new franchise. These were the mingled beginnings of impulses making for change, even for transformation, in national and Imperial affairs.

[1] Chamberlain to Morley, February 11, 1885.
[2] Morley to Chamberlain, February 14, 1885.
[3] Chamberlain to Morley, February 15, 1885.

XIV

One episode at this time is very interesting in itself and important for the understanding of Chamberlain's later career. Towards the end of the franchise fight Mr. Merriman, ex-Minister of Public Works at the Cape, and then the cleverest of South African politicians, was in England. He met Chamberlain and Dilke, and was both surprised and happy to discover that the leaders of the new democracy were Radical Imperialists and had nothing in common with the mind of *laissez-faire* Liberalism or with the Little England school. Chamberlain's personality impressed him more than that of any man, and he sailed for home with a new hope for the Empire.

Before leaving he called on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the interview is primary evidence in this biography:[1]

At first Merriman could scarcely credit the statement, which he heard repeated on every side, that Mr. Chamberlain had taken a vigorous initiative in insisting upon the maintenance of our Imperial obligations in Bechuanaland. It seemed too good to be true. What? Mr. Chamberlain, the leader of the Radicals, the chief of the party machine, whose name was held in execration second only to that elicited by the name of Mr. Gladstone himself! That he could realise our responsibilities, and not only realise but insist upon the fulfilment of them, was indeed a revelation not to be credited without enquiry.

Mr. Merriman made his enquiries and was satisfied. He said:

The great obstacle in the way of the maintenance of the Colonies is the Colonial Office. Excellent, smooth-speaking officials no doubt every man of them; but collectively their influence is a bane to the Empire. You will never get any good done in the direction of the unity of the Empire, or the federation of the Colonies, until you revolutionise the Colonial Office, and put men at the head of it who make a business of their work instead of dawdling over it in the ineffective fashion with which you are so well acquainted both in your foreign and colonial affairs. So far as I have seen there are only one or two business men in the whole company. Mr. Chamberlain, for instance, is a workman. He would put the thing through if he had it in hand. This at least is my impression of him.[2]

[1] *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 1, 1884.

[2] *Ibid.*

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The South African statesman continued:

I cannot say how delighted I am with the discovery that the Radicals generally do not share the views expressed so ably by Mr. Morley as to the worthlessness of colonies. For the life of me, I have never been able to understand why the Radical party of all parties in the State should have made it their duty year after year to make the very name of "Liberal" stink in the nostrils of every colonist. In the colonies we have everything you are trying to get, and more besides. We have realised the Radical ideal, and there is not a man even amongst the most conservative of us who does not hold opinions compared with which those of your extreme Left are quite moderate. . . . I never knew a colonist yet who visited England and did not turn a rabid Tory. I myself am quite a *rara avis*; a kind of black swan or white blackbird, for I remain true to Liberal principles notwithstanding your extraordinary Liberal practices.[1]

Mr. Merriman summed it up—if any one prayer was more to him than another it was that before long Mr. Chamberlain might become Secretary of State for the Colonies. This was the first suggestion of an event to be realised in the Empire's affairs, and the world's, more than a decade afterwards. But these were words that Chamberlain remembered. He preserved them amongst his papers. Probably they planted in his mind a new idea, vigorous though as yet secondary. Chancellor of the Exchequer? Yes. The attainment of that position seemed necessary to his democratic programme. Colonial Secretary? If that office ever came into his hands—and as we have seen his frequent responsibility on the Treasury Bench for Colonial questions had prepared him for it—he would do something to make Merriman's hopes come true.

[1] *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 1, 1884.

CHAPTER XXIII

"RANSOM" AND THE STORM: A BREAKING CABINET

(1885)

A CABINET in Chaos—Gladstone and the Two Generations—Chamberlain and Greater Britain—Origin of "The Radical Programme"—First Phase of the "Unauthorised" Campaign—The Queen and Gladstone—Chamberlain Stands Firm—Penjdeh and the War Cloud—Chamberlain as Statesman in Foreign Affairs—His Initiative and the Settlement—Gladstone's Greatest Coup.

I

LOOKING backwards, we can see well that 1885 was a watershed. This could not be so simply discerned when all active politicians, whether in Parliament or the constituencies, were looking forward with ardour or apprehension. CHAP. XXIII. ÆT. 49.

At the outset of that year—as would be still more the case at its close—the enigma of Gladstone's personal intentions disturbed all reckoning. He was passing through one of his deceptive phases of debility before another renewal of force. Meanwhile, just as formerly, his colleagues had to ask themselves whether his energies were not finally spent. Did he mean to retire? Could he continue? Another anxious comedy ensued for a few weeks; and it throws light on all the characters. We remember that when the Queen, entrusting him in 1880 with the seals for the second time, thought him haggard and feeble, he spoke of retirement in two years. Nearly five years had now passed; and he was still there after toils and difficulties enough to exhaust a man in the prime of iron vigour.

For his birthday, the Radical leader had sent the usual letter of congratulation, but in terms of exceptional warmth:

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I should like to add the expression of my sense of the magnitude of your latest triumphs, and of the genius, the patience and the resolution with which you have surmounted all the obstacles which might well have daunted any one less courageous. The new Reform Bills are the greatest revolution this country has undergone—and, thanks to you, it has been accomplished peacefully and with general assent.[1]

A few days later Chamberlain, like others, hears that the Prime Minister is sleepless, weary, depressed, and that his sudden retirement is probable.[2] That likelihood, fully assumed by some, suggested an extent of displacement beyond what our epoch can imagine. Harcourt, believing the end of the Gladstonian era to be at hand, was ebullient as at all times when permutations and combinations were in question.[3] He had an eighteenth-century zest in these matters. The *Daily News*, often intimately inspired, encouraged rumours of an impending Hartington administration as against the idea of relinquishing office to the Conservatives. Under a Whig Premier the two Radical Ministers were determined, if they served at all, to have a share nominally equal to all the rest, really predominant.

II

Harcourt, and he was quite genuine, flattered this confidence. Dilke is nearly carried away. Chamberlain is much more wary. The rapid exchange of confidences between the pair from day to day, may be given as a duologue—disclosing a Cabinet in throes and a passage of ephemeral excitement:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE (January 1885)

Antibes, New Year's Day.—Dilke.—I saw Acton yesterday at Cannes. He said he heard from Wolverton, who said Mr. G. was sleeping badly and had thought of *perhaps* coming to Cannes. This looks like a bolt on Egypt, which would I fancy now drive you and self out at once, as we have gone to the extreme limit of concession to bondholders' ideas. But if the next Cabinet does *not* go to pieces on Egypt at its first meeting, I see another rock for us (a raft if you like to escape for a little from the ship).

[1] Chamberlain to Gladstone, December 28, 1884.

[2] Morley's *Life*, vol. iii. pp. 170 *seq.*

[3] Harcourt's *Life*, vol. i. p. 515.

[Dilke goes on to say that he has heard of the approaching marriage of Princess Beatrice, and he insists on a parliamentary enquiry into Royal dowries and grants.] If not, that and Egypt together are quite enough to go on with dignity, though I think we should *win*, not go—as usual. What do you say?—Just leaving Antibes for Paris. . . . I go to Hartington's at Hardwick Hall till Monday 12th to coach him in the Redistribution Bill.

10 *Downing Street, January* 2.—*Chamberlain.*—Have you made, or do you intend making any communication to be laid before the Queen in shape of congratulations on Princess Beatrice's marriage? I do not wish to do it unless it is absolutely necessary. . .

Paris, January 2.—*Dilke.*— . . . I suppose it is intended that we should write to the Queen? If so—let me know *at once* what you are going to say . . . Egypt, I agree of course. . . . The question to my mind is should we not go out? . . . I'm becoming a little anxious for a flare-up. We've been too submissive lately, I think. . . .

10 *Downing Street, January* 3.—*Chamberlain.*—Mr. G. is threatened with return of his illness. He requires rest, but does not, I think, contemplate immediate retirement. We have once more tided over Egypt, but the question may at any moment break us up. There is, however, apparently a general wish to keep the Government together if possible, and I fancy this feeling will ultimately bring us through. . . . As regards the Dowry question, your argument is conclusive and I agree entirely. . . . Mr. G. is unable to attend to business for some days and everything is obliged to stand over.

Local Government Board, January 3.—*Dilke.*— . . . I will do nothing unless you tell me. . . .

Highbury, January 4.—*Chamberlain.*—I wrote you from Cabinet yesterday. After Mr. G. left it was evident that not a single member agreed with the course he proposed [on Egypt] . . . . The practical result is that we continue to drift. It is most unsatisfactory, but can we do anything else?

I would go out with pleasure, but for this we must have an excuse. . . . If Hartington and Northbrook carried their views we could go with a clear conscience, but they will not do so, and I cannot find a satisfactory boat to leave the ship in. . . . Possibly the Government may break up on this but we have more lives than a cat. As regards the Royal Marriage—nothing was said of this yesterday. I think we had better write a very

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short note to Ponsonby, asking him to lay our respectful congratulations before the Queen. . . .

Local Government Board, January 5.—Dilke.—We shall perhaps go out over the dowry. . . . I will write to-morrow to Ponsonby in the terms you propose.

But, a few hours later, Dilke reports from the political matchmaker that Gladstone's exit is imminent at last and that a new heaven and a new earth are promised. Highbury keeps very cool:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

Local Government Board, January 5.—Dilke.—Harcourt sent for me. He thinks Mr. G. must go at once and that Lord Granville and the Chancellor would go too. He wishes Hartington when sent for to offer to give way to Salisbury, but Salisbury refusing, to form a government. . . . Hartington would offer what places we pleased to have to us. (I said you *must* be Exchequer unless you should propose something else).[1]

Highbury, January 5.—Chamberlain.—1. Above all things we have to avoid the possible suspicion that we have joined in an intrigue against Mr. G. His retirement is possible and may be necessary. Hartington and Harcourt can bring it about—but let us be very careful not to enable them to say that we have been engaged with them in dividing the Lion's skin. It would do them no harm, but might be ruin to us. I incline to tell them frankly that we cannot enter into negotiations at present or until Mr. G.'s retirement has been decided. If possible put this in the form of a Memorandum to which we can afterwards appeal.

2. Subject to what is said above there can be no objection to our stating our views as to the policy which ought to be pursued by any Liberal Government whether Mr. G.'s or Hartington's.

3. But it will be better to avoid all reference to personal questions for the present. We know that our claims will not be disregarded and we may leave the discussion of them to the future. . . .

I doubt the wisdom of offering to give way to Salisbury. If we can agree on a policy I would rather propose it boldly and go out if defeated. . . . All this is written for your private eye, but you may read as much as you like of it to Trevelyan and even to Harcourt. . . . The latter has always been a most loyal friend, though he cannot be expected to agree with us in everything.

[1] Dilke, himself, was to be Foreign Secretary. (*Life*, vol. ii. p. 95.)

A few days after this the Radical leader was in London discussing personally with his ally and Trevelyan the terms whereon they would serve under Hartington in case of an early Ministerial reconstruction. Chamberlain wished an Irishman to be Chief Secretary and John Morley to be brought into the Cabinet.[1] It was all a bubble, but these evanescent things are of the very life of politics.

Harcourt again had been premature. Hartington's legitimate ambition was always latent but never set. Instead, his objections to the Egyptian ideas of the Radical Ministers were insuperable; and he came near to resigning with Northbrook. The alternative to Gladstone was not reconstruction but chaos. Accustomed influences were enough to induce the Prime Minister to continue—the persuasions of his entourage, the next turn of events, a few nights' better sleep, and his own inmost willingness. He gave Lord Granville to understand that he would remain until the Seats Bill was passed and Egyptian finances put in a better way, but then would retire finally from the Premiership.[2] Suspended resignation, always useful, had now become his indispensable persuasive. But well before the end of January, he was decided within himself to hold on. Immediately afterwards a succession of events first made it impossible for him to let go, and then led him with irresistible fascination into a last adventure whereof no end was to be seen.

This fact, so imperceptibly settled, was to alter British history in 1885 and for many a year to come. Well, in the present writer's conjecture, had it been otherwise. Trevelyan reflected long afterwards:

> Our generation in England was curiously affected by the question of age. Mr. Gladstone in gifts and faculty was exactly a whole generation better than his time of life, and while the Liberal party in some respects gained by it, it in some other respects was damaged. . . . But I cannot help wishing that he had retired from office long before he did, and had allowed the Liberal party to work out its own salvation, make its own mistakes, and learn from its own experience.[3]

At any time after the beginning of 1885 Gladstone could not

[1] Dilke's *Life*, pp. 97, 98.

[2] Granville's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 405 (January 22).

[3] George Macaulay Trevelyan, *Sir George Otto Trevelyan, O.M., A Memoir*, p. 125.

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have retired without confessing personal defeat and yielding to the dominance of younger colleagues. Neither thought was compatible with his nature. The Radical allies still believed at the point we have reached that his exit was only a question of months. His daemonic resiliency, his superhuman reserves of mental, moral and physical vigour were to astound them all. We may say without much excess that in his seventy-sixth year he was only beginning.

III

At every Cabinet and in all the interim transactions, these personal factors mingle inextricably with far-reaching issues of world-policy. Chamberlain's attitude shows again, and more clearly than before, how remote in temper he always was in foreign and Imperial affairs from the school of Gladstone and Bright or of Morley and Harcourt.

Amongst the Powers at this phase Britain's isolation was complete but not splendid. Germany, France and Russia were in tacit concert to aggravate British difficulties. The Australasian colonies railed at Imperial weakness; the Boers, with opposite feeling, welcomed German success. Sure of France, under the Ministry of Jules Ferry, Bismarck used the Egyptian imbroglio to browbeat British policy in colonial affairs and extort sulky submissions. France, sure of Bismarck for the moment, stirred up trouble on all hands for the Liberal Government.

When the best of our home army was locked up in the Sudan, Russia seemed inclined to crash through the frontier claimed by Afghanistan and to seize Herat.

Not for generations had there been a predicament more galling to British national pride. To Chamberlain the humiliation and the helplessness were alike unendurable. He detested the dilatory impotence of Lord Granville and Lord Derby. He stood for energetic resistance on some questions, and for frank concession on others.

The rumour spread at the time that the Radical leader in one of his Palmerstonian rages was a flaming Jingo ready to defy all challengers at once, and to plunge into a world war. There are two dubious entries in the published part of the journal kept at

this time by Harcourt's son, whose sub-acid habit was very unlike his father's genial vein:

January 3, 1885.— . . . Chamberlain is very jingo on the Egyptian question, and wants to "have a go in" at Bismarck and France, by which I suppose he means a European War. . . .

January 20.—Chamberlain laid up with an abscess in the jaw. W.V.H. and I went to see him in Prince's Gardens. We found him in great pain and he is to have several old stumps taken out under chloroform this afternoon. He said, "You peace at any price people ought to be glad that I am laid up, as I suppose you will get your wicked way at the Cabinet this afternoon." He wants to threaten and coerce, and if necessary fight France, but at the same time has no idea of staying an indefinite time in Egypt or declaring a protectorate or guaranteeing the debt. . . .[1]

This impression of a diarist who combines condolence with detachment upon a visit to a man in pain is exceptionally misleading. We have had many occasions to remember in this book that Chamberlain's startling conversation, as all intimately acquainted with him knew, was no guide to his method as a statesman. After talking with sardonic recklessness he would sit down, like a different man, to frame a speech or a Cabinet paper with compressed coolness. Gladstone's talk could be as earnest as eternity. To Chamberlain private talk was all relief and play, no guide whatever to his full meaning much less to his intended method. By his delight in indulging himself in irresponsible remarks, frequently of an expletive quality, he did not intend to mislead, but he did tempt many listeners to mislead themselves. The truth about his opinions on foreign and Imperial policy at this time when Britain was beset on all sides is in its way an instructive footnote to European history. We shall see how notably his vehemence in private contrasts with his control in public. To begin with, the correspondence with Dilke speaks for itself and again makes a duologue:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

Antibes, December 24, 1884.—*Dilke.*—My local paper (*Le Petit Marseillais*), generally well-informed by its Paris correspondent, says Bis-

[1] Harcourt's *Life*, vol. i. p. 514.

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marck has told the Powers not to reply to us, "in the hope that this may upset the Gladstone Government which is his only wish just now. . . ."

Highbury, December 29, 1884.—*Chamberlain.*— . . . I don't care the least about New Guinea and I am not afraid of German colonisation, but I don't like to be cheeked by Bismarck or anyone else, and I should let Bismarck know that if he is finally resolved to be unfriendly we accept the position and will pay him out whenever opportunity arises.[1]

Paris, January 2, 1885.—*Dilke.*—I agree as to Bismarck, he is making us a laughing-stock and must be fought.

10 *Downing Street, January* 3, 1885.—*Chamberlain.*—We decided yesterday to send a firm but courteous letter to France requiring immediate consideration of our proposals, failing which we shall "take our own course". What that course is to be is the question on which agreement appears impossible. . . .

I am in favour of showing our teeth in China, Madagascar, etc., but we may have to face a European combination.

New Guinea. The discussion has confirmed my impression that the German annexation is very like a breach of faith—certainly unfriendly. This, veiled in diplomatic language, will be communicated to Germany and explanations invited.

Zululand. I am strongly in favour of taking coast line. Mr. G. is against it and very strongly against any attempt to anticipate Germany. . . .

Local Government Board, January 5, 1885.—*Dilke.*—He proposes [Harcourt] for basis as to Egypt that we should say "we must scuttle, but—as we can't get out till we get Gordon out—we will pay the deficit till that happens and we will help Egypt to realise the indemnities. Then we will refer the situation to Europe. . . ."

Highbury, January 5, 1885.—*Chamberlain.*— . . . I do not think we could accept the proposed solution of Egypt question. . . . Our policy should be—

(*a*) Bankruptcy (immediate).

(*b*) Simultaneous communication to Powers of our fixed intention to leave Egypt as soon as Wolseley and Gordon can get away.

(*c*) Declaration that we will not allow intervention of other Powers in our place.

(*d*) Proposal for a Conference to settle at once details of decentralisation as soon as we go.

[1] These words already quoted (see pp. 497-498) are repeated above as a link in another connection.

Local Government Board, January 9, 1885.—*Dilke.*—This my No. 3 to you to-day. As to 13th, Tuesday [when Dilke was to address a meeting]—and Zanzibar I find that on 28th November Bismarck said to Malet that there was "*no foundation for the rumour circulated by the press that Germany was endeavouring to negotiate a Protectorate over Zanzibar*". I might say *this*?

January 11, 1885.—*Chamberlain.*—Your line about Zanzibar is the right one. Put our case on Bismarck's own words. The difficulty I feel about German annexation was put by Harcourt the other day.

We profess to approve of their enterprise in general, but we object to every single practical application. Where *can* they go, and be d——d by themselves, without our protesting?

These are some glimpses of the working of the Radical leader's mind at the time when *Weltpolitik* began and Anglo-German hostility made its first sinister appearance. When we have added another illustration or two we shall have little difficulty in drawing the real moral. When unable to attend a Cabinet held in the thick of these troubles, he comments to Harcourt:

So the peace at any price party will have it all their own way. If I were there I should be for telling the French to go to the devil—in other words for courteously informing them that their propositions are inadmissible and that if they don't agree to ours—with or without the modifications already suggested—we will settle the business ourselves, and if Mounseer does not like it he may lump it. We have come to the end of our concessions. After that you will be glad to think I shall probably be away.[1]

When he writes this he is just entering upon the racking encounter with his dentist. When Harcourt sees him after the operation we have another vignette:

W.V.H. said there were as many policies for Egypt as there were men in the Cabinet, but Chamberlain replied: "No, there are not more than three or four men capable of making one, and there are only three practical ones before us. There is Hartington's with his 'pay and stay'; yours, which is 'pay and scuttle'; and mine, which is 'scuttle and repudiate' ".[2]

Almost at the same time Dilke shows the generous relations

[1] Chamberlain to Harcourt, January 19, 1885.

[2] Harcourt's *Life*, vol. i. p. 515 (January 22.)

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of the pair, but gives a dismal picture of the hopeless Cabinet confusions, which were leaving an evil legacy to another generation:

> I had no notion you were so shaky as Harcourt tells me, and no notion you would not be at the Cabinet. Having no orders I did my best. . . . The Cabinet looked upon as a waste of time gets worse and worse! Mr. G. has no hand over Hartington and Harcourt, and they go round and round. I hope *you'll* never let people behave as they do now. . . .[1]

IV

So far as Chamberlain is concerned, we can now pull this tangle straight. He said again and again at this time that the policy of the Government had only one continuous characteristic: "It leaves things to drift." Thinking this the most fatal of all courses he stands for definite action, and for looking some risks in the face to avert worse.

