

# Select documents

## XXVII IRELAND AND PARTY POLITICS, 1885–7: AN UNPUBLISHED CONSERVATIVE MEMOIR (I)

**H**ugh Holmes (1840–1916), the author of the memoir,<sup>1</sup> parts of which appear below, was an Ulster lawyer who rose from quite modest circumstances to become a judge of common pleas in 1887 and ended his career as a lord justice of appeal. The parliamentary episode recalled below lay outside the general framework of his life.

Holmes's hitherto unpublished memoir, still in the hands of his descendants, was occasioned by the death of his wife Olivia in 1901, and only a small part of it is of wider than family interest. That part relates to his period as member for Dublin University, June 1885–June 1887, the only time he entered or stood for parliament. Certain omissions (indicated by rows of dots) have been made, but all that is of political significance appears below.

Holmes was educated at Trinity College, Dublin; entered the Irish bar in 1865, joining the north-west circuit; became a Q.C. and law adviser to the Irish government in 1877, and was solicitor-general for Ireland (without a seat in parliament), 1878–80. There is no published life, nor is there a notice in the *Dictionary of national biography*, though F. E. Ball's *The judges in Ireland* is of some use.<sup>2</sup>

All material within square brackets in the text, and all footnotes, represent editorial additions to Holmes's text. The use of capitals has been normalised according to the practice of this journal.

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to express our gratitude to the present owner of the memoir for making it available and for his generous encouragement. A copy of the complete manuscript, in two volumes, is on deposit in the Northern Ireland Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> A sketch of Holmes's personality appears in Maurice Healy, *The old Munster circuit: a book of memories and traditions* (London, 1939), pp 276–7.

. . . During the ten years that preceded 1878, farmers were making money; rents were consequently well paid; and the country as a whole was thriving. Home rule under the leadership of Isaac Butt never passed beyond the region of sentiment; and agrarian outrage was almost unknown. Parnell for the first part of his career was more remarkable for his house of commons tactics than for his popular influence. His real power dates from some remarkable meetings held in the spring of 1879. Yet nothing was said or done at them which had not been said and done with greater force on many former occasions. But the season was exceptionally wet. The crops failed—prices for pastoral and agricultural produce fell; and it was no longer possible to pay rents which theretofore were not excessive.

In any other country a remedy would have been found consistent with the methods of civilization, but Irishmen are not like other people. Tenants were advised not to make payment to their landlords. Evictions were forcibly resisted. Outrages became frequent. Liberty and law were fast disappearing in many parts of the country.

This state of things had not developed when the tories were defeated in 1880;<sup>1</sup> but there were then threatenings of the coming storm; and it was by a piece of luck that I ceased to be a law officer when the difficulties and anxieties of the position were fast becoming intolerable. There is no doubt that it was the worry of the law room continuing without interruption for five years that brought on the disease which carried off Naish in the prime of his life; and his capacity for work was certainly not less than mine.

The disturbed condition of Ireland was naturally a matter of concern to Olivia [Holmes's wife] and myself, although my personal interests did not suffer from it. On the contrary, the land act of 1881 which was Mr Gladstone's remedy for it, added largely to my income.

. . . If I had felt myself at liberty to follow my own inclination, I should probably have kept out of politics when I ceased to hold office. An Irish barrister cannot retain his practice and at the same time acquire a parliamentary reputation. If he tries to keep in touch with the law courts and the house of commons, he will fail in both; and I preferred following a career for which I knew I was well fitted to engaging in a new and doubtful enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

An ex-law officer however, unless he is prepared to break with his party, is not his own master. He is expected, and feels bound, to do something for the cause. From 1880 to 1885 I was often called on to take a more or less prominent part in political controversy. I made

<sup>1</sup> There was a definite improvement in the spring of 1880—i.e. election time—but the anxiety aroused in the autumn of 1880 was not greater than that reached in the previous winter.

<sup>2</sup> This view is confirmed by another lawyer, John Ross (M.P. Londonderry City 1892-5), last lord chancellor of Ireland: 'there can be no doubt that if he had desired to adopt a political career he would have become a great minister. But he loved the law too well to turn to anything else.' (Sir John Ross, Bt, *The years of my pilgrimage* (London, 1924), p. 201)

speeches in Dublin<sup>3</sup> and the provinces; I supplied the front opposition bench with criticisms upon Mr Gladstone's legislation; I was examined before the lords committee on the land acts; and on three or four occasions I conducted on behalf and in the name of magistrates and others a hostile correspondence with the Irish government in relation to its executive action. Moreover I was asked to become a candidate for both Dungannon and Enniskillen at the next general election. Indeed in 1883 Lord Cole wished to resign his seat for the last mentioned borough in my favour; and it was with reluctance he consented to retain it till the dissolution, before which, however, Enniskillen and Dungannon were disfranchised by Mr Gladstone's redistribution act.