The harrying of the British Empire by France and Germany together seems to him a new portent created by the feebleness of Lord Granville and Lord Derby. His method is similar to what it became years later in a graver dilemma except that first preferences are reversed. No English statesman had been more Francophile, but Jules Ferry's Ministry, in concert with Berlin, brought active animus into play, and Chamberlain was the last of men to submit to it. At the same time he regards Egypt and the Sudan as heavy encumbrances causing our weaknesses elsewhere. He holds that declared bankruptcy at Cairo and consequent cutting down of the bondholders' levy are imperative for relief of the Egyptian people and the financial conditions required for self-government.

Above all these things, he desired to cut loose from Egypt as soon as possible for the sake of restoring good relations with France, but he insisted inflexibly on guarantees that Egypt as the "Belgium of the East" should never become directly or indirectly a French protectorate, and that the Suez Canal should be open to Britain in all circumstances.

Chamberlain, it is quite true, was in favour of embodying these terms in a "Palmerstonian dispatch" to Paris.[2] He judged it to be

[1] Dilke to Chamberlain, January 20.

[2] Harcourt's *Life*, vol. i. p. 515.

the first step required to stop the drift of British policy. In his recollection Palmerstonian frankness—unlike the anxious uncertainty of Aberdeen—had not made wars but prevented them. He felt certain—and he was undoubtedly right—that on his lines there would have been no war with our neighbours but instead a check to aggressiveness, and an improvement of practical relations.

After all, his policy, if embodied in a "Palmerstonian dispatch", would have made more concessions to French ideas than were found possible by any British Government afterwards.

So far from challenging a European combination, Chamberlain's mind, recognising this new possibility, was exercised to prevent it. As for Bismarck, the Radical leader estimated safely that the Iron Chancellor would not and could not push his scornful rancour against Gladstone, Granville, Derby and the Liberal Government as a whole to the point of supporting France in a war against Britain. Chamberlain was friendly at heart to the new German idea of colonial enterprise. He saw the difficulty—that Germany could not easily expand anywhere without causing inconvenience, injury or alarm to British communities or enterprises long before established. But with all his heart he desired agreement, and the method he would have followed—personal conference in the friendliest as well as frankest spirit instead of disputes about dispatches—might have meant much for the future of Anglo-German relations.

We shall now see how true it is to say that Chamberlain in his love of unbridled private expression was one man, but in his responsible character quite another. Just after the New Year he made the first of his famous sequence of speeches through 1885. Writing to his ally on the eve he says, "I am to speak to-morrow. It is awfully difficult work steering between Jingoism and peace at any price."[1] He spoke in fact with admirable balance and control, and yet with a clear ring that reached to Greater Britain. It is the note for the first time of Radical Imperialism in full earnest. With high tributes to Bismarck, he suggested that democracy might prove a thing not to be played with, and prophetically he warned the German Empire against underestimating Australia:

[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, January 4, 1885.

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You will give no assistance to the party who are clamouring for what they call a strong foreign policy, and who at this moment in the interest, chiefly, of the bondholders and financial speculators, are calling upon us to take possession of Egypt without regard to the wishes of the population or the just susceptibilities of other nations. . . . We will not yield one jot either to the perfidious suggestion of dubious friends abroad or to the interested clamour of financial greed at home. . . . It is not the bravest man who blusters most, and the universal bully, at a time of pinch, is very likely to be found a universal coward.

If, however, the occasion should come to assert the authority of England, a democratic Government, resting on the confidence and support of the whole nation, and not on the favour of any limited class, would be very strong. It would know how to make itself respected, and how to maintain the obligations and the honour of the country. . . . It would be humiliating indeed if England, the mistress of half the world, were to be driven to imitate the conduct of an angry scold and indulge in a fit of hysterical passion because Germany had snapped up some unconsidered trifle of territory which we have hitherto not thought it worth while to acquire.

If it be necessary, as I think it may be, to review our foreign and colonial policy in the light of recent events, let us face the altered circumstances of the problem in the spirit of full-grown men, and not with the pettish outcry of frightened children. . . .

I regret the action, however natural it may seem on some grounds, which the German Government has thought it necessary to take [in New Guinea]. It does not need a prophet to predict that in the course of the next half-century the Australian Colonies will have attained such a position that no Power will be strong enough to ignore them . . . and for my part I cannot look with any confidence on any settlement which may be made in those regions in defiance of their united opposition.

Meanwhile we are not unmindful of our obligations. If foreign nations are determined to pursue distant colonial enterprises we have no right to prevent them. We cannot anticipate them in every case by proclaiming a universal protectorate in every unoccupied portion of the globe which English enterprise has hitherto neglected. But our fellow-subjects may rest assured that their liberties, their rights and their interests are as dear to us as our own; and if ever they are seriously menaced, the whole power of the country will be exerted for their defence (cheers),

and the English democracy will stand shoulder to shoulder throughout the world to maintain the honour and the integrity of the Empire. (Cheers.)[1]

Thirty years before the Great War, this is a startling passage, both in its far-reaching instinct and its dauntless faith.

The Cabinet was not destined, after all, in spite of a hundred threatenings, to break up on Egypt. France was brought to some agreement at last. By the London Convention in March, the loan of £9,000,000 to Cairo was based on the guarantee of all the Powers. This part of it squared Chamberlain's aversion to a guarantee by Britain alone. He was less pleased with the rest. Against the bondholders he had conceived a sincere hatred, regarding them as cosmopolitan exploiters of the fellaheen. If it was an exaggeration it was humanely meant and sprang from no ungenerous impulse. He would have cut the coupon by 50 per cent if he could. All he got by the new Convention was that the bondholders were constrained for two years to put, as it were, a shilling in the pound into an Egyptian poor-box.[2] Chamberlain grimaced and could do no more. Bright thought he had done more than any man to bring England into Egypt. His plans for getting out of it again were all frustrated. This turned out to his own satisfaction when, at a later period, he saw with his own eyes the British work of engineering and justice on the Nile.

V

These great foreign and Imperial questions engaging him so eagerly from the autumn of 1884 to the spring of 1885, now pass out of this biography for some years. When they come in again we shall be reminded of Pater's remark about the power of recurrent images in a changing environment. The London Convention was the turning-point at Cairo. The fight, meticulously waged—but in the long run the most brilliant triumph of its kind that pertinacious parsimony ever won—was not for Egyptian bankruptcy as the Radical leader demanded, but for solvency maintained by desperate manipulation to preclude international meddling. As we shall soon see, Gordon was power-

[1] Birmingham, January 5, 1885.

[2] *Life* of Childers, vol. ii. p. 215.

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ful in the ghost. His death did most to rouse popular opinion and to fix England in Egypt, no matter who liked it or not.

After Jules Ferry was brought down in March by the Tonquin repulse, Anglo-French relations ceased to be dangerous, though remaining unpleasant. Bismarck's malign scorn of the Gladstone Ministry and its ways remained unappeased. But he had lost his most pliant tool in Paris. After the acquisition of German East Africa he stayed the annexations. All the loose property safely to be "snapped up", as Chamberlain said, had been acquired. Further seizures anywhere would mean serious peril. There the Iron Chancellor, with his managing genius, drew the line. The resentment of Australasians smouldered against the new German factor in their vicinity and the Radical leader sympathised. But, on the whole, his ardent sympathies with the Third Republic before the death of Gambetta began to be replaced by a much more conditional feeling; and he thought the Germans were a people with whom blunt business could be more easily transacted if you were not afraid of them. He minded neither cudgel-play nor sabre-play, but a campaign of pin-pricks made him hard.

No serious student of the earlier origins of the World War, thirty years after, can neglect Chamberlain's feelings of transition at this time. Against aggression and indignity he embodies the Palmerstonian feeling of his youth, but he knows that in two decades the dominance and safety of the Palmerstonian age have passed away—just as the era of virtual monopoly in trade is giving place in its turn to the era of effective and increasing competition. He is no longer confident about the future relations of Britain with any foreign Power. He sees that the future is likely to be an alternative—as in truth it proved—between submission to squeeze and nerve to fight. Bismarck's doings in contempt of the Gladstone Government spread through the world the new idea that the British Empire was the brazen colossus with the feet of clay. The phrase began to tempt both Berlin and Paris. The Radical leader scouted the simile and the implication. He held that the British Empire, if forced to fight, would prove more united and formidable than foreign judgment supposed. In this view, sanguine and almost fantastic as it must have seemed at the moment to realists of the mere moment at home and

abroad and to Morley as well as Bismarck—Chamberlain's feeling was surer than the Iron Chancellor's calculation.

In this sense he imagined that the coming democracy would be made in his own image. He conceived the British people, after the next elections, as a conciliatory nation but a strong nation; anxious for peace but formidable in its reserves; not to be flouted or humiliated too much by any Power presuming on the ready possession of conscript armies. It never occurred to him in his life-time to think that any nation was greater than his own, would it but rouse itself.

VI

While statesmen were anxiously concerned by these deep matters, Chamberlain, in the opening weeks of 1885, completely diverted public attention from everything but the Sudan expedition and Gordon's peril.

In quick succession three flagrant speeches—as moderate politicians put it—made him the centre of a storm in domestic politics like nothing known again for a quarter of a century. His dismissal from the Cabinet seemed a possibility, averted by consummate skill in his private defence without the least public recantation. Suddenly he rose to his full power of democratic leadership. We must see how this came about. It is an affair full of character. Before we come to the flaming campaign itself we must understand the systematic thoroughness of the preparation. In its way, as a model of laborious popularising method in democratic politics it stands quite alone. It has never since been equalled.

So very far was this affair from being rash and improvised as many opponents supposed. How could they know? Through two years the design for all its boldness had been meditated with minute care. As we may say, the vessel was built up solidly on the stocks by a muster of craftsmen. There is no need for further mystery about one part of the work. A gifted writer of the day —until he broke himself by over-strain—was T. H. S. Escott, confidential supporter of our Radical Minister in several quarters of the press. As editor of the *Fortnightly Review*,[1] he printed in

[1] John Morley, to the regret of many disciples, resigned the editorship of the *Fortnightly* in the autumn of 1882, and was succeeded in October by Escott, who maintained for some years a very high standard of distinction with variety.

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its pages the prolonged series of articles republished in a well-remembered red volume.

The Radical Programme was one of the best briefs for a fighting party that ever was compiled. The plan was Chamberlain's own idea; with him all the articles in detail were concerted. He supervised every one of them in proof before publication. For the benefit of those who possess the little book—as should every student of the development of democratic politics in Great Britain—the names of the collaborators, then anonymous, may be disclosed. The three first sections—"Introduction", "Machinery", "Measures"—were written by Escott himself; "The Housing of the Poor in Towns" was by Frank Harris; "The Agricultural Labourer" by Jesse Collings; "Religious Equality" by John Morley; "Education" and "Taxation" by Francis Adams, ex-secretary of the old National Education League; while the final paper on "Local Government" was, as to the British part, by Escott, and as to the Irish part by George Fottrell—a Dublin solicitor, well considered by most of the Irish party, who gave good help in working out the scheme of National Councils for each constituent nation of the United Kingdom.[1]

Publication went on systematically in the *Fortnightly Review* through two years, from the summer of 1883 to that of 1885. We have had some passing views of how the Radical leader set to work on his enquiries into domestic and external affairs. Animating them all, he had, for instance, a hearty word for Collings who at an early stage of the work had contributed his knowledge of the agricultural labourer:

Board of Trade, October 18, 1883.—MY DEAR COLLINGS, I have read your paper. It is excellent—the best thing you have done. I have not cut out nor altered anything. I have seen Escott and have told him he must print it without any excision and you will accordingly have a proof in a day or two. Morley is going to write the article on Free Church and I think I have arranged for Finance.

In this manner was compiled an elaborate body of thought, perspicuously arranged and stated, supported by facts, figures and examples.

Chamberlain had mastered all of it that concerned reform in

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

Great Britain before coming out as its disturbing exponent from the beginning of 1885.[1] Preparation of this prolonged thoroughness had not been seen before in British politics; and this command of his matter, with compressed force of feeling and definiteness in proposition, gave his deliverances on the platform from this hour forward an excellence of form, a firmness in texture, a militant lucidity in exposition, superior to all his former speaking. Whether they incited his adherents or alarmed his enemies, these speeches compelled the whole country's attention. They are still worth study as models of how to do it in public agitation. In incidental generalisation, where he hardly ever was good, there are flaws, but not in his art of statement. These speeches have structure and proportion. They have style, if style is a fine unity of expression unmarred by mannerisms in detail. They are relatively short. Every terse sentence is instantly intelligible and frees the mind for the next; but better still, the whole argument is marshalled and conducted with clearness and energy. He eliminates all superfluity—ornament and embroidery as well as platitude and periphrasis; in his early days a spendthrift of quotations, he now uses few. Yet with this severity of restraint he is not cold; it is a sort of incandescent economy. For his audiences there is not a dead word, and the argument seems to live of itself apart from the man.

This, no doubt, is below the great march, the many colours, the memorable imagery, the abiding phrases of inspired eloquence, but as an instrument of power in democratic politics Chamberlain's method is far above any eloquence not inspired.

And in one respect at least, as the present writer's recollection attests, he has genius. It is a genius of incitement exercised not by expansive utterance but by controlled passion; and this is perhaps the soul of his quality. Many of the traits recalled here are recognisable still in his words; but the suggestion of concentrated temperament, the hint of danger in the underswell of his delivery, must be personally remembered to be understood. To the making of these speeches on the platform as well as to their

[1] The final article of the series, "Local Government and Ireland", did not appear in the *Fortnightly* until July, six months afterwards. This contribution was a very able plea from a moderate Irish standpoint for "purely domestic control of purely domestic affairs". Its main ideas were already fully grasped and expressed by Chamberlain.

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framing beforehand he brought an infinite capacity for taking pains, until his art perfectly concealed his art. "To be simple is always desirable," says Pascal, "but to be simple is so hard."

Something else must be added, and it is perhaps, after all, the principal thing. The Radical leader was undertaking what had never been attempted in public speeches addressed to the plain people—a comprehensive survey of social conditions, urban and agrarian, and a deliberate plan of national reorganisation. "Doing for the nation what he had done for the town."

VII

He opened his campaign on January 5 at a working-men's demonstration in Birmingham Town Hall. He told them that a new era of democracy had opened, and asked them what they meant to live for?

"Two millions of men will enter for the first time into the full enjoyment of their political rights. These men are for the most part your fellow-workmen in factory and in field, and for the first time the toilers and spinners will have a majority of votes and the control, if they desire it, of the Government of the country."

For that object strong democratic organisation would be more than ever imperative. The Caucus must be improved and enlarged:

"I see that in some quarters the Tories are consoling themselves for the changes which they fear in the hope that, at all events, they will put an end to the power and the influence of the dreaded Caucus. They never were more mistaken in their lives. . . . There will be more need than ever for organisation if you are to gain the full advantage from the new conditions. Vested interests, special crotchets and personal claims have a natural tendency to combine. They are on their defence; they are bound together by common ties and by common fears; and if the public good, if the interest of the great majority, is without discipline and without recognised leaders, it will be like a mob that disperses before the steady tread of a few policemen, or before the charge of a handful of cavalry."

But when franchise and organisation together made the House of Commons, "the Great Council of the nation", representative for the first time of the majority of the people, what would it mean for the lives of the people?

"What is to be the nature of the domestic legislation of the future? I cannot help thinking that it will be more directed to what are called social subjects than has hitherto been the case. How to promote the greater happiness of the masses of the people, how to increase their enjoyment of life, that is the problem of the future; and just as there are politicians who would occupy all the world and leave nothing for the ambition of anybody else, so we have their counterpart at home in the men who, having already annexed nearly everything that is worth having, expect everybody else to be content with the crumbs that fall from their table."

And with the next sentences he staggered Conservatives and Whigs and many middle-class moderates who supposed themselves to be fairly enlightened Liberals. He asked wealth to pay "ransom" for the continued enjoyment of its advantages. The monstrous, the revolutionary, word—as all the challenged classes called it—caused a commotion:

"If you will go back to the early history of our social system you will find that . . . every man was born into the world with natural rights, with a right to a share in the great inheritance of the community, with a right to a part of the land of his birth. . . . Private ownership has taken the place of these communal rights, and this system has become so interwoven with our habits and usages, it has been so sanctioned by law and protected by custom, that it might be very difficult and perhaps impossible to reverse it.

"But then I ask what ransom will property pay for the security which it enjoys? . . . There is a doctrine in many men's mouths and in few men's practice that property has obligations as well as rights. I think in the future we shall hear a great deal more about the obligations of property, and we shall not hear quite so much about its rights."

He proceeded to give glaring instances of the licence and impunity of wealth—Scottish deer-forests, coffin ships, rural labour impoverished and dispossessed; and he closed by proclaiming

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"the aim and end of all our Liberal policy—the greatest happiness of the greatest number".[1]

This opening challenge of the "unauthorised programme" was the most entirely characteristic speech—though not the greatest—of his whole career in its Radical phase.

Powerful as was the attack, he had weakened his guard by two very vulnerable expressions.

Frequent on democratic platforms just then, "natural rights" were associated with idyllic visions of our Saxon forefathers born to liberty and a share in the soil. Rights not so natural if we think of what happened when the Celts were driven from that soil or what was to happen again when Danes or Normans mastered it. Rights not definable nor maintainable except according to the law and stability of constituted societies; and no more natural than any form of architecture proper or of structural civilisation. Needless to say, he quickly recognised his verbal error, but with a stubborn adhesion to the substance of his meaning. Many comfortable moderates, both Whig and Tory, and many orthodox economists at that time fluently explained in effect that social squalors, distresses, miseries, were all "natural wrongs" not remediable by "artificial legislation". What Chamberlain really meant to demand was the recognition of a broader conception of social justice and the attainment by the enfranchised people for themselves of a higher order of statutory rights. As disparities and abuses then stood, the essence of his philosophy was better than the case of those who pulled to pieces a bit of loose verbiage. This the mass of the people very well knew, paying no attention to the logomachy of the pundits. Chamberlain had found the arousing word they wanted. "Rights" to better conditions they were becoming determined to establish, and whether the claims were properly called ancient or modern made no jot of difference. On this ground Chamberlain never budged. The harder they assailed him on it the stronger he stood.

But "ransom"? That was another thing altogether. If the Queen shuddered, if Mr. Gladstone looked upwards and Lord Hartington frowned downwards, some of Chamberlain's best

[1] Birmingham Town Hall, January 5, 1885. The passages of this speech concerning the future of Imperial and foreign policy have been already quoted.

friends were disconcerted. How did he come by this idea, they asked themselves. The terrible word was in fact introduced by the oddest comedy of accident. A few days before the Birmingham gathering, the Radical leader had a private talk with his political antithesis—with Goschen of all men, ablest of Whig logicians, then the very oracle of cautious people. Goschen thinking aloud in this conversation had mentioned "ransom".[1] Evidently he used it to define his objection. The Radical pounced in his way upon a picturesque expression, and so it came out. The appropriation was not lucky. It was an ugly word. No one liked it. In the first place, it implied anything but a safe canon of justice, and suggested to a degree far beyond Chamberlain's intention that private property must pay to be tolerated. Secondly, "ransom" had vague or confused associations with mediaeval captures, Greek brigands and Italian opera. Chamberlain saw that he had made a mistake. With good sense he then shunned the term, but it pursued him.

To-day we see well what he meant, and on his own side he found no difficulty in retrieving his slip by other language. Instead of "ransom" he will, henceforth, speak and think of "insurance". His idea was that the rich and the comfortable, who gain most under a flourishing state, cannot create nor maintain by themselves the political conditions of their own security; that the normal orderliness of the common people, and their services in peril, support and uphold all; that in this manner their contribution to economic prosperity includes an unpaid factor over and above the value and reward of their immediate labour; that the well-to-do in fairness and wisdom should provide the expenses of the State in proportion to their individual advantages derived so largely from the general system; and that they owed more than wages to the masses. When Chamberlain said "ransom" he only meant equity. That thought had been in his mind since the very beginning of his constructive days in Birmingham.

But to Conservatives and Whigs and others after his first fulmination in the year of the "unauthorised programme" he was Robin Hood, and they raised hue and cry. Already Hartington told the Queen that the Radical leader's ideas of future taxation

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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"almost amounted to Socialism".[1] The worst was not just yet, whether in reverberations from platforms; or in rival eruptions of leading articles; or in the exclamations of private conversation and correspondence; or in Ministerial trouble.

VIII

Some days later, in mid-January, he appeared at Ipswich, a town represented by his faithful squire, Jesse Collings—called his Sancho, but worthy of high esteem. This longer speech is said to have been still more telling or sweeping in immediate effect. So far was it from the tone of a statesman in a white sheet that it incensed the sovereign, alienated Hardwick—and nearly all other great houses, Whig or Tory—and offended Hawarden. Dilke, who had gone as far as his ally, but in more ordinary tones, notes that Ipswich was "the beginning of the terror caused by the unauthorised programme".[2] The reason is plain enough. The "ransom" speech was no single "flash-in-the-pan". Here evidently was a consecutive agitator, capable of developing his themes through a protracted campaign, and perhaps of making each utterance more disquieting than the former.

This time the pioneer of a new order unfolds his details. Extricating himself with skill from the word "ransom", he puts it another way.

"What *insurance* will wealth find it to its advantage to provide?" He explained to wealth his ideas of advisable insurance. Education ought to be free. Local government for the counties ought to be in the forefront of the work of a reformed Parliament. Then municipalities and counties, supplementing each other, could attack "the two greatest and most pressing needs of our time . . . the provision of healthy, decent dwellings in our large towns at fair rents; and in the country, facilities for the labourer to obtain a small plot of land".

For these objects let all local authorities be empowered to acquire land at a fair value—"which I define to be the price which a willing purchaser would pay to a willing seller in the open market". Exorbitant profit must no longer be demanded

[1] *Queen Victoria's Letters*, edited by Buckle, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 604.
[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 103.

when the public is a buyer. For the urban working classes he draws a charcoal sketch of the lot of their fellows on the soil:

"The agricultural labourer is the most pathetic figure in our whole social system. He is condemned by apparently inexorable conditions to a life of unremitting and hopeless toil, with the prospect of the poorhouse as its only, or probable, termination. . . . The old race has disappeared, and you cannot re-create it by a stroke of the pen. . . . I am not afraid of the three F's in England, Scotland or Ireland."

Nothing in Britain would be sound at bottom until a new race of peasants and yeomen was planted. Nothing but legislation and public credit could do it. He recognised that conditions were too diverse to allow of identical procedure for the two islands. The English farmer depended for improvements on the landlord, but capital was what the landlord in numerous and increasing cases could no longer supply. These comments of nearly fifty years ago sound like very modern language.

Yes; and all this scheme for urban and rural amelioration might have passed almost mildly, but for his answer to a crucial question. Who was to pay for it all? There, the traditional interests of half a century ago feared that Chamberlain meant to cut to the root. He as little as they foresaw the gigantic scale of direct taxation and social subsidies to-day. But he demanded local levies on ground rents. He advocated the rating of real as well as personal property. Above all, he mentioned in cold blood a horrid thing, "graduated taxation"—"graduated according to the amount of the income and to vary according to the character of the income". New death duties and unearned increment were suggested as other suitable subjects for a democratic Chancellor's attention.

We must always remember the background of circumstances as then they existed—"the poor taxed more heavily in proportion". "There is some truth in the statement of the man who said that the only difference in the incidence of taxation consisted in an adverb, for while it pressed very hardly on the poor it pressed hardly at all on the rich."

He closed, this time, with an insurgent sentence more like one of John Ball's than like any Victorian statesman's: "I am confident in the power of a wise Government resting on, and repre-

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sentative of, the whole people, to do something to add to the sum of human happiness and to lessen the evils of misfortune and poverty. We are told that this country is the paradise of the rich; it should be our task to see that it does not become the purgatory of the poor."[1]

After that the storm blew higher, and no wonder; for the possessing classes in England had in fact flourished on very easy terms till then. Now, with the engine of the new franchise, and this business-like idea of its operation, they scented real change and called it danger; and had not Gladstone interposed presently to shift the issue they might have proved right, from their point of view, before the end of the Victorian 'eighties. Meanwhile old Radicals and young Liberals—one of them a very young Lloyd George in Wales—thought that Chamberlain was the man of the future and their man.

IX

Each of these speeches is an event. We come to the third and its Cabinet consequences. A fortnight after Ipswich, Chamberlain stood up again in his own city at the annual "Members' meeting".[2] His presence and his cult, as now it must be called, overpowered in a new way all else—everything and everyone, John Bright included. When his turn came to rise, the audience jumped to its feet, cheering on and on as he never had been cheered. For several minutes they would not let him begin, while he looked on with that well-known expression of mocking pleasure—always pungent to them; and always provoking renewed cheers before he spoke.

Instead of standing upon his trial, he exceeded former offences. He declared, again, for manhood suffrage. "I cannot help thinking that the younger men amongst us, many of whom I see before me to-night and who are the chief sufferers by the present limitation, would be worthy to take their place beside the new electors." The interests of life must prevail over those of property. So,

[1] Ipswich, January 14, 1885. He had used this last sentence once before—in his speech of June 17, 1876, when first elected as member for Birmingham, but then it had not been part of the "terror", as Dilke calls it, spread amongst traditional minds by the systematic character of these new speeches.

[2] Birmingham, January 29.

"one man one vote". Why, he asked—amidst what the reporter called "Jocose cries of 'Shame'"—should he himself have six votes; some of his friends ten or twelve; and one unnamed "reverend pluralist" he knew of, twenty-three? "If we are to make a distinction I am not quite certain whether it is not the poor man who ought to have more votes than the rich one."

He advocated the direct and effective representation of Labour. But for that purpose another change must be adopted—payment of members. That measure, he might be told, would create a new breed of professional politicians? "Why not?" "I should like to know why politics are the only business which must be left to amateurs." He instanced doctors and lawyers as persons paid for efficiency. But neither he nor anyone after him on his own side pointed out the broad distinction—that payment for professional politics is uniquely dissociated from any test of knowledge or capacity. This reflection is wisdom after the event. He hoped genuinely that payment of members would enhance their average competence. It cannot do so while there is no standard of qualification.

As for Bradlaugh's case, said the Radical leader, the House of Commons must abandon its inquisition into matters of private conscience and must recognise the unfettered power of electors to choose their representatives.

The plain people, he maintained, had not adequately benefited by the immense advance in national wealth during the preceding generation. Why should an ordinary worker pay 7½ per cent of his wages in taxation while he (Chamberlain) certainly paid no more than 6 per cent and probably not as much? "I say that is unfair, and I say the sooner it is altered the better." Why should bad housing and statistics of mortality in towns be suffered to remain what they were? Why should agriculture decline and rural labour stream ceaselessly away? Orthodox economists talked of "natural" causes. Did they so?

"I cannot call it a natural cause when I find a system under which the labourer is content to work for ten or twelve hours a day for ten shillings a week, and with no hope, no prospect, for the termination of his career except a death in the hospital or the poorhouse. If the life of the labourer were more tolerable would he be so ready to fly from it?" Let England like every

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other country in the world bring "the magic of ownership" into play and restore the breed of small-holders. Indolent and inefficient landlords "must be taught that their ownership is a trust . . . limited by the supreme necessities of the nation, and they must give place to others who will do full justice to the capabilities of the land".

Execrated as the advocate of blackmail, confiscation, plunder, Communism, his intent personality stands out at this end of January 1885. The three heretical speeches open the campaign for the Radical programme and stir the orthodox to form into something like battle array. The clinching sentences of his case were stated in a hammer-and-anvil fashion in the second speech at Birmingham; summing-up, as they do, the spirit of the whole they must be quoted:

> I have been the subject of torrents of abuse and of whirlwinds of invective. . . . The working classes of this country are to continue in the future as they have in the past—to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters and to do their duty in the state of life to which it shall please God to call them. . . . The proposals which I have made are not directed against any class or any individual. I have had two objects in view. In the first place I want to see that the burthen of taxation is distributed according to the ability of the taxpayer, and in the second place I want to increase the production of the land and I want to multiply small owners and tenants. All this clamour about confiscation and blackmail and plunder is so much dust raised by men who are interested in maintaining the present system and who are either too prejudiced to read my proposals or too stupid to understand them. Let them keep their invective for some better occasion—for more apposite uses.
>
> If it be blackmail to propose that the rich should pay taxation in equal proportion to the poor, what word is strong enough to describe the present system under which the poor pay more than the rich?
>
> If it be confiscation to suggest that land may be acquired at a fair value for public purposes, what language will fitly describe the operations of those who have wrongfully appropriated the common land and have extended their boundaries at the expense of their poorer neighbours, too weak and too ignorant to resist them?
>
> If it be plunder to require the restitution of this ill-gotten property,

> I should like to know what we are to say to those who perpetrated the original act of appropriation. . . . I hold that the sanctity of public property is greater even than that of private property, and that if it has been lost or wasted or stolen, some equivalent must be found for it and some compensation may be fairly exacted from the wrongdoer.[1]

This is, of course, a very defective view of history whether economic or political; for in any case the arraigned wrongdoers were mostly dead long since, their capital had been sunk to fertilise enclosures; largely they had re-made the whole soil; their living successors were not responsible for the situation inherited; the profits of landed property under free imports were no longer what they used to be. Yet Chamberlain's doctrine rang with sterling conviction. Much of it, as we all recognise to-day, was sound good sense and good morals as well as magnificent agitation.

The spirit of this campaign anticipates by over thirty years the swarming talk—much of it ineffectual still—about national reconstruction towards the end of the World War and after. Of the Radical leader's policy in 1885 somewhat has been realised. On the financial side too much, as he would be the first to agree were he alive again. But no man can be responsible for a posthumous exaggeration of his ideas. Direct taxation to-day exacts from less than 10 per cent of the electorate in the interest of the rest, "ransom" with a vengeance beyond conceiving by him. But we must cast our minds back to that time nearly fifty years ago when the bias was heavy on the other side. Chamberlain was right in his desire to trim the scales of justice. Drift was called freedom, and every proposal to remedy the accumulating muddles of our urban and agrarian life was called "socialistic"; even though the Radical leader's programme in 1885 left untouched private enterprise in manufacture and commerce—apart from State encouragement of small ownership on the land, a principle most inimical to Socialism proper. Chamberlain aimed at nothing but wider and more equal opportunities for the development of a higher individual life amongst the masses of the people. *Punch* had a half-kindness for him at this phase—for whatever he was he was not dull—and pictured him[2] as "Joey"

[1] At Birmingham Town Hall, January 29, 1885. [2] February 14, 1885.

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of pantomime touching up the elderly citizen with a hot poker, its glowing end labelled "Socialism".

X

The Radical "terror" reopened the old controversy touching Ministerial discretion and relations with the Crown. After Ipswich the Queen intimated her disquiet.[1] Next, the "Members' meeting" at Birmingham led to a very remarkable exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and the nominal follower now riding so hard ahead.

Gladstone, disapproving—and far more deeply than he ever showed—the whole temper and direction of "constructive" Radicalism, was at first loath to interfere, having enough on his hands; but at last he felt compelled, and we must sympathise with him. All the Whig Ministers and some others were well entitled to hold that for the Radical leader to continue on this public tack while remaining in office was impossible. Otherwise they would be forced as publicly to repudiate his opinions. The Cabinet idea, at least as applied to domestic questions, would become an open farce. When these considerations became urgent Gladstone was staying, as it happened, with the Duke of Devonshire at Holker in an atmosphere little favourable to the new agitation. His method of complimentary admonition is inimitable, his verbal resource matchless, but he meets a man of sinew whose first instinct is to resign rather than suffer himself to be stayed in his course.[2]

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Holker Hall, January 31, 1885.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, . . . You were absent during the last Cabinets from a painful cause now I am glad to know no longer existing, or it would perhaps have been convenient to have had some conversation on this subject. It rarely happens, even in less anxious and busy times, that members of the Cabinet find themselves tempted to go so far afield into political questions not proximate, as your abundant store of energy and vigorous period of life have enabled and induced you to do. You would not be insensible to the risk that other

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 173.

[2] Gladstone's inmost feeling is better shown in his letter to Lord Granville on the same date (January 31), quoted on page 565.

"JOEY!"

From the cartoon by Linley Sambourne reproduced in *Punch*, February 14, 1885, by kind permission of the Proprietors

members of the Cabinet, exercising an abstract right in an opposite direction, might feel that silence would be interpreted as consent, and might deliver some opinions contradictory to yours; or again that, as will probably occur, there should be comment in Parliament on the subject such as to require notice. The consequence of such divarications is discredit *pro tanto* to the Government, and the weakness which ought to wait upon discredit. I would have sent you this sooner had I been aware that the Birmingham meeting was at hand.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

Highbury, February 3.—MY DEAR MR. GLADSTONE, . . . I can say truly that had it been possible for me to submit to you beforehand the speeches that I have recently delivered, I would have readily cancelled any part of them. . . . I know that you make allowance for the more advanced section of a mixed Government, who are in the position of continually accepting and supporting a policy which does not fully satisfy their sense of justice and is often inconsistent with their previously declared opinions. . . . I have proceeded on the assumption that with regard to questions of the future which were not immediately before the constituencies, but which were properly matters for discussion, each Minister was free to express an individual opinion without committing his colleagues. . . .

If I have erred in this interpretation of my liberties, I much regret the involuntary mistake, and should be glad in this case to know how far you regard it as seriously embarrassing to the Government and what course you would wish me now to pursue.

I have long felt the grave difficulty of reconciling the objects I have most at heart and the promotion of Radical opinions, with a continuance of official responsibility under existing conditions; and it may well be that I should best serve the cause I have espoused, and at the same time relieve you from some of the anxieties of the situation, by resuming an independent position. I can only say that if I am left to decide the question, I should be chiefly guided by my desire to do whatever you think best for the Government and least likely to add to your cares. . . .

But before sending this reply Chamberlain, divining close peril and prepared to fight at any cost, instantly sought touch with his ally in the Cabinet, telegraphed that he was coming to town next day, and meanwhile sent up the following in a "secret box".[1]

[1] Dilke's note in his *Life*, vol. ii. p. 104.

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CHAMBERLAIN TO DILKE

SECRET.—*Highbury* [*February* 2, 1885].—Before I see you to-morrow I want you to read the correspondence herewith.

1st. Letter from Mr. G. and enclosures.

2nd. Proposed reply.

Take them in connection with *The Times* articles. There is to be a dead-set evidently.

I don't like Mr. G.'s minute left to R. Grosvenor's discretion:[1]

There are three possibilities:

1. Mr. G. may wish me to resign.
2. A vote of censure may be proposed in H. of Commons and carried.
3. Mr. G. may defend me—and in doing so may to all intents and purposes censure me in such a way as to entail my resignation.

The 1st of these would not I think do me any harm. The 2nd would do me good. The 3rd would not be pleasant.

My object in proposed reply is to make Mr. G. speak more plainly and to let me know where I stand.

I have spoken above in the first person because (until I see you) I have no right to assume that you will accept a joint responsibility.

But I think you will—and then if we go out or are forced out there will be a devil of a row.

I have been speaking to Schnadhorst to-day on the possibility. He says (you must take the opinion for what it is worth) that it would strengthen us in the country and that a Liberal Government in 1886 without us would be an impossibility. I presume Tn [Trevelyan] would go with Mr. G. and Hartn. [Hartington].

When I see you I shall want to know what you think of it all—and whether you have any alterations to propose in the reply. As this ought to go by to-morrow's post drop me a line to B. of Trade to say if you could see me 4 P.M. instead of 5 P.M.

This might have been a sharp test of the alliance had not the pair renewed it just a few weeks before with the most binding vows.

[1] Gladstone, on receiving a letter of complaint against Chamberlain, had made a minute for the Chief Whip and sent a copy of it to Highbury: "They [Mr. Chamberlain's] are statements made on individual responsibility on matters entirely outside the action of the Government and having no relation to any matter which it has in hand or in view . . . all this for Lord R. G. [Richard Grosvenor] to use at his discretion. Jan. 23" [1885].

January 10, 1885.—*Dilke.*— . . . We are always pleased at the attempts of our friends to split us apart! I had this morning within five minutes two good specimens one on each tack. . . . The one from *The Economist*: "Both in substance and in tone it [Chamberlain's "Ransom" speech] can hardly have failed to be most distasteful to his colleagues—to Sir Charles Dilke quite as much as to Mr. Gladstone or Lord Hartington". The other from a friend of mine enclosing a bit of a letter from another friend of mine: "Dilke has become an idiot owing to his absurd adoration of his Radical friend". At all events *both* are hardly likely *to be quite* true and I leave you to take your choice.

January 11.—*Chamberlain.*— . . . The malice and ingenuity of man are so great that I should be afraid they would some day break our friendship—if it had not victoriously stood the strain of political life for so many years. I will swear that I will never do anything knowingly to imperil it, and I hope we are both agreed that if by any chance either of us should think he has the slightest cause of complaint, he will not keep it to himself for a day but will have a frank explanation. In this case I shall feel safe, for I am certain that any mistake would be immediately repaired by whoever might be in fault.

January 12.—*Dilke.*—I agree in every word you so prettily and kindly say—Yours ever affectionately.

The strength of the partnership lay exactly in the fact that its members were sworn to stand by each other even when not wholly of one mind. Dilke's fidelity at the present pinch required fortitude. Instead of wishing to leave the Government at that moment he wanted above all things to make the Seats Bill safe. Most of the powerful newspapers were in full blast against the Birmingham movement. John Morley had tried in vain to soften W. T. Stead's attitude towards Chamberlain, whom the *Pall Mall Gazette* pursued with peculiar animus.

When Chamberlain arrived on February 3, his ally remarked to him shrewdly that the object of the Whigs was to open a breach between the Radicals and the head of the Government—"We therefore play into their hands by going NOW". Yet making common cause without hesitation, the President of the Local Government Board informed the Prime Minister of his intention to go out if necessary with the President of the Board of Trade; and identified himself with the full claim to free speech by indi-

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vidual Ministers on issues of the future as distinguished from Cabinet questions of the day.

The Prime Minister's reply to Chamberlain's defence was patient but grave (February 5): "I think that, after all which has passed, a conversation in the Cabinet, when an opportunity offers, will be the best means of enabling you to estimate your personal situation: the matter being one of common interest to all our colleagues". He went on to say in effect that our unauthorised campaigner was claiming unprecedented latitude as a Minister, and that any Cabinet would be thrown into moral chaos were Ministers of diametrically opposite opinions upon questions of the future to exercise equal liberty in confuting each other. "Differences may at any time be forced upon the members of a Cabinet, but I should be deeply grieved if anything like a self-sought cause of difference were now to cause any difficulties among us." Further by covenant with the Conservatives, Ministers as a whole were pledged to do their best to carry the Seats Bill, and to keep that pledge was a matter of honour.

XI

On constitutional grounds Gladstone's position was impregnable and Chamberlain's untenable. He could not resign without suffering extreme damage in Parliament at least. While a Minister he could not keep up the Radical campaign with ceaseless force as he had designed. Plainly, he would have to suspend public operations for a few weeks or a few months until the Government fell; or until he could extricate himself from it in some better way than now offered.

How was he to come off well? He solved the problem with audacious but careful art by combining in the same letter deferential acceptance of Gladstone's constitutional propositions with a Radical manifesto which if its publication were forced by his expulsion from the Cabinet would have placed him, instead of the Premier, in the impregnable position.

This astutely elaborated reply, worked out designedly at great length, was framed in concert with his ally and sent as expressing their joint view. Dilke says of Chamberlain: "He covered his

retreat with great skill and the document as corrected by me would be valuable if it could be found".[1]

The document has been found by the present writer, and proves indeed to be of deep interest in several ways. Dilke's marginal emendations make few verbal changes, but he adds one telling little paragraph to strengthen an argument on the housing question. In a letter at the moment, he says about the potential manifesto (February 7):

> I have made no changes of substance and I agree and propose you should at once copy and send it, if the matter is not raised here to-day, and read it or circulate it if it is raised. I've made a few verbal changes and one suggestion of an addition.

On the same date the letter was dispatched to the Premier. As an unflinching restatement, though in scrupulously moderate words, of the whole Radical programme which we already know, it is far too long to be given in full here, but some passages upon coming democratic conditions well represent the spirit of the whole:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

> ... Popular government is inconsistent with the reticence which official etiquette formerly imposed on speakers and which was easily borne as long as the electorate was a comparatively small and privileged class, and the necessity of consulting it at meetings infrequent and limited. Now the platform has become one of the most powerful and indispensable instruments of Government, and any ministry which neglected the opportunities offered by it would speedily lose the confidence of the people.... Reform is not an end in itself but only the means to an end....
>
> Starting with the proposition that the obligations as well as the rights of property must be strictly enforced, I argued that the community as a whole owed to its poorer members something more in the way of social legislation, than it had already conceded in the Poor Law and the Education Act. I urged that the incidence of taxation still bore unequally on the working-classes and that the burthen should be in proportion to the means of the taxpayer. I also argued in favor of some practical attempt to multiply small owners and tenants....
>
> I will only say in conclusion that I believe the greater part of the

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 106.

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outcry against the speeches is raised by persons who have not done me the honour of reading them, and who have derived their opinion of their scope and tenor from the gross exaggerations and wilful perversions of certain organs of the press. . . . (*Feb.* 7, 1885.)

When this statement was received it had to be accepted without further ado for several reasons. No more could be obtained from Chamberlain. He had reasserted his intentions, and suspended his movement. Above all, one nail drove out another. The crisis created at this very moment by the news of Gordon's fate thrust the Radical programme into the background for a short time. In all the circumstances, it was impossible for Gladstone without ruin to press this controversy with his determined colleague. Again Chamberlain's defence, as a potential manifesto, was so skilfully and dangerously framed, for all its quietness, that its publication would have left him master of the ground in the eyes of a large majority of Liberals, and perhaps master of the future in view of the coming General Election under wider franchise.

He wrote as he had spoken, virtually as a co-leader. Small doubt that the Prime Minister from this moment was silently estranged and in no mind to make Chamberlain's aspirations easy of fulfilment.