I had in fact come generally to be regarded as a good party fighter, and it was not likely that I could long avoid a serious effort to enter parliament; but until such necessity arose, Olivia and I were more than contented with a life of which the interests and duties were many and the cares but few.

It has not been my way to try to map out the future or to make plans in advance. Some men are able to create opportunities. I have been satisfied to take advantage of them when they arose . . . I have . . . been confirmed in it by the fact that what would be considered my successes in life have come without my looking for them in a way which I could not have calculated on and through circumstances which I was powerless to control. It was thus suddenly and unexpectedly that I found myself embarking in a new career and entering a new arena in June 1885.

The general election of 1880 proved that no other English statesman could be compared with Mr Gladstone in influence over the masses: and with moderate luck and a straightforward policy, he might have been prime minister during the remainder of his political life. But from the first night on which the new parliament met and which saw the beginning of the Bradlaugh incidents, he seemed to be the sport of some evil genius. Misfortunes for which he could not be held responsible, failures for which he could blame no one but himself—formed almost the sole records of his administration; and his popularity was manifestly waning year by year. It was my opinion at the time—and I have found no reason to alter it since—that if the opposition instead of adopting a policy of finesse had opposed the reform bill of 1884 upon the merits and if this measure had been finally rejected by the house of lords, the Tories would have gained at the polls in the ensuing general election as great a triumph as that of 1874. But once the compromise as to the redistribution of seats was arrived at, Gladstone got a fresh start; and it became impossible to predict the verdict of the new constituencies.

<sup>3</sup> One of these, delivered at a loyalist demonstration at the Rotunda, 24 Jan. 1884, was later published with the title *Ireland under a Liberal government* (Dublin, 1884). In it he accused the liberals of weakness in suppressing crime, despite the coercion act, because of their underlying sympathy with Parnell.

It was definitely settled that the dissolution was to take place in the autumn, and it was presumed that till then there could be no political upheavals or complications. This was not however the view of Lord Randolph Churchill, in whom the whole fighting force of the opposition was then concentrated. He thought that it would be for the advantage of his party that it should hold office when parliament was dissolved; and he watched day and night for an opportunity of defeating the government in a critical decision. His chance came when in the middle of June,<sup>4</sup> the Tories assisted by the Parnellites succeeded in rejecting one of the budget resolutions. It became known next evening that Mr Gladstone had resigned; and after an interval of hesitation it was announced that Lord Salisbury had undertaken to form a ministry.

It is difficult for anyone whose knowledge of Lord Ashbourne's political position is confined to the last few years to realize his prominence in the party during the parliament of 1880. He was the most effective member of the official opposition; and his services were not too highly rewarded when he was given a peerage with a seat in the cabinet in addition to the office of lord chancellor of Ireland. He wrote at once to me saying that I was to be attorney general and suggesting that I should take immediate steps to succeed him in the representation of Dublin University.

It would have been impossible for me to have obtained a seat in the house of commons more easily and pleasantly.<sup>5</sup> The constituency was thoroughly loyal to the new government. I found it also friendly to myself; and no other candidate was seriously thought of. The political crisis came like thunder in a cloudless sky; and almost before I had time for thought I was Irish attorney general, a privy councillor and a member of parliament.

. . . The house of commons met after an adjournment on Monday, 6 July 1885, when the re-elected ministers as well as two or three new members like myself took our seats. . . .

. . . From this until the end of the session, I was obliged to do much more than my fair share of talking. The greater part of the time of the house was taken up with Irish business; and Sir William Dyke, who was only to hold the office of chief secretary for six months, took very little part in it.<sup>6</sup> I had practically the sole charge of three important and

<sup>4</sup> At 1.45 a.m. on 9 June 1885, by 264 to 252.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes was returned unopposed on 30 June 1885.