It is significant enough that just after receiving this letter of obedience and challenge from Chamberlain in his own name and Dilke's, the Prime Minister wrote to Lord Acton: "There is no crisis at all in view. There is a process of slow modification and development, mainly in directions which I view with misgiving." He went on alluding to Radicalism though not naming it: "Its pet idea is what they call construction—that is to say taking into the hands of the State the business of the individual man".[1] In this he found "much to estrange me"; but he imagined what he found. Chamberlain's idea was not to displace private enterprise but to supplement it powerfully where it was no longer adequate for social justice and national needs.

Gladstone's mood was not very promising for the new democracy. He lived in a mental region astronomically aloof from the ordinary life and cares of the masses of the people

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 173 (to Lord Acton, February 11, 1885).

whom the Radical leader, after more than thirty years' helpful activity amongst them, had learned to know in the grain. On social questions, Gladstone was still a man of Peel's day; he could not conceive that "construction", as he put it with some disparagement, was bound inevitably to become the increasing demand of the working classes whom he himself had now made dominant; and indeed would be necessitated by the changing conditions of human life in the machine-age. The Prime Minister, with evident reference to Chamberlain and his speeches made other notes on the margin: "From various symptoms it is not improbable there may be a plan or intention to break up the party" (January 22).[1] Again he writes (January 31) to Granville:

> I think these declarations by Chamberlain upon matters which cannot, humanly speaking, become practical before the next Parliament, can hardly be construed otherwise than as having a remote and (in that sense) far-sighted purpose which is ominous enough . . . there is here a degree of method and system which seem to give the matter a new character.[2]

But also Gladstone felt for the first time that a member of his Cabinet had made a popular appeal not only independent of the Prime Minister but challenging to his proper authority. Imperious veterans, often weary when their position is not contested, are apt to recover tenacious intent when a young colleague seems to appear openly as a successor. This episode must have played its part in deciding this great man of the past generation still possessing supreme resources to reassert his sovereignty. Though he knew his own powers he much underrated the rising man whose force he might check but would not vanquish.

XII

Through nearly two months more, domestic interests were overshadowed by the crises in Imperial and foreign affairs. These events played their part not less than democratic agitation in moulding the future issues properly belonging to this narrative.

For weeks the nation and Greater Britain were torn by the

[1] To Granville, January 22, 1885, cited in Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 171.

[2] *Ibid.*, January 31, p. 174.

BOOK V. 1885. Gordon tragedy and excited by the prospect of reconquering the Sudan; then for weeks we seemed on the brink of a Russian war, and it might extend. In New Guinea we had to pay Prince Bismarck his blackmail without being sure of his services. The Cabinet seemed doomed at last; it lingered discredited. And then Gladstone turned the tables on Conservatives and Whigs alike by a *tour de force* of parliamentary genius never excelled.

Owing to his Ministerial difficulties about his speeches, Chamberlain was in London on February 5, and in the very early hours of that Thursday morning he received from the War Office the tidings of the fall of Khartoum. Like the nation, he was aghast. The country was roused by feelings unknown since the Indian Mutiny, but sadness and wrath were the deeper because touched with shame. The next month left an ineffaceable mark upon the memory of those then living, especially those of the younger generation. Press and platform resounded; the Government reeled. But Ministers, instead of resigning, adopted Gordon's policy. Mahdism was to be "smashed" up to Khartoum; and we were to leave some form of settled government behind us. Wolseley's army was to be reinforced; preparations put in hand for an autumn campaign.

How ill at ease was Chamberlain's mind his letters show, and his views for some weeks wavered in a strange way for him. He had one of his fits of black depression:

February 12, 1885.—*To Dilke.*— . . . It is possible that the victory reported to-day may enable Wolseley to push on this season. No doubt, if we keep the country in suspense about everything except cost and the loss of life through the climate until November next they will be in a pretty temper. . . . As long as there is the slightest doubt about Gordon's fate we are all right, but if his death is confirmed there will be a strong party for retirement. . . .

February 13.—*To Mrs. Pattison.*— . . . I am not able for a wonder to take a cheerful view of the situation. I do not care about the Government—but it is so difficult in present circumstances to satisfy oneself as to the right course to take,—to be true to one's principles—or to find any principles to be true to. . . .

February 13.—*To Dilke.*— . . . But what can we do? It is equally

dangerous to go or retire. I wish it were possible for Wolseley to advance at once. . . . CHAP. XXIII. ET. 49.

February 14.—*To "a correspondent"* (through his secretary).—Mr. Chamberlain agrees with you in deploring the war in the Sudan but he feels that the policy of running away from the fanatical leader who now occupies Khartoum would not further the cause of peace or prevent the effusion of blood.

February 15.—*To Morley.*— . . . If we were to adopt the magnanimous course (I am not sure that is a fitting word) of running away from the Mahdi, I fear that noble savage, as well as all the Powers of Europe, would misunderstand our motives and, sooner or later, under the weight of repeated humiliations, we should be driven into war that might be more serious than anything we have now to face.

On the other hand I am fully alive to the division of opinion which may be very serious in the country if not in the House of Commons. If we could make a rush to Khartoum it would be all right, but the long waiting, the probable ill-health of the troops, the heavy cost—will all tell against the Government and its policy and I confess I cannot see how we can survive it.

The case is a desperate one. I hate the war and all it involves but I cannot see that your policy would settle anything. . . . We must therefore retake Khartoum even if we leave it again immediately. I am ready to protest and resign if necessary rather than commit myself to any permanent occupation or any war of conquest properly so called.

Personally he has no wish to "survive it" as a Minister, and he has no relish for retaking Khartoum even when he agrees with the majority of his colleagues that it must be done. He strongly desired the Gladstone Ministry to make way for a "combination or patriotic Government" under Lord Hartington[1]—something like what we should call to-day a National Government. It would be formed to carry on the Sudanese war with the support of those who might go out with Gladstone.[2] As he considered the political future at home and the prospects on the Nile, less and less did the Radical leader care to remain directly responsible for the war, much less to accept any permanent reoccupation of the Sudan. His ally in the Cabinet

[1] Chamberlain to Dilke, February 25, 1885.
[2] Dilke's *Life*, p. 110.

BOOK V. 1885. demurred to the idea of a Hartington "combination", and this time had his way. Dilke's admirable handling of the Redistribution Bill and the Housing Commission was raising him just then to the very highest reputation, and he preferred to continue in office for a while.

Chamberlain made one suggestion[1] remarkable indeed in view of events years afterwards—that the Canadian Government should be invited to join in sending Colonial troops to Suakim.[2] It must always be remembered that Gordon's death, the New South Wales contingent and Bismarck's colonial policy opened a new era of Imperialism destined to be supported for many years by a majority of the new democracy about to come into play.

When Parliament met for the stormy debate on the vote of censure the Government was battered, but after all not shattered. The division taken at an unwonted hour, four o'clock on a Saturday morning, reduced its majority to 14. Later on that day, February 28, Ministers, at a Cabinet sitting said by some to be the longest in living memory, considered whether to go out or go on. Chamberlain, like half the Cabinet, including even Lord Granville, wanted to resign; but Gladstone's personal decision to the contrary just turned the scale. About this time he may have formed a silent resolution to retain the Liberal leadership up to the next General Election and for a sufficient time after, and not to put off his armour for ever except in the light of a last victory.

The Government would have been beaten and dismissed but for Hartington's assurances in its name that the retaking of Khartoum would be carried out at all costs. Instead, that policy was totally abandoned. Lord Wolseley himself had no strong relish for his task, and strengthened those who wished to abandon it by the extent of his demands.[3] One short week after the narrow division some Whig Ministers as well as the two Radicals were for "stopping our impossible campaign".[4] The rest of the Cabinet rapidly weakened in the same sense. And then a far greater crisis loomed. For Gladstone the Asiatic scare was a political godsend.

[1] February 9, 1884.
[2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. pp. 109, 110.
[3] Devonshire's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 28.
[4] Dilke's note, March 7, *Life*, vol. ii. p. 114.

XIII

On April 8, consternation fell upon Chamberlain, like his colleagues. They learned that the Russians had attacked the Afghans at Penjdeh and driven them out of that coveted position on the Kushk river, north of Herat. This happened in spite of the agreement months before for the peaceful demarcation of an uncertain frontier by a Joint Commission. What did it mean? For aught anyone knew it might be the push at last towards Herat itself. For strategical and moral reasons together, that Afghan city was held by many military experts, though not by all, to be the key of Indian defence.

There was a Stock Exchange panic, followed by panics on the European bourses. At first war seemed almost certain, and vast war. Bismarck was contriving other troubles for us, and had secretly concluded his "Double Insurance" Treaty with St. Petersburg. For some months the Cabinet had been concerned by the continued ominous advance of the Russians towards Herat since the capture of the Merv oasis. Already on March 26 the Reserves had been called out in view of the strain on our military resources. Once more it was "like Dizzy's days" again, but much worse.

Well before the news of Komaroff's attack on the Amir's outpost reached London, a letter from the Radical leader to one of his most important followers breathed anxiety and warning:

March 30, 1885.—*To Dr. Dale.*— . . . You will, of course, bear in mind that we must not consider alone public opinion in this country. If that were all I should not hesitate to urge that you should do your best, and you can do a great deal, to bring about a more healthy state of feeling and to deprecate the Jingo spirit in which our newspapers and many speakers are approaching the consideration of a very difficult subject; but I greatly fear that at the present moment any action of the kind might be misinterpreted abroad.

The great security for peace lies in impressing the Russians with the conviction that they cannot do as they like and that English opinion is united. Otherwise, the experience of the Crimean War will be repeated, for although I do not think that our case is as clear as it ought to be, I have little doubt in my own mind that the Russian policy is ultimately

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to obtain a hold in Afghanistan, and that they would seize the present opportunity if they thought they could do so safely.

In the meantime, while pressing forward our preparations for war we are doing all in our power to prevent a collision on the frontier, and to secure a settlement by friendly negotiation. I think the probability is that we shall succeed although the question is still in a critical condition.

Just over a week after Chamberlain wrote this letter came the news that the collision he hoped would be avoided had occurred; and that peace between the British and the Russian Empires hung by a hair. We must realise that, only a few weeks before, the British Boundary Commissioner, Sir Peter Lumsden, had telegraphed: "The loss of Penjdeh will be an irretrievable blot on our prestige in Asia. . . . I reiterate my conviction of fatal consequences of giving up Afghan title to Penjdeh."

Despite these militant words Chamberlain was resolved to save the peace, and with the utmost energy he set to work. He was all himself on this question. While prepared to offer an unbending front to proved aggression, he refused to accept as proof what at best as yet was no more than presumption. Already occupied with the Anglo-Russian question before the clash at Penjdeh, he was not satisfied with the British case but thoroughly uncomfortable about it. Three weeks earlier, on March 17, he had circulated to his colleagues a Cabinet minute on the subject. Arguing for caution and reservation of judgment with respect to everything that had yet happened in a region so obscure, he was in a minority of one. Yet he foreshadowed the very settlement that averted war.

The minute was a long and close analysis. He confessed that he had begun his consideration of the case with a prejudice against the Russians, and still believed them to have "concealed objects dangerous to our Indian Empire". Then he sketched the rival arguments, Afghan and Russian, as they might be stated in an imaginary lawsuit. In this quarrel about debatable ground little known, the case for the Russians at every point was at least plausible. "The case against them is not so clear as to give us an indefeasible plea of bad faith, and consequent justification for pushing matters even to the point of war." He recommended arbitration without illusions—"it is not of much

consequence to us what the decision is"; furnishing Afghanistan with guns, munitions, money, without sending British troops into a country which might turn against them; and the steady strengthening of the Indian frontier proper. Russia already ruled over part of the lands grazed by the Sarik Turcomans, and it might be better for order and peace to let her extend her authority over the whole tribe.

The practical force of the Russian argument, as we have all learned to understand since the great war-scare in the spring of 1885, was that in view of the ceaseless disputes about water, they would have to push up towards the head-springs, until the watershed became the frontier.

As the Minister for Trade went further into the subject he became more convinced in the sense of his minute. On April 4 he noted to Dilke:

> The more I study the matter the more I think that the Russians are right both in form and substance. . . . But we cannot have the pill forced down our throats by Russia without enquiry or discussion on equal terms.

For weeks before the crisis no other member whatever of the Cabinet saw the essentials with so clear an eye. Dilke by creed was more anti-Russian. War was no sooner threatened than Chamberlain, in the spirit of his Cabinet minute, seems to have suggested arbitration confidentially in pro-Russian quarters. Of how it was done there is no trace in Chamberlain's papers.

Conveyed to the Russian Ambassador, de Staal, in the first days of the crisis, the suggestion was promptly reciprocated. Dilke testified:

> Chamberlain consulted me as to whether he should tell Mr. Gladstone it was his, and I told him that I thought he had better not. . . . It was more likely to be successful as coming from the Russian Ambassador and Stead than as coming from him.[1]

So little—and it counts in this narrative—was the Radical leader a favourite with the Prime Minister. After long anxiety the plan first proposed by Chamberlain's even judgment settled the crisis, and in the end other peaceful means settled the whole

[1] Dilke's note under date April 13. *Life*, vol. ii. p. 117.

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question. Chamberlain's part in this episode stands in a high degree to the credit of his capacity as a statesman. Throwing into it great earnestness and courage, he made up his mind that in no case short of undoubted Russian aggression would he consent to war. While most of the country was talking of it he wrote another good letter to Birmingham:

April 24, 1885.—*To Dr. Dale.*— . . . I think I am justified in saying that although the situation is grave there is no immediate probability of a breach, and as at present advised such a breach will not take place as long as I am in the Government. When I leave you may consider that the time has come for squalls. . . .

It must be remembered that the first suggestions of arbitration were violently unpopular. Nothing, it seemed, would satisfy some devoted patriots but the prostration of the Tsar of Russia before the Amir of Afghanistan.

XIV

Chamberlain felt sure there would be peace. Dilke, on the other hand, was full of war-plans. He had always wished, as we know, to be First Lord of the Admiralty; then, as for years afterwards, he was intensely and most ably interested in armies and navies, bases and strategy. What the Prime Minister really thought will never, it seems, be known. He may have counted like Chamberlain upon the virtual certainty of peace. He may have believed that assurance of peace would be doubly assured by such a symbol of war-strength as would impress the whole world, Bismarck included. Or as head of a Government and a party he may have perceived a marvellous chance to raise both from the depths of misfortune while retrieving and enhancing his personal supremacy.

This miracle he wrought, and for once exceeded all Disraelian conceptions of a *coup de théâtre*.

While the issue of peace or war was supposed by the good multitude to be still wavering in the balance, Mr. Gladstone, in his solemn and electrifying appeal of April 27, transcended Disraeli by proposing a vote of credit for £11,000,000, including Sudanese expenses with the cost of armed preparation against

Russia. Vindicating the honour and power of Britain above even its love of peace, the venerable orator, like some aged but dauntless paladin, rose to a height of parliamentary majesty that even he had never touched. Conservatives who abhorred him when he stood up were overcome as he swayed the House, and when he sat down opposition was dissolved.

The speech was great, the political strategy wonderful past compare. He secured what had seemed impossible a few weeks before—the abandonment of the Sudan to the Mahdi; he covered without a single protest the costs of futility and tragedy in Africa; while assuring lustre and dignity for his intended settlement in Asia. He restored the almost ruined position of his Government, and in his seventy-sixth year exalted his own. Never were more multiplex purposes obtained in Parliament by a single effort. But in spite of all, it was the swan-song of his administration, and the last absolute triumph he ever was to know, though his parliamentary career was prolonged for nearly a decade more.

When Chamberlain appeared next evening as the principal guest of the Eighty Club, he dwelt rather on social reform and was thought to dissociate himself somewhat conspicuously from the war-like tone of his political chief:

> We are met, I am afraid, under circumstances which are not altogether favourable for the calm and impartial discussion of political questions:
>
> The sound of tumult troubles all the air,
> Like the low thunders from a sultry sky.
>
> . . . War—even a successful war—is so great a misfortune for all who are engaged in it, that it is the highest obligation of a patriotic Government to exhaust every means of honourable and amicable settlement. But if, when we have done that, we find ourselves face to face with a determined policy of aggression, and have to make an appeal to the loyalty and support of the Empire, I believe that the summons will be responded to as it has been in past times, and that the English democracy will show that it is patient and resolute and enduring to the end, and that it will exhibit that courage and tenacity which have always distinguished the Anglo-Saxon race.

It was a deeper confession of faith than most of his hearers understood. But after that short exordium he left the topic of

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the moment and discoursed upon the social question, though in smouldering terms, not like the blaze of incitement and suggestion before he had wisely constrained himself by his adjustment with Gladstone not to outrage his Whig colleagues again until he was free from office.[1]

Four days later, on May 2, Russia accepted arbitration, as the Radical leader alone had urged on the Cabinet six weeks before. Arbitration was not in fact the actual process in the sequel, but the spirit of the acceptance ensured peace. He had felt it would turn out that way, and now sent from Highbury a jest to Dilke, from whom he heard the news:

> I assume that the information will be *immediately* communicated to the House—otherwise we shall be open to charges of bad faith and secret agreements. But then what becomes of the Vote of Credit and the Budget? It seems cheeky to ask for 6½ millions of Preparations when the matter is practically settled.[2]

Both the African and the Asiatic nightmares were dispelled at that moment by the Prime Minister's sorcery. Ordinary politicians thought that this Cabinet might last for another six months at least. Yet within a few more days it was doomed at last to a speedy fall. There were other issues behind the scenes, and they became paramount after the end of the Sudan entanglement and the agreement on Central Asia. Throughout these four tumultuous months since the New Year, Chamberlain, unknown to the country, was in the thick of new Irish negotiations. They would decide his personal career and the course of politics for a generation.

[1] Speech to the Eighty Club on Tuesday evening, April 28, 1885, at the Westminster Palace Hotel.

[2] Chamberlain to Dilke, May 3, 1885.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHAMBERLAIN AND AN IRISH COUNCIL—FALL OF THE GLADSTONE GOVERNMENT

(1885)

O'Shea reappears—Parnell and "Practical Settlement"—The Irish "National Council" Plan—Suppressed Letters and a Fatal Misunderstanding—Chamberlain's Good Faith and Great Struggle—Cardinal Manning supports—The Ninth of May—Spencer wins—The Cabinet doomed—Confusion worse confounded—The Radical Allies in Suspended Resignation—Gladstone estranged—Coercion and the Budget—The Crash at Last—The End of an Epoch.

I

From the New Year to the midsummer of 1885 Chamberlain endeavoured nothing less than to negotiate a "practical settlement" of the Irish Question. He had full reason to think his prospects good. His attempt was the real beginning of the Home Rule conflict. Long known more or less to a very few, this affair never has been fully explained till now, for none of the actors themselves were aware of all the motives. It is an episode full-charged with audacities, cross-purposes, misunderstanding and fate.

When it began the Radical leader was the last person to suspect what would come of it in the end; but it was to be a decisive influence, not only on the rest of his own life, but on the destiny of every person directly or otherwise involved, particularly Gladstone and Parnell. It is an episode historic in every trait, and yet it has the elements of fantastic fiction; interludes of comedy and satire; ecclesiastical entrances and exits alternating with the manœuvres of a luckless go-between. The memorable personal tragedy on the Irish side a decade later is directly traceable to this transaction.

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In Chamberlain's own career it is the real turning-point reached unawares months before the disruption of Liberalism.

> In the early part of this year (1885), while I was publicly advocating a Radical programme for Great Britain, I was also endeavouring to arrange for a settlement of the Irish land and local government questions.[1]

This was one of the bare notes made by Chamberlain looking back. It is far from suggesting the scope and colour of the business he set afoot. He was led to undertake it partly by his boundless originating activity at that time, partly by ambiguous inducements. It will be seen that his own straightforwardness never swerved. When he thought his good faith had been grossly abused, his rupture with Parnell came before his severance from Gladstone. On evidence apparently complete, his belief that he had been betrayed seemed wholly justified. He never knew until too late that a material part of the truth had been hidden both from himself and the Irish leader.

Since the Kilmainham treaty frustrated by the assassinations we have seen little of the figure of O'Shea. Now, "the Captain" resumes his comings and goings. His political objects are excellent, though including some views to his personal advantage. This time, by trying to make the end justify the means, he works as much mischief as though he were the *Spielmann*.

II

In the autumn of 1884 and at the turn of the year the situation in Ireland was more than ever perplexing and the outcome incalculable. Lord Spencer's hard rule was more bitterly attacked than any former coercive regime. The Nationalists, totally estranged from Gladstone's Government, longed for vengeance on Liberalism, but controlled the feeling until large reinforcement of their parliamentary strength was sure.

The two Radical Ministers, overborne by the majority of their colleagues, detested coercion, except for the single purpose of putting down active intimidation. They saw that affairs could not be carried on much longer on the old basis. From the beginning they had supported complete political equality

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

for Ireland under the new Reform Bills, though this meant, as we already know, that Parnell's phalanx, whenever the next elections were held, would return to the House of Commons at least 80 strong, counting 160 on a division. How could repressive law for the neighbouring island coexist with its political equality and increased political power conceded with open eyes? The Radical allies were determined on remedial legislation at an early date, and were sanguine as to its healing effect.

Parnell himself had become a mystery. For two years the "Uncrowned King" reappeared in his country only at the rarest intervals to accept tribute or crush revolt. At the point reached at present in this narrative even devoted Nationalists, feeling almost deserted by the Chief, asked, "Do you think that Parnell is tired of the whole business and means to chuck it up?"[1] Amongst the mass of his people the mystery only strengthened the superstition of his spell; but this was not understood by many Irish politicians, much less by English statesmen.

> In October and November 1884 [notes Chamberlain] Mr. O'Shea frequently had interviews with me at the House of Commons and at my own house, and discussed the possibility of some *modus vivendi* being found which might enable the Irish Nationalist Party to work with the Government and would offer a chance of the settlement of the Irish difficulty.[2]

The conversations turned on two points—limiting coercion to the minimum and extending local government to the utmost short of weakening the Imperial connection.

> In these discussions Mr. O'Shea declared himself to be the spokesman of Mr. Parnell, who he said was getting sick of the agitation and would gladly bring it to a close if reasonable concessions were made.[3]

But any attempt to renew with the same stringency the Crimes Act—due to expire at the end of the next session—would be resisted to the death by the Irish party; and as for Local Government something more was required for Ireland than the County Councils in view for Great Britain.

Parnell may well have encouraged the emissary to take soundings in this way, and may have been firmly prepared for an inter-

[1] Barry O'Brien, *Life of Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 36.

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[3] *Ibid.*

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mediate arrangement without prejudice to his further plans. His "spokesman", as we know too well, was anything but his full confidant.

At the end of November 1884—it was the 27th—pourparlers with a view to negotiation were opened. O'Shea brought to Chamberlain a short note purporting to contain Parnell's views, though framed not to commit him:

> Independent suggestion which Mr. O'Shea might in due course submit in the proper quarter. The advisability in order to cover any partial renewal of the Crimes Act of introducing in the same Bill a considerable measure of County Government with important accessories touching the public Boards in Dublin; or else of limiting the duration of the re-enactment to one year from September 1885.

To leave the new Parliament free to deal afresh with Ireland was the object of the latter alternative. Chamberlain—and he would—far preferred the other course of accompanying least coercion with most self-government. The conversations with the intermediary, Dilke sometimes being present, went on until they were interrupted by the Christmas holidays. In conjunction with Parnell—whose own ideas were always supposed to be the matter of discussion—O'Shea was to work out a definite scheme of minor Home Rule. Chamberlain believed the suggestion of the intermediary—who believed it himself—that though the scheme did not recognise National idealism in Ireland, it would mean in practice a final settlement. The more the Radicals contemplated what they thought a new vision of peace, the better they liked it.

III

Some days later—a week before that Christmas of 1884, the last that was to see either Liberalism or Radicalism united on the Irish Question—Chamberlain wrote in very remarkable terms to an old supporter of his in the Midlands, Mr. W. H. Duignan[1] of Walsall, who by blood and connection had warm sympathies with Ireland and had recently returned from a visit

[1] It has been oddly suggested that "W. H. Duignan" was a bogus name, a pseudonym for O'Shea himself! (Henry Harrison, *Parnell Vindicated*, p. 356). A very real and worthy person, Duignan had been a correspondent and admirer of Chamberlain for many years.

there. His account to the Radical was that he found much improvement but that the large majority of the people were still Nationalist. Chamberlain's reply expressed with drastic candour both sides of his mind and explains all that followed. Nothing shows more clearly how ineradicable in his nature were the two distinct opinions he had held since his first entry into public life—his sympathy with the fullest subordinate Home Rule, and his insuperable antagonism to co-ordinate Parliaments as certain to lead to separation virtual or avowed. So he jibs at the word "Nationalist".

December 17, 1884.— . . . I should like to know exactly what this word means and what the people really want. But before entering on this enquiry I ought to say that the answer to it will not necessarily be conclusive in my mind as to the policy to be adopted. I do not consider that wishes and rights are necessarily identical, or that it is sufficient to find out what the majority of the Irish people desire in order at once to grant their demands. I can never consent to regard Ireland as a separate people with the inherent rights of an absolutely independent community. . . .

Accordingly, if Nationalism means separation, I for one am prepared to resist it. I see in it the probability, almost the certainty, of dangerous complications and an antagonism which would be injurious to the interests of the larger country and fatal to the prosperity of the smaller. Sooner than yield on this point I would govern Ireland by force to the end of the chapter.

Then with the same trenchant frankness he states his other view:

But if Nationalism means Home Rule, I have no objection to make in principle, and am only anxious to find out exactly what it means.

I object to the Home Rule proposed by the late Mr. Butt, because I believe it would not work, but would infallibly lead to a demand for entire separation.

On the other hand, I consider that Ireland has a right to a Local Government more complete, more popular, more thoroughly representative, and more far-reaching than anything that has hitherto been proposed, and I hope that the first session of a reformed Parliament will settle this question, so far at least as what is generally called County Government is concerned.

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But for myself I am willing to go even further. I believe that there are questions, not local in any narrow sense, but which require local and exceptional treatment in Ireland and which cannot be dealt with to the satisfaction of the Irish people by an Imperial Parliament.

Chief among them are the education question and the land question, and I would not hesitate to transfer their consideration and solution entirely to an Irish Board altogether independent of English Government influence. Such a Board might also deal with railways and other communications, and would, of course, be invested with powers of taxation in Ireland for these strictly Irish purposes.

I doubt if it would be wise or possible to go any further, and I do not know if public opinion would at present support so great a change; but if I were entirely free I should be greatly inclined to make a speech or two in Ireland submitting these proposals. If they were carried out the Irish people would have entire independence as regards all local work and local expenditure, Irish newspapers and politicians would find occupation, I hope more congenial than that of bullying English officials and the English House of Commons, while the Imperial Parliament would continue to regulate for the common good the national policy of the three Kingdoms.[1]

Despite its uncompromising repudiation of any policy weakening the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament or loosening the United Kingdom, this letter was the first declaration by an English statesman holding office in favour of an Irish National Council such as Ulster might have joined. The recipient begged permission to publish the letter. Chamberlain refused. Duignan then asked whether he might show it to some personal friends. This privilege was granted and so liberally used that by the New Year of 1885 the letter in full was known to various leading members of the Irish party. The effect was profound. There were two views. Some, like William O'Brien and Healy, saw Chamberlain as potentially the most formidable enemy of the full Nationalist claim. Moderates like Dwyer Gray, proprietor of the Dublin *Freeman*, then the great daily newspaper on the Home Rule side, thought that Chamberlain's spirit and plan offered the wisest and surest basis for an Irish settlement.

Parnell took another line. He was in Ireland again. Having

[1] Chamberlain to W. H. Duignan, December 17, 1884.

bided his time for two years, he was just about to attain the climax of his power by summoning his movement to fight for full nationalism as a goal now almost in sight. He never was more worshipped. When he studied the letter to Duignan he saw from his own standpoint, and he never considered any other, both attractions and objections. First, he suspected quite wrongly that Chamberlain was seeking to meddle and tamper with his own following and to divide it. Secondly, these very practical proposals might serve great intermediate uses in Ireland while the further future was still uncertain. But, thirdly, though welcoming the prospect of an Irish Central Board for administrative purposes, he did not wish it to have legislative powers such as Chamberlain designed; for this might weaken the full demand for an Irish Parliament and confuse the Nationalist movement. Of emotional response to British sympathies, whether democratic or other, Parnell had not a spark.

He authorised O'Shea to negotiate—but on cold terms not fully disclosed by that go-between, and in essential particulars never known to Chamberlain until long after. As little did Parnell know of the suppression. This was the hidden fatality. No plot of the old-fashioned theatre of intrigue can surpass this when we consider that O'Shea owed his footing in the affair and his high personal hopes at the moment to the fact—whether sufficiently suspected by him or not—that his wife was Parnell's mistress. We must first see what the ingenious diplomat communicated and then what he withheld.

IV

On the afternoon of January 15, 1885, Captain O'Shea kept an appointment fixed with Chamberlain after several attempts. We must picture him appearing at the Board of Trade with his vivacious suavity and his air of confidential influence in what he liked to call the "proper quarters"—a word well known in Ireland. The preliminaries were dramatic.

He produced, and deposited with the Minister, a document in his own large, smooth handwriting. He declared it to be in fact Parnell's own scheme for a Central Board—that is a National Council—and subsidiary reforms in Ireland. In a few more days

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he brought another document equally interesting and still more curious. It was, he said, a copy of the Crimes Act with Mr. Parnell's own amendments—suggesting a mild measure which might be allowed to pass after a show of resistance. But the "amendments" were exclusively in the shape of long and drastic pen-strokes such as anyone might have made. There was not a tittle or trace of the Irish leader's own writing.

The first conversation was animated without commitment. The proposition had been brought for the Minister to study. He thought it so significant that, "pleased and perhaps a little astonished",[1] he went at once to the Prime Minister and told him all that had passed. The Prime Minister was less surprised. "Mr. Gladstone told me that he had received a similar scheme embodying Mr. Parnell's views through Mrs. O'Shea." As we now know, this scheme called similar was the larger plan of Home Rule transmitted long before by Mrs. O'Shea through Lord Richard Grosvenor.[2] "He (Mr. Gladstone) approved of my action in entertaining the proposal which he thought was hopeful, and requested me to continue the conversations."[3]

The document produced by O'Shea at the Board of Trade on January 15 as "Parnell's scheme", though wholly in the intermediary's exemplary script, may be summarised as follows:

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND

I. *County Boards* for all County business, with compulsory powers to purchase or lease land and with a right to associate amongst each other for common purposes. "In order to guard the rights of landowners, a representation in proportion to the rates paid by them might be admitted."

II. *A Central Board* indirectly elected by the County Boards and the municipalities with "weighted" representation for landowners. "To the Central Board would be handed over the management of such public departments as the following: (1) The Local Government Board; (2) The Board of Works; (3) The Board of National Education; (4) The Board of Intermediate Education; (5) The Irish Fishery Board; (6) The Lunatic Asylums

[1] Chamberlain to Morley, January 21, 1885.

[2] Mrs. O'Shea, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, vol. ii. pp. 18-20.

[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

Board; (7) The General Valuation and Boundary Survey; (8) Charitable Donations and Bequests Commission; (9) Endowed School Commission, etc."

III. *Financial powers and resources.* "The Central Board would have power to levy national rates for such purposes as internal improvements, harbours, arterial drainage, tree-planting, the reclamation and improvement of land; for subsidies and guarantees of interest for railways, tramways and public enterprises; for guarantees in reference to the purchase of their holdings by tenants, and similar objects, and for the better housing of the poor and working classes. It would be entitled to borrow money from the Treasury. . . . It would have power to move Ministers to ask Parliament for contributions from the Imperial Exchequer not exceeding the proportion of such contributions to rates granted for similar purposes in England."

IV. "There would be no appeal from the Central Board except on the question of legal power, and such appeal would be finally decided by the Supreme Court of Appeal in Dublin. (*Signed*) W. H. O'SHEA. January 14, 1885."

Chamberlain at once put his finger on a blank spot. What of the police?

> I pointed out to Mr. O'Shea that in some respects the proposal was more conservative than I expected, especially as provision was made for a separate representation of landowners, and no claim was put forward for the control of the police.[1]

O'Shea said that these points had been fully considered by Parnell, and he added that, if such a Council were established, Parnell most probably would be willing to accept the Chairmanship.[2]

The go-between claimed that in concert with Parnell, in the same way as they had worked out together the Kilmainham treaty, this big plan had been framed. It was not the last word in the Irish Question. But in practice might it not mean pacifica-

[1] Gladstone afterwards claimed that he went further than Chamberlain as favouring Irish control of the police (Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 197). This is erroneous. Chamberlain for his own part was as willing as Gladstone to give control of the police if desired by Parnell, whose views he wished to meet. Parnell did not desire it then because he wished to keep in being full Nationalist agitation.

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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tion for a long time with scope and stimulus for every kind of practical and prosperous development in Ireland?

This was and remained Chamberlain's conviction. He believed that such a scheme would rally the moderates in Ireland and isolate the extremists. As for the imaginative force and the inextinguishable passion of Irish nationalism, he never knew fully what they meant. But whatever they meant, he for one would not yield to them at the price of breaking up the United Kingdom instead of remodelling it thoroughly, as he became more and more prepared to do in these months while he went on thinking.

What led him, however, to take action in a way that altered everything in politics was the assurance to him that the scheme was Parnell's "own proposal" for a "final settlement". O'Shea suppressed the letters proving, with other evidence, that finality on this basis never for a single moment was contemplated or suggested in public or private by the Irish leader.

V

We must continue somewhat further the relation of things as they seemed before coming to the secret of things as they were. When negotiations had been some days in train, the intermediary's methods alarmed and angered Chamberlain in a way that by itself might have put him more on his guard for the future had he been of a reserved habit in confidential intercourse—a sort of distrust singularly foreign to his character.

To talk more of the big plan three days after it was presented, the member for Clare had another meeting with the Minister for Trade. This interview he travestied to Parnell with a florid plausibility diverting enough. By now revelling in his own cleverness, he was misrepresenting the two principals to each other with the fervent desire to smooth them into agreement:

O'SHEA TO PARNELL

January 18, 1885.—I had a conversation with Chamberlain yesterday, in the course of which I put before him our views and wishes.

The Man on the Tricycle, a person of the name of Dignum (*sic*), has been careering a little too fast. . . . Chamberlain acknowledged to me

that he wasn't quite sure that he wasn't rather sorry that he had answered Dignum. This is the formula for a Cabinet Minister who thinks fit to acknowledge that he has made an ass of himself. However, Chamberlain does not do this very often, and the best generally are those who make the fewest mistakes. Dignum saw and seized a chance of making himself *dignior*. . . . I explained the position in which you are placed, and as long as you are practical for the time being, Chamberlain does not appear to mind the determination which you are expressing in your speeches of recovering Grattan's Parliament. . . .

I then read and explained to him your system of Irish administration and left the papers with him. . . .

Chamberlain observed that all this might be premature, that I was proceeding somewhat as if he were already Prime Minister and I Chief Secretary. After a little conversation as to the proportions of local taxation and the proposed representation of landlord and tenant he explained the situation as it appeared to him. Gladstone says he will retire before the Dissolution. The first men Hartington will send for will be Chamberlain and Dilke, to whom he will offer a choice of places. . . .[1]

The following terms are suggested for your approval. (1) Chamberlain to accept generally your programme of administrative reform in Ireland. . . . (2) Chamberlain to prevent the renewal of the Crimes Act for more than one year. (3) You, on the other hand, to suggest that you are willing to give the new democratic power a chance. . . . (4) You to call Heaven to witness that you and yours will die on the floor of the House rather than allow the Crimes Act to be re-enacted for more than one year. . . .

Chamberlain believes, and I go with him, that personally he could do better by devoting himself to English reforms; that this would better please his Merry Men; that he could drag the Whigs with him and against the common foe, the Irish enemies. But he is anxious to settle Ireland and will work steadily and fairly with us if you will put him in a position to overcome objections by the argument of 80 votes. . . . Besides, there will be a good many appointments to distribute.[2]

[1] O'Shea might well be impressed by the idea that before long, under Hartington's Premiership, Chamberlain would be Chancellor of the Exchequer and Dilke Foreign Secretary.

[2] Long afterwards O'Shea apologised for this elated burlesque. Writing to Chamberlain on August 10, 1888, he says: ". . . I suppose I ought not to have written as I did, but anyone knowing the terms on which I then was with Parnell would make some allowance for the style. . . . I fully admit that the letter did not contain, nor attempt to contain, a literal account of our interview, but was

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When Chamberlain read the impudent levity of this effusion, blandly copied for his edification by the writer, his scorn and wrath blazed:

TO O'SHEA

January 21.—Speaking frankly, as a friend should do, I must say that you have a most damnable habit of letter-writing. Take the present case. You come to me for a chat and I talk to you according to my wont, fully and openly—perhaps even indiscreetly—about Irish affairs *et omnibus aliis*. . . . You send me a detailed précis of the interview according to your recollection of it, winding up with the heads of a cut and dried treaty of alliance, as to which I will only say that it resembles the late Lord Brougham's nose in its most important characteristic, namely, that it is all on one side. You ask me to approve of this document, which you send to me in an envelope which arrives open on two sides, whether by design or accident I know not.

I can only reply that your report of the conversation seems to me to omit much that I considered of importance and to include some things I cannot accept as accurate. . . .

One thing, however, I must make clear: the time has not arrived for any negotiation or agreement. I am very glad to know Mr. Parnell's views on local government, which in principle seem to be the same as my own. If this turns out to be the case I shall be glad to find that we are working on the same lines. As to any support he may be able to give to English Radicals in matters in which they are interested, I will neither ask nor receive a pledge. Experience alone can show if there is any possibility of co-operation between the Irish party and the English democracy.

After that O'Shea never took a liberty again. Misled, like Herbert Bismarck and others, by Chamberlain's irrepressible love of free language and free speculation in confidential talk not binding on either side, the gallant captain had not realised be-

rather my own version of it interspersed with my own comments on the political situation suggested by general personal observation. I cannot at this distance of time separate what was yours from what was mine in the picture I drew. . . . Parnell knows perfectly well that you at once repudiated all responsibility for my description of the interview, for I told him so the next time I saw him and I often spoke to him about it afterwards." — Unfortunately there is no extant proof of accuracy in the latter respect; and as O'Shea was withholding some of Parnell's letters it cannot be assumed that he reported Chamberlain's full mind.

fore, or had forgotten for the moment, what the sudden other edge of Chamberlain's character could be.

VI

Encouraged by Gladstone's approval, the Radical leader was himself convinced that an extensive reform of the system of Irish Government local and central was the best thing for its own sake, apart from any question of reciprocal compacts with Parnell. After the jarring episode just mentioned, he described his state of feeling in a very full and instructive letter to John Morley. Much of it recounts matters already familiar in these pages and not necessary to repeat, but a passage or two must be given:

TO MORLEY

January 21, 1885.—Referring to my recent conversation with you in reference to Irish affairs I am beginning to be a little uneasy on the subject of Captain O'Shea's volunteered communications.

I believe him to be perfectly honourable and sincere, but he has a perfect mania for diplomacy, and seems inclined to press matters as if he were actually negotiating a treaty between two high contracting parties. Now, I do not believe that any treaty is either possible or desirable, although I think the force of circumstances and the interests of all true friends of Ireland would naturally point in the direction of co-operation between the leaders of the National Party and the English democracy. The former profess to desire independent government and possibly separation? . . . In any case, even English Radical opinion is not prepared for this contingency, to which I personally have the strongest possible objection, as I believe it would be dangerous to England and disastrous to Ireland. . . .

The plan which has been forming itself in my mind for some time past is to have a thoroughly effective popular County Government . . . and then to complete the work by establishing a Central Board consisting either of delegates from the County Boards or of separately elected representatives. . . .

I have talked this scheme over with many people, including Lord Spencer and Mr. Trevelyan, and although objections have been taken they have not been absolute and might, I think, be overcome. . . .

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I confess that I was pleased and perhaps a little astonished to receive from O'Shea a scheme which he declares has the approval of Mr. Parnell and which embodies most of my propositions. . . .

I have told O'Shea that I cannot accept his account of the conversation as accurate . . . at present my impression is that a solution of Irish difficulties will be rather delayed than hastened by his officious but well-meant interference.

Without much further communication with the emissary for some time, the Radical leader, after launching his "unauthorised programme" for British democracy, went on with the private work of trying to convert his reluctant or doubtful colleagues, and was full of hope. So was Dilke, who wrote to Grant Duff: "Chamberlain has a grand scheme for an Irish Board".[1]

Thus far regarding what O'Shea put forward in Parnell's name. What did he withhold now and for "several years later"? Incredible to say, he concealed with infatuated finesse two letters stating the Irish dictator's real position.[2] Before the pourparlers began Parnell gave imperative warning to the man who claimed to be his mouthpiece.

PARNELL TO O'SHEA

January 5, 1885.— . . . In talking to our friend [Chamberlain] you must give him clearly to understand that we do *not* propose this Local Self-Government plank as a substitute for the restitution of our Irish Parliament, but solely as an improvement of the present system of Local Government in Ireland. The claim for restitution of Parliament would still remain. Some people think it would be weakened, others, strengthened by the concession. I myself think that this improvement of Local Government in Ireland if carried out would have very little effect one way or the other upon the larger question.

This was serious for O'Shea. He knew that nothing on earth could persuade Chamberlain to consider the claim for an Irish Parliament; or to strengthen that claim as Parnell meant. The intermediary fears that his negotiation may break down at the outset; he is threatened with stultification in the eyes of the

[1] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 124 (January 23, 1885).