<sup>6</sup> Rt Hon. Sir William Hart Dyke, Bt (1837-1931), M.P. (Cons.) for seats in Kent, 1865-1906: chief whip, 1874-80. Dyke, holding office outside the cabinet, was in no position to play a grand role, nor did he wish to. His recommendations were those of a former chief whip worried by the effect of Irish legislation on party unity and concerned to preserve a working alliance with the Parnellites (Dyke to Salisbury 30 and 31 July 1885, Salisbury MSS class E). On the most sensitive subjects, catholic education and home rule, he was content to follow Carnarvon's lead. The latter estimated him judiciously: 'careful, clear, intelligent in business', a plain country gentleman whose real berth was an undersecretaryship (Carnarvon to Cranbrook 24 Jan. 1886, Cranbrook MSS T501/262).

Dyke's appointment was part of a whole chapter of accidents. There were three names canvassed as Irish secretary: Sir M. Ridley, Bourke, and Dyke. Carnarvon, Gibson, Northcote, and R. Power (the Parnellite whip) would have

complicated bills—now appearing in the statute book as the land purchase act, the labourers act<sup>7</sup> and the educational endowments act<sup>8</sup>—; and I never had a more troublesome or laborious job than to pilot them through their several stages.<sup>9</sup>

It was understood that if the government would not seek to renew the crimes act, the nationalists would try to keep it in office or at least preserve a benevolent neutrality until the prorogation. But this did not prevent them from subjecting our legislation and executive action to the most rigid criticism, and there was also a ring of the tories comprising such men as Brodrick (the present minister of war), Lewis, King-Harman and Tottenham<sup>10</sup> which was determined to make itself as nasty as possible. In my subsequent experience, debate was often bitterer; but it could hardly have been more pertinacious.

preferred Ridley, but Salisbury insisted that Ridley was required as foreign office spokesman in the commons. Dyke was therefore chosen: but then Salisbury, under pressure to placate Bourke, offered him the foreign office post fully believing he would turn it down. Bourke accepted, while at the same time the other position which he might have taken, the Duchy, was again unexpectedly closed by Chaplin agreeing to take it, after an initial refusal, without a seat in the cabinet. Dyke himself at first refused Ireland, which would have let Bourke in there and vacated a place for Ridley at the foreign office: but Dyke too changing his mind, Ridley, everyone's first preference, was left without a place (Iddesleigh's diary, B.M. Add. MS 50063 A, typescript, f. 436, 27 June 1885). According to Ashbourne's autobiographical notes written in 1891, Chaplin was also suggested as Irish secretary with Ashbourne's approval, but Carnarvon thought he would 'boss' too much.

<sup>7</sup> This took the form of an amendment to the act of 1883. It increased the power of sanitary authorities over land and cottages. Local government improvement schemes became less liable to private obstruction. During the formation of the ministry, Power, the Parnellite whip, had offered his counterpart Winn support in return for an extended labourers' bill and a measure eliminating sheriff's expenses in uncontested elections (Winn to Salisbury, 20 June 1885, Salisbury MSS).

<sup>8</sup> The tory Irish programme was provisionally agreed in the cabinet of 4 July. It was so designed that both the tory party (by the land purchase bill) and the Parnellites (by the labourers' bill) should be propitiated (Carnarvon to Salisbury 1 July, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/53/54). The endowments bill was altogether a later addition, 'worked up' by Fitzgibbon in response to the catholic hierarchy's agitation (Carnarvon to Hamilton 11 Aug. 1885, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/56/75).

<sup>9</sup> Dyke moved the second reading of the land purchase bill on 4 August, Holmes speaking in support (*Hansard*, 3, ccc, cols 1113–7). Holmes assumed responsibility for it in committee, speaking 42 times on its behalf. The conduct of the Labourers (Ireland) Bill and the educational endowments bill was almost exclusively entrusted to Holmes. He moved the second reading of both (on 3 and 11 August respectively) and then steered them through committee. Altogether he rose 64 times in defence of them.

A suggestion that the land bill be read first in the lords was stamped on by Salisbury as 'very inexpedient—if not positively a breach of privilege' (Salisbury to Ashbourne, 16 July 1885, Ashbourne MSS).

<sup>10</sup> These were St John Brodrick, later 1st earl of Midleton (1856–1942), then M.P. for West Surrey; Charles Edward Lewis, M.P. for Londonderry City since 1872; Arthur Loftus Tottenham, M.P. for Leitrim 1880–5; and Col. Edward Robert King-Harman, M.P. for Dublin County 1883–5. For Brodrick's quarrel with Churchill's opportunism, see Earl of Midleton, *Records and reactions 1856–1939* (1939), pp 61–4.