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum". He nowhere gives the exact date when he learned of the existence and contents of these letters. It was towards the end of 1886, nearly two years later.

Radical Minister to whom he has represented himself as almost a plenipotentiary, not an agent rigidly limited. O'Shea writes and expostulates:

O'SHEA TO PARNELL

January 6.—I now scarcely know how to act, inasmuch as your letter would appear to convey, on the eve of coming to close quarters in the negotiations, that I am still to demand one of the widest extensions of political and popular administration imaginable, at the same time withdrawing any offer of party advantage or parliamentary peace. I am afraid that this would be a proposal too Dutch to deserve success. Please let me have your further views. Time is short.

Parnell meanwhile had crossed over to Ireland, where he heard more from some of his chief followers about Chamberlain's letter to Duignan and saw still more clearly that its conception of legislative as well as administrative powers for an Irish Council might indeed weaken the demand for full Home Rule and confuse his movement. This caused him to regard the Radical leader's frank letter "with suspicion".[1]

Parnell now replied relentlessly to the unfortunate go-between:

PARNELL TO O'SHEA

January 13.—The two questions of the reform of Local Government and the restitution of an Irish Parliament must, as I explained to you from the first, be kept absolutely separate. I have not gone into the latter question at all in the communications with you. The central Local Government body which I propose will not have legislative functions, only administrative. I could not put it forward as a substitute for a Parliament nor would it be advisable for your friend to do so. A clear statement from me on this point at this stage is the more necessary because your friend has recently written a letter to a friend of his [Duignan], and this letter advances a proposition for the establishment of a central board, with more extensive powers than those I have claimed, as a substitute for an Irish Parliament.

Copies of this letter have been sent by the gentleman to whom it was addressed to several prominent politicians in Ireland, who have communicated its contents pretty freely to others. The letter proposes that the central board should be empowered to legislate regarding the

[1] Parnell's letter in *The Times*, August 6, 1888.

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settlement of the Land question and should have full control over this matter. This is a power I have not claimed as it would cross the border line between legislative and administrative functions which I have endeavoured to follow in all important particulars.

Though Chamberlain never could bring himself to believe it—and he had further apparent reason for incredulity as will be seen—his own good faith in this business was not straighter than the Irish leader's, whose candour in asking much and giving nothing was ruthless to a degree that overreached itself in the end. But in the strict article of good faith Parnell did not allow himself to depend on these letters, not communicated as he enjoined. He based himself immediately afterwards on the strongest public declarations in the same sense.

> We cannot under the British Constitution ask for more than the restitution of Grattan's Parliament. But no man has the right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation. No man has a right to say, "Thus far shalt thou go and no further"; and we have never attempted to fix the *ne plus ultra* to the progress of Ireland's nationalhood and we never shall.[1]

This was at Cork on January 21.

Nothing could be plainer. Parnell, like Chamberlain, meant just what he said. But neither of them in the least understood the other. Some well-meaning Irish moderates informed the Radical leader that the Nationalist chief was himself a moderate in his heart, though yielding for the moment to the extremism of O'Brien and Healy. No information could be more delusive. Parnell never was more completely master over them all than at this moment of his reappearance and his apotheosis in the eyes of his people.

But O'Shea kept back the Irish leader's two letters; and began in this way a hopeless misunderstanding between the two formidable principals.

To elucidate the psychological enigma of this situation is difficult, but perhaps not impossible. Consider briefly three persons of the drama. "Take the trick when you can and go on with the game." By that spirit, whether he knew the maxim or not, Parnell was guided. County Boards and a Central Board in

[1] Barry O'Brien, *Life of Charles Stewart Parnell*, vol. ii. pp. 38, 39.

Ireland with himself as Chairman would advance his power to agitate for a Parliament to supersede the Central Board. So far from having any sympathy whatever with the idea of an alliance between British democracy and the Irish party, he hated the Ministerialists more than the Conservatives; and was already resolved to swing the Irish vote in both islands against Liberalism at the General Election. In this way he would inflict retribution on the Government for the Spencer regime and at the same time would promote his supreme aim of equalising as far as possible the two British parties in the House of Commons so as to hold the balance between them. The prodigy of Gladstone's early conversion he could not yet anticipate. He wished to draw Chamberlain and Dilke as far as they could be brought to go.

The scheme carried by O'Shea to the President of the Board of Trade represented indeed, as he said, "Parnell's proposals". But the intermediary dared not confess that in Parnell's mind the plan for a great intermediate reform of Irish administration was not a settlement but an implement. His instructions in this sense were positive. If communicated, Chamberlain would have grasped their sense in a twinkling. This is why the go-between, fearing total rupture of negotiations at the first attempt, exaggerated his credentials and omitted half the truth.

Judgment cannot be quite merciless towards O'Shea.

> In tragic life, God wot,
> No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
> We are betray'd by what is false within.

By mingled vanity, weakness, self-interest and good intentions, he was more deceived than deceiving. From time to time his wife and Parnell had to manage him. To use his "mania for diplomacy" was as convenient to them on this occasion as pleasing to him. If he wished to resume an important rôle, better let him have his way within limits. Also he might be eminently useful in exploring the situation and finding out what Chamberlain could be induced to attempt.

Allowed to begin his diplomacy when he, like many others, believed Parnell to be in a state of inert debility, tired of "the movement", the envoy could not foresee that "the Chief", with a sudden reawakening of energy, was just about to cross St.

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George's Channel and electrify the Irish people by trumpet-calls to the historic spirit and aim of Nationalism.

In another respect O'Shea was discerning. He had an instinct that there was incalculable force in Chamberlain. He saw that statesman as a coming Prime Minister and himself as a quite possible or probable Chief Secretary; for what Irishman so suitable as himself when the Radical leader was insisting more earnestly than ever that under the new political conditions an Irishman should occupy the post? Further, the intermediary felt that not easily, if ever, would Parnell in fact obtain more Home Rule than Chamberlain was inclined to concede. He must have imagined that he was doing the best thing for Ireland, for himself, and for all concerned, and exercising superior judgment, when he withheld from Chamberlain's knowledge Parnell's inflexible letters which, if disclosed, might have ruined at once the negotiations for "a practical settlement". The irony is that the Captain's general notions were right. Had he succeeded, Liberalism would have had a very different future; while in Ireland an era of transition quietly started might have developed by consent. Not knowing many things deeply, O'Shea at least knew more of Ireland than Chamberlain and more of England than Parnell. His character was not of the calibre for his task.

Chamberlain's position was entirely honourable. O'Shea, whose credentials in the Kilmainham negotiations proved perfectly authentic, had never misled him before, and he had no reason to expect ambiguity now. He disliked O'Shea's officiousness, but did not question his sincerity, and to the last thought him more sinned against than sinning. No English statesman ever had been more anxious for a better system of government in Ireland, and none had fought harder for it. In that cause he was full of goodwill and courage. Friendly with a good many of the Irish members, he had helped a private purpose or two of theirs in a way that touched the hearts of some of them; especially when the widow and orphans of a very distinguished Nationalist, A. M. Sullivan, were left in straits. These Irish members knew that the Radical leader had taken repeated risks for Ireland; that he longed for the end of coercion; and that he was bent on drastic reform of Dublin Castle rule. Like many virile and frank natures,

he scorned suspicion, though when he found his confidence abused he did not forgive.

The strangest thing is that the two letters withheld by O'Shea happen to be the only traces of Parnell's handwriting in the whole dossier. Suspicious as a Medici himself, Parnell became convinced, as we shall see, that Chamberlain had seen the warning letters and was trying to trap him in spite of them. Not having seen them, Chamberlain had every reason to believe at a later phase that Parnell had played him false. Through the fault of neither, the seeds of mortal antagonism between them were sown. Convinced of his own cleverness and meaning well, the facile, exuberant intermediary bedevilled all.

VII

In the ensuing months, from the latter part of January to the latter part of April, Chamberlain was far from anticipating an irremediable crisis. He thought that with patience—as in the Kilmainham affair of nearly three years before—he would carry the Cabinet for his idea of large concession to Ireland without weakening the Imperial connection. He records:

> During the whole of the time I was in frequent communication with Mr. Gladstone and others of my colleagues in reference to the whole subject, endeavouring to bring them to accept something in the nature of Mr. Parnell's proposals and at the same time to consent to a modification of the Crimes Act.[1]

It became very evident that Lord Spencer held the key of the position. In March and April the question of renewing coercion oppressed the Liberal Cabinet. The Viceroy held out for stringent articles accompanied by land purchase and by local government on a county or even provincial basis, but excluding a National Council. Chamberlain urged that the Crimes Act should be mitigated to the utmost; and that even in its limited form—directed against positive acts of lawlessness while restoring liberty of writing, speaking, and meeting—it should leave the question of renewal or abolition to the new democratic Parliament, upon whose decision against Dublin Castle Chamberlain

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

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counted. In any case, remedial legislation was the greater aim. Imperative in his view were the beginnings of self-government and popular responsibility in Ireland. Without that, land purchase, to which in itself the Radical leader was emphatically favourable, would be used as an expedient for delaying political reform and as an excuse for continued repression of political liberty as well as criminal violence.

Chamberlain early in March tried to soften the Viceroy. Spencer at this moment embodied the Castle mind, though a few months afterwards he swung to the opposite pole. At present nothing is to be done with him. While his personal courage in his Muscovite task is devoted, his political obduracy seems immutable. "I shall not wish to be considered as a party to anything like a negotiation with Parnell." [1] Less than a fortnight later he proposes to the Cabinet large facilities for land purchase with a continuance of strong coercion to curb opinion as well as to cope with lawlessness.

> The National League is governed by men whose aim is to discredit British rule; who are utterly unscrupulous; and whose speeches at meetings and writings in the press are well calculated to inflame the people against the Government and to excite outrage.[2]

That psychological way of looking at it implied a theory of coercion for ever. Apart from any question of crime, the Castle would have liked to suppress the National League with its branches all over Ireland. What of the busy branches in Great Britain?

Chamberlain fought the harder in the Cabinet for reducing coercion to a minimum "in the sense of Mr. Parnell's suggestions". What were these suggestions? As produced by O'Shea they were, as we know, nothing but pen-strokes through parts of the printed text of the existing Act. They might have been made by any pen. Parnell never put on paper one syllable or word, one jot or dot, that could compromise him with his people. If, as at that moment it seemed, renewal of coercion in some form was unavoidable, he wanted, of course, to emasculate its provisions as much as possible without committing himself in any way to Liberalism or Radicalism.

[1] Spencer to Chamberlain, March 12, 1885.

[2] Spencer's "Memo." (*Secret*) for the Cabinet, March 23, 1885.

After three weeks of it, Chamberlain's exertions amongst his Whig colleagues on behalf of a real though limited revolution in the existing system of Irish government did not seem hopeless. In mid-April this colloquy occurred:

CHAMBERLAIN AND SPENCER

To Spencer, from 40 *Prince's Gardens, April* 13, 1885.— . . . When I last saw you I gathered that you were inclined to the suggestion of a Central Board and I hope that I am correct in this impression. I do not think Mr. Gladstone will make any objection to such a proposal which in my opinion is a *sine qua non* of success in dealing with the Irish difficulty. Local Government is our last card. Hitherto, all our concessions have come too late, and it will be the same with this if the kind of Home Rule we can safely grant is withheld much longer.

To Chamberlain, from The Castle, Dublin, April 14, 1885.— . . . *I do not think that we are far apart in our views. I shall lean to some Central Board if we can work it out,*[1] but the difficulties are very large, and I wish to turn that over in my mind again before I write fully to you. . . .

When this word came from the "Red Earl", as the picturesque idiom of Irish Nationalism called the Viceroy—because of his beard and severity—Chamberlain might well feel sanguine of inducing the Cabinet to play the "last card". But as yet, though so active and zealous, he had no reason to stake his political life on Irish reform.

VIII

At this moment, the whole situation as affecting the action of the Radical allies and the fortunes of the Government was altered by the apparition of a more potent intervener than O'Shea. This new character in the drama was no less a magnate than the Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster. Our generation knows nothing like this salient figure amongst the great Victorians of the older stamp. Amidst them all, his personality and lineaments were the most sharply-cut. With his pallid asceticism, high carriage, imperious will and supple mind, Manning looked like one of the great prelate-statesmen of the middle ages. His rank

[1] These words italicised above are underscored in the original.

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as a prince of the Church was fully acknowledged, and he enjoyed more personal influence than any Catholic ecclesiastic in this country since the Reformation. At this very time he had reached the height of his career. With the Prince of Wales, he was a member of the Housing Commission. In effect, though not in name, he was a Papal Legate for the United Kingdom, carrying on outside his own arch-diocese a busy correspondence with the hierarchy in the other island as well as with the Vatican.

Why did he intervene in these confidential transactions—partly a secret Cabinet matter; and how did he know about them?

At this juncture, in the spring of 1885, a group of Irish prelates were on their way to Rome upon a rather anxious and critical mission. Before leaving London they discussed with Manning the whole state of Irish affairs spiritual and political. Both were involved in a curious ecclesiastical crisis. Cardinal McCabe, Archbishop of Dublin, had died in February. He was the last of a type, regarded by his people as in his quiet way a friend to "The Castle". The succession threatened to raise a storm. The British Government desired the appointment of Dr. Moran, whom they expected to be another mild politician. Lord Granville worked for this through Mr. Errington—*persona officiosa* at the Vatican on occasion, though not an accredited envoy—and seemed likely to succeed. Backstairs interference of this kind with their politico-spiritual affairs was peculiarly hated by Nationalist Catholics. They demanded passionately for the vacant see Dr. Walsh of Maynooth, who was also the choice of the Hierarchy.

To defeat the Errington intrigue, Manning resolved to move the two Radical Ministers. The ecclesiastical question by itself was not enough to stir them much, but he had another purpose certain to enlist their sympathies and perhaps to arouse the whole vigour of their action.

The Irish bishops bound for Rome were acquainted with Chamberlain's project of a National Council with very large powers. They told the Cardinal that they were prepared to accept the scheme as a settlement, and to give it their open support if it were adopted by the Liberal Government.

This Manning approved with all his heart. His political views

exactly coincided with Chamberlain's. As regards the Imperial connection he was emphatically a Unionist at this time, but in favour of ample devolution for Irish internal affairs. He had pressed this view on the Vatican.

In talking about Ireland in my first audience I said that the preservation of the Imperial Unity is vital to the three Kingdoms and to Ireland above all. The Holy Father seemed to be relieved, as if he expected Home Rule from me. I added, under this condition there is no domestic administration which Ireland ought not to have. In many letters I said, *Amministrazione domestica, ma Parlamento no: sarebbe preludio di conflitto e di separazione.*[1]

It sounds word for word like an Italian translation of Chamberlain's formula, unvarying then as before and to the end. Unchanged in this view, Manning now reported to Rome that the Irish prelates who had been staying with him were not extreme men.

April 12, 1885.—Mgr. Croke asserted in the most explicit terms his own conviction that the Union should be left untouched and that the whole Irish Episcopate is unanimously of that same opinion.[2]

In this new phase of the strange story well might the Radical leader think that he stood on sure ground.

The Cardinal opened matters on the afternoon of April 22 in an interview with Dilke, who at once wrote to the Prime Minister that—

Manning suddenly proposed to me to bring about peace and goodwill in Ireland on the basis of Chamberlain's Local Government and Central Board scheme. . . . I should suggest that Manning be encouraged to let the Pope have Chamberlain's scheme.[3]

Dilke further suggested that the author of the scheme should meet the Cardinal at once. Chamberlain answered, "I am quite willing to call upon the Cardinal if Mr. Gladstone approves". The Prime Minister at the House of Commons gave verbal consent. Lord Spencer demurred gruffly when he heard of it.

[1] Purcell's *Life of Manning*, vol. ii. p. 579 (December 4, 1883).

[2] Shane Leslie, *Henry Edward Manning*, p. 403.

[3] Dilke's Diary, quoted from Chamberlain's duplicate.

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Listening to Manning in London would mean the dreaded Walsh after all as Archbishop in Dublin; and the failure of Errington at Rome.

From this moment exciting events marched with extraordinary speed. The Viceroy's stubborn opposition brought about the catastrophe of the Cabinet just after it seemed to have received a new lease of life from Gladstone's triumph in the Penjdeh crisis.

The Radical leader paid his novel visit at Archbishop's House, Westminster. Two more opposite types than this ecclesiastic of the ancient Church and this statesman of the new school hardly can be conceived, but their conversation was excellent. Chamberlain immediately recorded it in a memorandum for the information of his colleagues:

CHAMBERLAIN AND MANNING

April 24, 1885.—I saw Cardinal Manning to-day at his house in Westminster. . . . He said that the Irish Bishops, including Archbishop Croke, passed through London on their way to Rome and that he had had full explanations with them. They were all opposed to separation between the two countries. . . . The Bishops stated that they had been made aware of a private suggestion of mine for Local Government which included a proposal for a Central Board with powers of taxation and legislation on matters not affecting the interests of the Empire as a whole, and that they were inclined to accept these proposals as satisfying all just and reasonable demands. Cardinal Manning himself agreed in this view. . . .

He said that there were practically two influences powerful in Ireland at this moment—Mr. Parnell's . . . and the Bishops'. . . .

In answer to my question, Cardinal Manning thought that it would not be desirable that Mr. Parnell should be told at present of our interview, but he agreed that it might be well that I should again refer to the general question in conversation with Captain O'Shea. . . .

The Cardinal also thought it would be advisable that . . . he should invite Mr. Parnell to see him so that he might learn from the Cardinal the views of the Irish clergy. I remarked that I thought such a course very desirable, as Mr. Parnell was naturally jealous of his authority and would not like any proceedings taken behind his back; but I added that in my view the difficulty would not lie in his personal objections to such

a scheme, but in his hesitation to commit himself in face of possible opposition from members of his own party.[1]

The Cardinal expressed a wish to have from me in the shape of heads some fuller account of the details of my proposed scheme, and this I promised to send.

I explained that I spoke entirely on my own responsibility and could not answer for my colleagues, but I said that I had gathered from conversations with Lord Spencer that he would be prepared to give full consideration to the subject. I pointed out that the assent of the Government as a whole to any such scheme would be made much more probable if I could point to the sure acceptance of it by the Irish people as represented by the Bishops or by Mr. Parnell.

The Cardinal concluded the interview by expressing his extreme sense of the importance of the subject and his belief that it offered a real prospect for the pacification of Ireland; and he ended with the words, "I think the present position is very hopeful".

The Radical allies were more than hopeful. It seemed a golden opportunity to end all the odious part of coercion in Ireland, introduce sweeping reforms and reconcile the two peoples. Now for the first time they made up their minds that it was right to risk all on so great an issue. Needless to say that, as the Cardinal desired, they were filled also with zeal for the appointment of Walsh to the see of Dublin, and with desire as Ministers to frustrate "backstairs diplomacy" at Rome. As he had promised, Chamberlain promptly sent to Archbishop's House full information of the details of his scheme, and offered to supplement them in any way that might be desired:

I shall also be ready at any time to wait on you again if you think that a personal interview would be advantageous.[2]

IX

Earnest on the same date was his memorandum for circulation amongst his colleagues:

Assuming, as I do, that a separation between the two countries, or even a separate Parliament under the same sovereign would be injurious

[1] Here appears Chamberlain's want of knowledge of Parnell's vital letters suppressed by O'Shea.

[2] Chamberlain to Manning, April 25, 1885.

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in the highest degree to the interests of both, and could never be granted by any patriotic statesman,[1] I am nevertheless impressed with the importance of meeting in the fullest possible way the legitimate aspirations of the Irish people towards entire independence in the management of their local affairs. I would therefore give the widest possible interpretation to the word Local Government, and would include in it not merely local and municipal affairs but also questions which may be described as national, although they do not concern Imperial interests. A Central Board should have if possible some distinctive title as, for instance, the National Board of Ireland. . . . The establishment of such a Board would involve the practical disappearance of what is known as "Castle" administration (April 25th, 1885).

But the Castle for its part was as little willing to commit the happy dispatch as any institution known. It disliked negotiation with or through Manning. It detested the prospect of defeat at the Vatican by the failure of Errington as *persona officiosa* and the alarming appointment of Dr. Walsh as an Archbishop of Dublin, certain to be more on the popular side than his predecessors for so many years. Lord Spencer reiterated that his mind was not closed to Chamberlain's plan, but in his way he was hardening himself thoroughly against it. All the Whig Ministers in the Cabinet were determined to stand by their Viceroy, though most of them would have accepted the other view had it come from him. On April 28, the very day after Gladstone's Penjdeh speech, which had seemed to retrieve all for the Government, the Irish question threw the Cabinet into jeopardy again, and this time there was to be no salvation.

On that date Ministers met to consider the Viceroy's proposals for the renewal of rigorous coercion. "It was evident that a majority of the Cabinet would accept his view".[2] The Radical allies nailed their own flag to the mast.

I sent word to Parnell through O'Shea that Dilke and I were prepared to offer our resignations if the views which we had been pressing were not accepted; and if, in the event of our resignations being accepted, Parnell would publicly pledge his full support to the scheme proposed

[1] This obviously is of conclusive importance in the question of Chamberlain's consistency on Home Rule.

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum",

by him in January, and would prevent obstruction on the part of his followers to a renewal of the Crimes Act for one year.[1]

The Irish leader requested time to think it over.

But on the morrow, the last day of April, the expected interview took place between him and the Cardinal. Parnell must have made it clear, in accordance with the spirit of his recent and resounding declarations in Ireland, that he could not declare the National Council to be a final or limiting settlement, but that he would countenance it as a great intermediate reform. He would not obstruct a mild Crimes Bill for one year only. It suited his book. Calling on O'Shea immediately after leaving Archbishop's House, he gave the requested promise to support the Radical Ministers if they resigned. The go-between noted:

April 30.—Chamberlain at 11 A.M. He tells me Manning will be able to promise P. full support of Catholic Church in case of his accepting Local Government Bill. Urges necessity of P.'s speedy reply. Telegraphed P. He called at Albert Mansions at 7 P.M. After much conversation accepted proposal. I had seen Card[inal], who did not go further than that Irish bishops, including Arb. Croke, had told him they would gladly accept Local Government Board proposed by Chamberlain's letter to Dignan (*sic*).

O'Shea that night carried the news to the House of Commons.

11 P.M. Dilke asked the result of interview with P. On my telling him, he observed he thought the Cabinet would break up on it. Chamberlain —saw him in his room. He expects that at the Cabinet Committee at Spencer House[2] called for 11 A.M., May 1, the rupture would be complete. If he triumphs, Hartington, Spencer, Carlingford, Lord Chancellor, will go.[3]

On the strength of his discussions with Parnell, though not having found them completely satisfactory, Manning, through Dilke, advised the prompt introduction of Chamberlain's scheme. "It cannot be known too soon". But he urged the Radicals not to dream of resigning.[4]

[1] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[2] A special Committee of the Cabinet to consider Chamberlain's scheme met from time to time at Spencer House.

[3] O'Shea's original notes in Chamberlain Papers.

[4] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 131.

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At the Cabinet meeting on May Day Mr. Gladstone fervently supported a National Council, as Chamberlain now called it; it was as vehemently opposed. The dispute was adjourned for another week. Through every day of it tension was extreme.

Three days before the decision the Prime Minister sent to the Radical leader a singular communication. "I am a free man." He emphasised his freedom either to retire at any moment from office or to stay if his leadership and management were fully accepted.

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

May 6, 1885.—I think that to my conversations with you on the merits of the case as regards Crimes Bill and Local Government Bill for Ireland I ought to add a word on my personal position, which is peculiar at this moment.

I conceive that my interposition in these questions is that of an *amicus curiae*.

My covenant with my colleagues about Redistribution is substantially fulfilled, and our foreign difficulties are as I conceive (if the Financial Convention for Egypt can now be regarded as safe in France) effectually relieved. Such at least are the appearances and probabilities of the case. The result is, that I am a free man; and am entitled to claim my release without either rendering or having a reason except that my work is done.

My opinions about Local Government in Ireland have I think long been well known; but I have preserved an entire liberty of action as to the time and circumstances of their application. Still, I shall be most happy if in the smallest degree I can aid those who are less free than myself towards the solution of a problem soon to come fully into view.

What I hope and am endeavouring to promote is that my colleagues shall communicate freely among themselves, and shall also tender to one another whatever suggestions may occur to them during the days that have yet to pass before they come to any decision on the course that they have to pursue. Many difficulties have been solved during these last years by time and thought, and this may yet yield to them like the rest.

These intimations seem charged with some significance not quite explained. Once more his mention of retirement is meant as a restraining influence. That he had the slightest intention to withdraw there is nothing to suggest. The contrary is hinted. On

the day when he wrote this letter he had made penetrating observations to Lord Granville. "I did not calculate upon Parnell and his friends, nor upon Manning and his bishops. Nor was I under any obligation to follow or act with Chamberlain".[1] In no way would he bind himself to the Radicals so as to subordinate his own will and action. Not for him, directly or indirectly, to promote their social programme. Nor to help in lifting them into the saddle. If he resigned, it would not be on the particular Irish plan now in dispute nor upon any other issue raised by them. At the same time he regards the National Council policy "as invaluable in itself and as the only hopeful means of securing Crown and State from an ignominious surrender in the next Parliament".[2] These words are worth dwelling upon syllable by syllable. Could Chamberlain's action at this stage receive fuller justification?

The Radical leader, as we know, had burned his boats with pleasure, and could only respond to Mr. Gladstone's declaration of personal freedom by asserting his own:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

May 7, 1885.—I am very much obliged to you for your letter of yesterday, which relieves me from the only uneasiness that I have ever felt in reference to the Irish question.

That hesitation proceeded from a deep sense of obligation—both personal and public—to yourself, which seemed to me to demand the greatest possible sacrifice of private opinion to meet any wishes you might possibly express.

As the matter stands I feel the Government has now offered to it a chance—probably a final chance—of settling the Irish difficulty with which English statesmen have to deal at the present time.

I do not think anything would justify me in consenting to any course that could prejudice such a settlement in the future.

Immediately following Gladstone's receipt of this respectful but steely reply, Friday, May 8, was a day of doubts and agitations from awakening to midnight. Harcourt, after violently attacking the scheme a week before, had come round to it. O'Shea dined with Dwyer Gray—who also had seen Chamber-

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 191. his words to Lord Granville. *Ibid.*
[2] Gladstone's own memorandum of vol. iii. p. 191 (May 6, 1885).

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lain himself—and "inspired", as he says, the leading article in favour of the National Council scheme which appeared in the Dublin *Freeman* next day, and was supposed to express Parnell's sentiments. All appearances supported an extraordinary delusion—part of the fatality that runs through all these things. O'Shea seemed the Irish leader's friend, to a few his peculiarly complaisant friend, whereas there was no person living whom Parnell so gladly would have seen dead.

Now the wavering hopes of converting Hartington were dashed. Never inclined to agree to any change until political momentum made it irresistible, the solid Whig was on the Viceroy's side. Spencer, Campbell-Bannerman and the "Castle" threw their whole weight against the limited revolution. That settled it.

The meeting of Ministers on Saturday, May 9, came to a negative result in an ominous way. It is familiar history. All the Commoners in the Cabinet, except Hartington, were for Chamberlain's scheme; all the Peers, except Granville, against.[1] So after four months' devoted exertion it was arrested. Its ardent author did not for a moment think it less living, nor less promising for the near future. Gladstone alone, with a prophetic touch of age, divined all the possible, perhaps sombre, significance of the moment. Of his solemn strain in addressing several of his colleagues there are as many accounts. Chamberlain's version is this: "As we were standing afterwards on the landing of the first floor Mr. Gladstone said to me, 'These men have rejected this scheme, but if God spares their lives for five years more they will be glad to accept something infinitely stronger'." With similar exclamations the "giant old", but giant still, turned to Dilke, whose version is more biblical, "Within six years, if it please God to spare their lives, they will be repenting in ashes". Chamberlain in his fighting mood of those days—full of all manner of definite visions about policies of the future, with a Radical initiative in his head for every difficulty, social, Irish, foreign, Imperial—was very far from brooding darkly like his chief. He used to say how far he was from dreaming that the Prime Minister, instead of leaving the issue to con-

[1] Dilke, who was present. His *Life*, vol. ii. p. 132, and Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 194.

vincing experience during the five or six years predicted, would begin in less than five or six months the mighty but convulsive attempt to fulfil his own prophecy; and that Spencer after ponderous obstinacy would cast a somersault.

X.

From that moment the Gladstone Government of 1880 was moribund, and gave up the ghost in a month. Life flickered in it through four weeks of fitful rallies, and relapses with added complications. These weeks are of classical instruction for close students of the party system. The incidents seem minute and tortuous, but the motives are broad and foreshadowing. In both the historic parties new wine will burst old bottles.

On the Liberal side the real struggle is on the one hand between Dublin Castle represented with near-sighted stolidity by Lord Spencer; and on the other hand by the two Radicals, whose anti-coercion principles Lord Randolph Churchill with nimble wit is soon to borrow and improve with a gay hope of destroying their party.

Lord Palmerston used to jest that he kept a special drawer for Gladstone's letters of resignation. A chest of drawers would be filled by the full record of Gladstone's own trials in that kind. He now receives in as many days, and for different reasons, several resignations not accepted by him, yet remaining unwithdrawn up to the moment of the Ministerial collapse. It is a constitutional case without example for absurdity and gravity. It led within the depths of Gladstone's nature to one of the potent revivals of his leonine spirit, very old though he was. He put away his floating thoughts of retirement—that they ever were other than hypothetical there is not a sentence to show in Lord Morley's great biography—and resolved to prove master over rebellious juniors. While they regard him as an almost exhausted reconciler, he is meditating with a magnitude beyond them all.

Chamberlain had no further interest in the Government, and wished it to come to an end as soon as its voluntary demise could be arranged with tolerable decency. O'Shea in scribbled notes, made at the moment in diary form, leaves what the Germans

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call a *Stimmungsbild*, or "picture of the state of feeling", on the Radical side:

Sunday, May 10.—Saw Chamberlain at 12. At Cabinet yesterday Local Self-Government rejected. He tells me that he will not agree to the summary jurisdiction clauses of Crimes Act. Expects to resign with Dilke in course of week. Gladstone says he will retire into private life if D. and C. retire. Trevelyan has written to Chamberlain, talked over by Spencer.

Monday, May 11.—Cabinet Committee met. Chamberlain tells me fought all day. Saw Dilke. Both consider their resignation inevitable. Later, about 11.30, Chamberlain spoke to me of compromise.[1]

At first, as we see, the Radical leaders were bent on leaving at once after their repulse on May 9. They persuaded themselves to linger, on the chance of bringing the Cabinet to reverse its decision. Meanwhile, if they could not get their way, Spencer should not have his. "We would not agree to any tinkering either with local government, coercion or land-purchase."[2] All Irish proposals should be relegated to that Elysium of democratic hope, the new Parliament. Harcourt exerted himself for compromise in this sense of stalemate, but it was not feasible. On May 12 Chamberlain wrote to Mr. Gladstone, "I am obliged to urge that the new Crimes Bill should be for one year only." The Cabinet sat on May 15, without accommodation. The Radical twins were ready to resign against Spencer, as was he against them. The Viceroy prepared himself unwillingly to accept attenuated and short-term coercion upon condition of being granted a measure of land purchase to sweeten repression. That, however "modified and reduced", as Chamberlain said, the *Irish were certain to regard as a nauseous dose.*

Land purchase without representative responsibility in Ireland the two Radicals regarded as the very worst form of what Chamberlain called "tinkering". One week after the rejection of National Councils, Chamberlain for one, after an inconclusive Cabinet, went away convinced that between the two sections of the Cabinet the position still was stalemate and that Spencer was not to have his way about land purchase without a new system of Irish government.

[1] O'Shea's original notes.

[2] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

Instead, more Cretan intricacies were added to the labyrinth of misunderstandings with which this chapter is occupied.

Something else had happened on this 15th of May to embroil all. The same afternoon Mr. Gladstone quite unconsciously sealed the fate of his Government and revolutionised the parliamentary conditions by announcing to the House of Commons the renewal of coercion without remedial measures:

> We shall embody various provisions of that Act which we deem to be both valuable and equitable in a Bill, and it will be our duty to press it upon the attention of the House with a view to its being passed into law. There are two other subjects . . . one of them relating to local government in Ireland and the other relating to land-purchase in Ireland . . . both of them are measures with regard to which the Government feel that they have unfulfilled obligations, and it is a matter to them of great regret that they cannot ask the House to deal with either of them during what remains of the present session in a satisfactory manner.[1]

A dull roar of Irish defiance met this statement. The Liberal party was now hopelessly trapped. Lord Randolph during the next few days got into friendly touch with the Parnellites and gave them to know that the Conservatives, if called upon to form a temporary Government, would drop coercion altogether. At the same time he threw out an anchor to windward. A terse memorandum goes across from the Board of Trade to the Local Government Board. The breaking-point between the Radicals and the rest of the Cabinet is very near now.

CHAMBERLAIN TO DILKE

> I hear R. Churchill is going to give notice to-night (?) of a Committee after Whitsuntide of the whole House to enquire into the state of Ireland. He hopes for our support, and possibly contemplates a separation from his leaders and a union of the opposite sides below the gangway.
>
> Could not Kimberley tell Staal that if Russian matter is not settled *at once* the Government may be out of office? If this were out of the way Mr. G. would let us go, and I think *we must go*. J. C., 18/5.

At the first opportunity "*we must go*". This signal, better than anything else, explains a sudden sequel of farcical and well-nigh

[1] Hansard, vol. ccxcviii. col. 627 (Commons, May 15, 1885).

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indescribable confusions. For on the very morning before he wrote these words Chamberlain had visited Gladstone to discuss the Budget—by now the Chancellor also was in a state of suspended resignation—and the Prime Minister somehow had gathered the impression that the two Radicals would yield something to Spencer without exacting any return.

In a ludicrous manner the new complication—yet another—came about. The Radical allies were at loggerheads with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the Budget. To meet a £15,000,000 deficit, looming large at that time, though a bagatelle to ours, drink-duties were a considerable part of Childers's plan. The grim scare of an Anglo-Russian war, perhaps widening to a world war, having passed, England was full of noises against the beer-tax, and Ireland at least as loud against the whiskey-tax. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, feeling himself insufficiently supported in a righteous cause, wished to go, and regretted afterwards that he was persuaded to linger.[1]

A basic opinion of the Radical creed held the existing incidence of taxation to be unfair to the people and too favourable to the rich. Criticising in the Cabinet the financial proposals, Chamberlain argued generally for more increase of direct taxation by comparison with indirect. He thought the Budget feeble though unpopular.

This was why the Prime Minister invited conversation with the President of the Board of Trade.[2] So far as the talk turned on the Budget, they left the question where it was. But incidental references to another matter led unawares to a most unfortunate misunderstanding and to far-reaching consequences. Since his announcement of coercion without either reform of Irish government or agrarian concessions, many Liberals below the gangway had conveyed to him their anxiety that the new Crimes Act should at least be accompanied by increased facilities for land purchase. This is his own innate desire, and he wants to win Chamberlain for it.

The National Council plan being rejected, Gladstone is for carrying on upon the Viceroy's basis of modified coercion, with land purchase as an emollient. Neither he nor Chamberlain, apparently, mentions a fundamental difference which each

[1] *Life of Childers*, vol. ii. p. 223. [2] Monday, May 18, 1885.

assumes that the other tacitly understands. Chamberlain is resolved not to go on unless his plan of Irish reform is revived. But Gladstone, after the adverse decision, dismissed that subject for the present from his mind "and sorrowfully accepted the negative of what was either a majority, or a moiety of the entire Cabinet".[1] Chamberlain was favourable, needless to say, to land-purchase in itself. That he would consent to a Bill providing funds for one year only, and postpone for that time his demand for the reconstruction of Irish government, became somehow the Prime Minister's erroneous impression. That, on the strength of this idea, action would be taken without further discussion in the Cabinet never entered the Radical leader's head. It ought not to have entered Gladstone's, who should have attempted at this juncture a more serious appreciation of the character and fibre of a personality belonging to another world of associations as well as to another generation. The answer is, no doubt, that the Radical leader's new type was partly incomprehensible by the old Prime Minister. There never was between them one frank, humorous, explosive conversation in Chamberlain's own natural vein.

XI

Every single day now had its own comedies and agonies. The conversation just noted took place on May 18, which was Monday. On the Wednesday afternoon Gladstone repeated to Dilke his intention to retire at the end of the session, leaving Hartington to form a Government—if he could. But the head of the Government said nothing about an immediate step in Irish policy, contrary to the last Cabinet agreement on stalemate between the sections, and as contrary to the Premier's own statement a few days before in the House.[2]

In the course of the same afternoon he suddenly announced from the Treasury Bench a Land Purchase Bill, limited as regards its finance to one year. Believing that Chamberlain had consented to this condition, he assumed without further question the concurrence of both inseparables, who moved in step and told each other everything. So little had Chamberlain expected this excursion that he had not thought the remarks

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 194. [2] Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. pp. 133, 134.

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between him and the Prime Minister on a minor subject worth mentioning to his ally, whom he never failed to inform about things possibly important.

With Chamberlain's words in his mind, "I think *we must go*", Dilke took the bit between his teeth.

He instantly supposed that Gladstone had given way to Dublin Castle on another point—Spencer for his part still refusing *quid pro quo*—and had wilfully broken a specific understanding that the Radicals were not to be drawn further into one-sided concessions to the Whigs. In his surprise and anger Dilke did an extraordinary thing. Without trying to find his partner, who happened to be out of the House of Commons at the moment, he sent in his resignation. At the very height of public success in all connections—except that he had not a touch of magnetism on the platform—and with private reasons for high elation, he had been for some weeks inwardly excitable in contrast to his composed demeanour; and less subject to the habitual ascendancy between them of Chamberlain's will. Now he had bolted.

Chamberlain's resignation perforce followed Dilke's. Shaw-Lefevre,[1] when he heard this, decided to hurry after them. That same evening, Lord Randolph Churchill at St. Stephen's Club publicly declared against any renewal of the Crimes Act. Politics seethed with excitement.

When Chamberlain returned to the House that evening and learned what Dilke had done, he was confounded. It was not the right way. Opposing land purchase financed for a year only would appear a niggling issue in itself. That position would be unpopular even amongst many Liberals below the gangway. But Chamberlain, for the first and last time in his political career, was helplessly committed. He had been rigidly careful never to involve his ally in the slightest without consultation. To estrange Gladstone personally and seriously, at that delicate point, was the last thing the Radical leader desired. But never had it been more important that his alliance should hold at all costs. Bound at once to make common cause, he showed the firmest front without an apologetic syllable.

[1] Shaw-Lefevre had been Postmaster-General since Fawcett's death. He introduced sixpenny telegrams.

His own letter of resignation, irksome to write, had to seem in the circumstances another challenge to the Prime Minister's authority:

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE

May 20, 1885.—*J. C. to Mr. G.*—I have heard with great surprise that you have this afternoon given notice of the introduction of a Land Purchase Bill for Ireland, unaccompanied by any reference to the large scheme of Local Government, the promise of which for next year was the condition of the assent given by Sir C. Dilke and myself to the proposal for dealing with Land Purchase during the present session.

I am convinced that a measure of the kind suggested by Lord Spencer will have a distinct tendency to increase the agitation for a separation between the two countries; and at the same time will seriously prejudice the success of any such scheme of Local Government as I have submitted to the Cabinet. Although I have accepted their decision so far as the present Parliament is concerned, I have intended to secure absolute freedom as to the future, and I feel that I ought not to consent to anything which will diminish the hope of success in a new Parliament. In these circumstances I feel that I have no alternative but to place my resignation in your hands.

The Prime Minister, who by now must have felt like a haunted man, returned the most pained remonstrance:

May 20, 1885.—*Mr. G. to J. C.*—I have never been in greater surprise than at the fresh trouble developed this afternoon. I believed myself to be acting entirely within the lines of yours and Dilke's concurrence. . . . What I understood to be your and Dilke's proceeding was to agree to a Land Purchase Bill with a provision of funds for one year which would leave the whole measure stranded next session and dependent on a fresh judgment which might be associated with Local Government as its condition. It seems to me to be a matter, which we may perfectly well consider and hope to arrange, in what terms reference shall be made to Local Government when the Bill is brought in. Will not that be the time to part, if part we must, which I do not believe? I send a copy of this to Dilke, and will only add, to the expression of my surprise, my deep concern.

But Lord Randolph's public declaration against coercion that evening had made intolerable the position of the Radical allies.

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Chamberlain was resolved not again to be weakened or fettered. His answer was in the spirit of his words to his friend less than three days before, "I think *we must go*". It was a manly answer—prophetic in terms but antagonising in effect.

May 21, 1885.—*J. C. to Mr. G.*—I fear there has been a serious misapprehension on both sides with respect to the Land Purchase Bill, and I take blame to myself if I did not express myself with sufficient clearness. I certainly never imagined that the promise of introduction would be made without further reference to the Cabinet, or without some definite decision as to Local Government.

I doubt very much if it is wise or even right to attempt to cover over the serious differences of principle that have lately disclosed themselves in the Cabinet. I think it is now certain that they will cause a split in the new Parliament, and it seems hardly fair to the constituencies that this should only be admitted after they have discharged their function, and when they are unable to influence the result.

Next day the Premier, and no wonder, was further exasperated to the limits of mortal endurance by another thorny incident. Showing for the first time unmistakable animus, and with an uncommon loss of his weird virtuosity in cautious verbiage, he blamed Chamberlain too much.

The troubles of the Cabinet were published so large that he who ran might read them. That morning the *Birmingham Daily Post* had disclosed everything; and everyone believed that Chamberlain had inspired it. It declared the Government to be "on the eve of dissolution". And the cause? "It is not Russia or Egypt, but Ireland." The watchword of the Radical allies, said the Midland paper's London correspondent, was "Local Government and no Coercion"; instead, they were offered just the opposite, "Coercion and no Local Government". It was a policy they would not have at any price. They might yet consent to a renewal in a milder form of the Crimes Act for one year only, leaving subsequent alternatives to be dealt with freely by the new Parliament. Failing concession to that effect at least, Chamberlain, Dilke, Shaw-Lefevre would assuredly resign, perhaps one or two other Ministers also. "It is possible that what looks like an already broken bridge may be mended, and the crisis may pass away. That will depend upon the squeezability of the Whig

portion of the Cabinet." Nothing on earth could be more distasteful than this to the Prime Minister. At this broadcast of all the secrets of the sanctuary, Gladstone pointed his finger, and virtually accused.

May 22, 1885.—*Mr. G. to J. C.*—The enclosed extract from the *Birmingham Post* has been sent to me this morning. Statements of this nature form a heavy addition to other cares. I am at a loss to conceive how anything of this kind can have oozed. But on account of the local origin I refer it to you.

The Prime Minister forgot, or did not know, that the revelations had been anticipated elsewhere in the press and were the common gossip of the lobbies. The article in the *Birmingham Daily Post* had been written by "Toby, M.P."—Henry Lucy, who was well acquainted with the Radical leader no doubt, but had other sources of intimate information, as well as his own manner of writing.

Tired of it all, Chamberlain, at the irate veteran's sharp thrust, parried and struck.

May 22.—J. C. to Mr. G.—I had not seen the notice in the Birmingham paper till now. I have had no direct communication with Birmingham on any subject connected with the differences in the Cabinet.

But this communication is dated from the House of Commons, and is I suppose the production of one of the correspondents in the lobby.

Owing to the article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* [1] (as to the origin of which I cannot form the slightest idea) the whole subject was freely discussed in the lobbies yesterday, and I was asked about it by many members.

The *Pall Mall* article contained I think everything which is now repeated in the *Post*. I was told that similar statements appeared in the Tory papers—the *Yorkshire Post* and *Manchester Courier*—yesterday morning, but I did not see them and have no conception how they got there.

The only thing which troubles me in this business is the deep regret I feel at being the involuntary cause of adding to your great anxieties. . . .

P.S.—I am leaving this evening for the Continent.

They had never been so curt with each other. The Whitsuntide holiday was beginning. Chamberlain left the same evening

[1] A newspaper virulently unfriendly at that time to Chamberlain.

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for Paris. Dilke, who refused to attend further Cabinets at all unless definite concessions were made to the Radical wing, left the same day for Dublin. He was to confer with Spencer and explore the chances of finding a way out of a situation so nearly lost and so entirely humiliating. Thus during the Whitsuntide adjournment for a fortnight these Ministers for the most part were happily delivered from each other's company.

XII

How they were to meet again in Cabinet at all even for form's sake—that was the problem. When Chamberlain returned from Paris at the beginning of June, Dilke reported that he had found "the Castle" hopeless. Spencer would agree to four Provincial Boards for Ireland, but nothing would induce him to accept one National Council.

At this moment, Mr. Edward Heneage, Liberal member for Grimsby, created a sudden diversion—and he too acts on the prompting of O'Shea. Heneage was a politician with some marked traits of independence—we shall have to glance at him again.[1] He was well acquainted with "Mercury", as Manning called the supposed messenger of Parnell. To the member for Grimsby the member for Clare wrote to say that Parnell on one condition would not seriously resist the re-enactment of certain provisions of the Crimes Act—such in fact as might usefully be extended to the whole United Kingdom. The ingenious condition was that the powers in view were not again to be entrusted to the discretion of the "Castle" bureaucracy. Instead, they should be brought into force only by special "proclamation" on the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister.

This was a great change. It implied Cabinet discussion before proclaiming. It would be a standing check on the Castle and might neutralise coercion altogether even if nominally re-enacted. Heneage took fire at the idea of this happy palliative and possible solution. First he addressed the Prime Minister. Then on second thoughts he resolved to take action on his own account and signalled cheerfully to "Mercury":

[1] He was soon to become a Liberal Unionist with Chamberlain, and more than a decade after this was made a peer.

DEAR O'SHEA—I have decided to force the running as time is short and some of the Cabinet slow, and shall give notice of an amendment to Morley's resolution this afternoon in the sense of my letter to the "Boss"![1]

The notice put down by Heneage regarding Ireland said that any exceptional powers should be entrusted only to a responsible Minister of the Crown, and that the time had come for a reconsideration of the anomalous system of government in Ireland.[2]

Aware of this move, the Prime Minister spoke to the Radical allies, whose exit he still strove to avert. On the promise of consideration for the O'Shea-Heneage device, Chamberlain and Dilke, without withdrawing their resignations, consented to attend the ominous Cabinet of June 5.[3] The certainty of an amicable settlement with Russia was just then a public relief but removed the last serious motive for Ministerial cohesion. There was high dispute on the Budget, the Chancellor left the room. Next came renewed squabble on the Irish proposals. Spencer rejected the Heneage formula. Then Chamberlain and Dilke in their turn rejected coercion altogether. When the meeting broke up there had been "no decision upon any point".[4]

Ministers assembled again, and for the last time as an effective Government, on Monday, June 8.

Two matters of disagreement must be clearly distinguished —the Budget and the Irish Question as these stood on the afternoon before the Government unexpectedly foundered. All through the Budget discussions the Radical leader held that a still higher duty on spirits should be substituted for part at least of the increased tax on beer; but he did not care enough about this to make it a probe. The whole financial scheme he thought dismally poor seen in a democratic light. One feature had his lively approval—the levy of equal death duties on land and real property. But this was the first £100,000,000 Budget—the figure once a nightmare to Cobden and Bright.[5] Childers confessed a

[1] This letter is undated but must have been written on June 4. Morley had given notice of his intention to oppose renewal of the Crimes Act in any form.

[2] Heneage gives a very full account of this incident in a letter to Chamberlain, August 3, 1888.

[3] Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

[4] Dilke's Diary; *Life*, vol. ii. p. 143.

[5] Under Lord Beaconsfield, whose profligate finance was denounced in *Midlothian*, the last Conservative Budget was for a total expenditure of

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heavy deficit; imposed general burthens; raised income-tax from fivepence to eightpence; and dealt with the national beverage in a manner not conducive at that time to the electioneering hopes of Liberals in the boroughs. Instead depression spread widely on the Ministerial benches.

Next, if an unpopular Budget were carried on this very day, the new Crimes Bill, without any accompanying pledge of Irish reform in the Radical sense, would be introduced two days later.

Gladstone, some months later, dwelt on forms, and was oblivious of realities known to his most ordinary followers when he made a communication to the Queen. He then stated his impression that the Cabinet of June 8 was agreed about the Crimes Bill except on what he himself regarded as a minor point —whether the "intimidation or boycotting provisions" should be applied just as hitherto, or depend like the rest upon special Proclamation authorised by the Cabinet.[1] This was no minor point for his Radicals. Chamberlain, Dilke, Lefevre, now joined by Trevelyan, had no intention of giving way on a method of procedure which would enable them to exercise a new kind of check upon the Castle, as the keepers of that stronghold well saw.[2]

Chamberlain and Dilke had not withdrawn their resignations. Bound to be careful of their forms and not to expose themselves to any charge of seeking wantonly to wreck the Cabinet and overthrow Gladstone, they had no intention of implicating themselves in coercion of any kind without Irish reform. They could resist in the Cabinet any or every proposal to "proclaim" coercion. A day too late the obstinate Viceroy partly yielded. Had the Cabinet continued in existence a few days longer another nominal compromise would probably have been reached, but it would have been no real truce. No more substantial and sufficient difference between any Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet can easily be supposed. Gladstone's insistence upon the extent of apparent agreement before the fall illustrates a typical idiosyncrasy of his character with its peculiar passion for justifying all his words and proceedings.

£82,000,000. The deficit on the last year was small. There was no increase of taxation. Income-tax, 5d.

[1] Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 199.

[2] Dilke's Diary; *Life*, vol. ii. p. 144.

From a Cabinet which was like the last supper of the Girondins, Ministers walked across to their places in Parliament.

XIII

On this Monday, June 8, when the House met to debate the Second Reading of the Budget, there were at first no warnings of storm. Before taking his seat on the Treasury Bench, Chamberlain indeed conversed with Heneage:

> When we met in the House at four o'clock I well recollect your remark as to the impossibility of dealing with Spencer and Harcourt; and that it was no good trying to get a *modus vivendi* with men who would yield nothing.[1]

The summer afternoon passed into an evening heavy with heat. The benches were not filled; the galleries not crowded; the lobbies unusually deserted. Sir Michael Hicks Beach spoke with little effect in moving his frankly partisan amendment against the increased duties on beer, spirits and death. Hours of talk, nearly all of it very dull, dragged on till past midnight. It was ten minutes to one before Gladstone rose and the House filled. For some weeks he had been a very tired speaker and the magic of his voice seemed broken for ever. Now he recovered his tones and surprised his audience by a little masterpiece of oratory full of his happiest resources. Some declared—they said it a hundred times before and after—that it was the best debating speech he ever delivered. The testimony of different witnesses assures us that it was one of the best. As he triumphed it was noticed that Chamberlain beamed with delight.[2]

Then in the oppressive atmosphere members filed listlessly to the lobbies. Even now there was no hint of the crash. A small majority for the Government was looked for by both sides. Presently came signs that the unexpected was happening. When the numbers were declared, Ministers were defeated by twelve.

Sir Michael Hicks Beach's amendment was carried by 264

[1] Heneage to Chamberlain, August 3, 1888.—Morley, who had been visiting Dublin, wrote to Chamberlain a few days before (June 3, 1885): "I had an hour with Lord Spencer and we parted mutually dissatisfied. I thought him querulous."

[2] T. P. O'Connor, *Gladstone's House of Commons*, pp. 550-553; and H. W. Lucy, *The Gladstone Parliament*, pp. 475-478.

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against 252. Parnell "made" the majority by leading 39 men into the Opposition lobby.

Towards two o'clock in the morning after the long sitting, passions broke out on the Opposition side. A wild scene, well remembered ever after by Chamberlain and all who took part in it, was indeed of no momentary significance to them or to us. Standing up on the bench Lord Randolph, waving his hat, was the fugleman of tumult. In a moment many other Conservatives and nearly all the Parnellites were standing on their benches flourishing hats and handkerchiefs and cheering like men possessed. Other sounds from the Irish party were cries of vengeance upon a coercionist administration. There is no account of Chamberlain's demeanour, but he must have experienced some difficulty in suppressing the appearance of his unmeasured relief. Two other men more prominent in the scene were self-controlled. Gladstone, without looking up, continued his letter to the Queen. Parnell, having brought down one English Government, felt convinced that he would yet bring down another, and another again if necessary, and that his long-intended system was coming into play; but taking no part in demonstration, he only allowed himself that smile with impassive eyes which, on rare occasions, was his singular attraction.

Appearances were delusive. So far as concerned the solid factors of English public life it was not, in truth, Parnell's victory nor Churchill's. True that "the Tories" owed their success wholly to the Parnellites. Had that phalanx abstained, the Conservative Opposition would have been beaten by nearly thirty instead of winning by twelve.

The deciding factor was of another kind. The Government was brought down because no less than seventy-six Liberals did not vote. Their subsequent apologies were various and partly diverting. With the purposes of Parnell and Churchill they had nothing in common. Some of them complained that they had not been properly warned by the Whips. Others dodged the electioneering risks of voting for the beer-tax. This was far from accounting for all the abstentions. The truth is that enthusiasm had evaporated and lassitude prevailed. For a fortnight the Liberal ranks as a whole had been full of despondency and misgiving. The dissensions in the Cabinet were well known to be incurable.

Far better for the party to go out than become responsible for an Irish policy which advanced Liberalism could no longer support with an easy mind or a clear conscience.[1]

Thus the real cause of the downfall was the complete moral disarray created by the deadlock between the Whig and Radical Ministers on Irish reform. We have seen that Chamberlain's own good faith was perfectly clear at every point, and that though full of intrepidity at each step, his method through these transactions during six months had not been rash or hurried but gradual and methodical.

As for the present fate of the Ministry, he had at the outset intended nothing less. Had he fully foreseen, it would not have deterred him after the last days of April. By then, on Cardinal Manning's urging and assurances in the names of the Irish hierarchy and Parnell, he committed himself in earnest to his bold and ill-requited battle for what would have been of its kind a real All-Irish Assembly "with powers of taxation and legislation on matters not affecting the interests of the Empire as a whole"—a self-governing body, national indeed, but subordinate, not co-ordinate; leaving unchanged and more secure, as he believed, the cohesion of the United Kingdom. Out of office he means to pursue the same cause with all his force.

In this way disappeared at last the great and ill-starred Ministry of all the Talents and all the discords. It was the end, after somewhat more than fifty years, of the epoch of politics opened in 1832.

XIV

Here at last we are out of a maze of confusions. The rest of this biography will follow a plainer course, though the personal drama soon becomes as much more intense as more simplified.

A few hours after the parliamentary scene in the small hours of June 9, Ministers tendered their resignations. We are in no way concerned here with the wrangle during the next fortnight on constitutional punctilio before Chamberlain ceased to be a Minister and said farewell to the Board of Trade, when Lord Salisbury's administration took charge. From these pages the

[1] H. W. Lucy, *The Gladstone Parliament*, pp. 472-473. A good account of "men heartily sick of the whole business and chiefly anxious that it should be over".

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second Gladstone Government disappears. Never was public relief more universal on a change of administration. With some qualms and scruples Conservatives were pleased to be in but Liberals more glad to be out.

One curious question cannot be evaded. Lord Morley records that but for the happy catastrophe Gladstone firmly intended to fill up the places of the Radical Ministers, had they persisted in their resignations, and so to carry on without them. This plan might in fact have proved as astute as indomitable on one condition. Gladstone might possibly have been able to "distr the Radicals" by inducing Spencer and the Whigs to accept Chamberlain's scheme without Chamberlain. Of that scheme when negatived he had remarked: "*It will quickly rise again, as I think, perhaps in larger dimensions*".[1] Again, he had written to Hartington at the end of May that he thought the Radicals erring in their tactics but right in their ideas about Ireland.

> Forgive me if I now speak with great frankness on a matter, one of few, in which I agree with them and not with you. I am firmly convinced that on local government for Ireland they hold a winning position; which by resignation now they will greatly compromise. You will all, I am convinced, have to give what they recommend; at the least what they recommend.[2]

That these persuasions might have prevailed upon the Whigs in a reconstructed Cabinet was not likely.

Contemplating circumstances that never happened, Gladstone's idea of continuing in power without the Radicals was a heroic fancy. The commonplace truth is that it was frustrated in advance by the Radicals who were to be its victims. The open secret of their resignations spread doubt and dismay through the Liberal rank and file in the House of Commons. It is impossible not to think that, towards Chamberlain especially, Gladstone's feeling—and though never cordial it had sometimes seemed not unkindly—was seriously estranged during the last harassed fortnight of his Government and by the manner of its end. As before suggested in these pages, he must have resolved

[1] Gladstone to Spencer. Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 194.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 197.

deeply within himself that the supremacy he had meant at need to wield if maintained in office would yet reveal itself in some other way.

Meanwhile the whole House of Commons was in bubbling spirits, and none among them gayer than the outgoing President of the Board of Trade. Though many of his efforts in the House of Commons had been admittedly admirable in lucidity and point during the past five years, his opportunities had been relatively limited and the constraints often irksome. He had not nearly achieved in this Parliament the mastery of which he felt capable when he became a Minister. He had not yet risen to recognised greatness in general debate. Gladstone might well feel pretty safe in far underrating, as he did, Chamberlain's reserves in that particular. Dilke might have drawn ahead in the House but Chamberlain was far ahead in the country. There his platform powers and his genius for originating and organising activity were already at their height. From the New Year, since the beginning of the fight for the "unauthorised programme", he had doubled his power in the constituencies. He might fairly hope to double it again now that he was quit of the official restrictions which had so soon forced him to suspend his agitation in February, after Gladstone's just warning that he had gone much too far as a man in office and as a member of a mixed Government.

Since then his public appearances had been very few. But a few days before the defeat of the Government, when he already felt himself in heart a free man, he addressed "his own people" when accepting the invitation to contest the new division of West Birmingham and so forming a celebrated connection which was to endure unbroken for nearly thirty years. In this speech on that occasion he eulogised Gladstone as a Mont Blanc amongst men: "I sometimes think that great men are like great mountains, and that we do not appreciate their magnitude while we are still close to them. You have to go to a distance to see which peak it is that towers above its fellows." He went on to vindicate indirectly his National Council, though he could not yet openly name it, by demanding "the widest possible self-government to Ireland which is consistent with the maintenance of the integrity of the Empire". But he limited his meaning, as

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he had so often done before. "While we have to conciliate the National sentiment of Ireland, we have to find a safe mean between separation on the one hand . . . and on the other hand, that excessive centralisation . . . which stifles the national life, which destroys the sense of responsibility, which keeps the people in ignorance of the duties and functions of government, and which produces a perpetual feeling of irritation while it obstructs all necessary legislation."

As for the British democratic policy: "I have nothing to withdraw; I believe (and I rejoice to believe) that the reduction of the franchise will bring into prominence social questions which have been too long neglected, that it may force upon the consideration of thinking men of all parties the condition of our poor—ay, and the contrast which unfortunately exists between the great luxury and wealth which some enjoy, and the misery and destitution which prevail amongst large portions of the population".[1]

His inmost feeling about the future of politics is expressed in a private letter:[2]

> We are having a most exciting and anxious time of it. Mr. Gladstone is certainly going to retire soon, and the influence which has held together discordant elements will be removed with him. Fortunately we know our own minds and are not deficient in resolution, but it is not always easy to see clearly the right time and way of giving effect to our decisions. I do not myself believe that the struggle between us and the Whigs can be long postponed. It has nearly come over the question of Ireland. . . . In any case we shall not join another Government, nor meet a new Parliament, without a decision; and if it is against our views, the split will be formal and complete, and we shall be out of office until we can lead a purely Radical administration. . . . It will all be settled in the next few months, and I do not much care in what way. The ultimate victory is to the strong, and Providence *est toujours du côté des gros bataillons.*

We see why no political leader ever more wholly rejoiced in escaping from office. Personal initiative and keen adventure at his own risk were the breath of his being. For five years—

[1] At the Forward Liberal Club, Birmingham, June 3, 1885.

[2] May 17, 1885, to Mrs. Pattison, who was engaged to Dilke.

to him a lot of life—he had felt himself fettered and galled, not by Cabinet responsibility as usually understood, but by the continual necessity for an extreme degree of compromise and accommodation between ill-assorted colleagues in abnormal disagreement. Now, above all, as he takes it, he is his own man again, resuming his natural course, exultant in his liberty and bent to make the very utmost of it.

He is looking forward to a tour with Dilke in Ireland, which will help him to make the "limited revolution" in that country. He intends a far wider, more systematic, platform campaign than has yet been seen in Great Britain. "Unmuzzled", he will develop his advocacy of the democratic programme, attack Whigs and "interests", and rouse the masses in town and country. He expects that the Reformed Parliament of 1886 will be much more significant for English life than that of 1832. The victory of Radicalism, whether at the next election or at another in a year or two after, he does not doubt for a second. In his mind's eye he sees on the social question the "big battalions" marching. In his heart of hearts he regards Gladstone, however majestic, as a man of the past, and himself as the man of destiny. Still well under fifty, and looking and feeling no more than thirty, he is sure that he represents a new generation coming to power. Gladstone seems to him, as to others, almost a Methuselah of politics by comparison. For public purposes, not for self-exaltation—that sort of vanity never was in the least his trait—there is no limit to his ambition; but none neither to his sanguine energy.

There let us leave him at the height of his political dreams and at the top of his own confidence. Nothing in this conception of the political future seemed wholly improbable to many of his opponents, much less to his near friends. The things that changed all in Chamberlain's career were to begin in a few weeks; but, at the moment we are viewing, neither he nor anyone living could have the faintest imagination of the sequel.

Not one of the persons in the play knew all the motives at work. Gladstone's innate desire in his seventy-sixth year to continue and prevail; his secretive but strengthening idea of going beyond the Radical leader on the Irish Question; the magnetic disturbances caused by Lord Randolph's personality on

BOOK V. 1885. the Conservative side; the political effect of the relations between Parnell and his mistress, the wife of his supposed confidant whom he loathed; O'Shea's suppression of letters; the consequent deadly antagonism between Chamberlain and Parnell; Cardinal Manning and the Irish bishops who enlisted Chamberlain for their immediate purpose, but beyond it had no serious intention in his favour; the imminent vengeance on Dilke of another woman when he became engaged to Mrs. Mark Pattison. All these elements make in real life and politics a melodrama too complex in improbabilities for any stage.

END OF VOL. I

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