. . . My time while in office during the parliamentary session was thus distributed. At whatever hour I might go to bed, I was at breakfast at ten o'clock; and before and after this meal I read the news of the morning and the parliamentary papers of the day. At eleven, I was in the Irish Office where I worked till half past one. Luncheon in the Carlton gave me an hour's rest, followed by another hour in the office. At four I was in the house of commons which I did not leave till it adjourned, rarely in those days before two o'clock in the morning, often as late as four or five. This was the invariable programme for four days of the week.

It was understood that the occupants of the treasury bench would dine in the house. There were in the dining room two reserved tables—one for cabinet ministers, the other for the lesser lights of the government. At the latter there were to be found any time between the hours of seven thirty and nine thirty, six or eight statesmen enjoying a modest meal. Possibly most of us, if our own tastes had been consulted, would have dined elsewhere; but being obliged to keep watch in the palace of Westminster, these dinners I think were the pleasantest incidents of our confinement.

. . . When the house rose I generally walked home for the sake of the exercise; and as I always sat in an armchair for half an hour before going to bed, there was little time for sleep. I had the evenings of Wednesday and Saturday to myself; but even on Sundays I was obliged to spend a couple of hours in the Irish Office. The ordinary business of attorney general, although I did it without assistance, gave me no great trouble, but the preparation of bills, involving the study of previous legislation on the same subject and the drafting of clauses and amendments, was new to me, and caused much anxiety.

. . . The session came to an end on 13 August 1885, and I was not sorry to get back to Ireland and a comfortable home. My first parliamentary experience lasted only six weeks, but it was long enough to lower my estimate of the men engaged in the work of government and the methods by which such work is conducted. Although I did not expect exceptional ability, I was surprised that so many of the occupants of the treasury bench were essentially commonplace and far below the intellectual standard required for success in literature and the learned professions. Two things however astonished me still more—first the timidity and want of moral courage which characterized the best of them, and secondly the thoughtless and haphazard way in which important resolutions were arrived at and carried out.

Lord Randolph Churchill was the only really courageous member of Lord Salisbury's first administration, and his high reputation was due even more to this quality than to his brilliant parts. But on the other hand he was especially casual and reckless in his political action. I select two examples from this period of how business was done. The provisions of Ashbourne's land act were considered by a committee of the cabinet which I attended; but the selection of the purchase commissioners who were to be responsible for its administration was a matter for Lord

Salisbury himself. A pledge was given that their names would be announced before the bill went into committee; but no decision had been come to on the day fixed for the committee stage. I doubt if Lord Salisbury had even thought of it. Ashbourne, after discussing with me the qualifications of several candidates,<sup>11</sup> had gone to Ireland leaving the matter open; and no one else knew anything about it. It was five o'clock; the bill might come in at any moment; and the chief secretary Sir W. Hart Dyke, whose business it was to move that the speaker leave the chair, was not in the house. In this state of things I asked Sir Michael Hicks Beach what was to be done; and I was told by him to go at once to the house of lords and settle it with Lord Salisbury. This was my first meeting with the prime minister, who, after a few words of explanation, sanctioned the names which I thought would be most generally acceptable. It fell to my lot to announce them to the house, for Sir William Dyke whether from accident or design continued to be absent.<sup>12</sup>

My second instance illustrates both ministerial methods and the energy of lord justice Fitzgibbon.<sup>13</sup> The educational endowments act<sup>14</sup> of this session was hardly less important than Ashbourne's act; and a large portion of the funds and property dedicated to Irish education . . . has been dealt with under its provisions. It had been read a first time early in the session as one of Mr Gladstone's government bills; but it had been practically abandoned before he went out of office. I had never even heard of it; and I am sure that there was not one of my colleagues who had read a line of it.

It occurred however to Fitzgibbon who had been one of the commission that enquired into educational endowments in 1878 and who had always taken an intelligent interest in the subject that this bill might be so altered as to become a useful measure; and he determined to exert himself to make it law.<sup>15</sup> He wrote to me and to Lord Randolph

<sup>11</sup> Ashbourne sent his suggestions to Carnarvon and Holmes on 5 Aug. 1885 (Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/56/71).

<sup>12</sup> There is no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy of this account. Ashbourne, however, describing the cabinet of 11 Aug. 1885 in correspondence with Carnarvon and Sir Robert Hamilton (Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/36/73-4) claimed that the choice of the two commissioners proceeded from a cabinet decision 'just before the house met'. Yet Holmes had announced the two names (John McCarthy and Stanislaus Lynch, both catholics) in the commons on the previous day, 10 Aug. (*Hansard* 3, ccc, col. 1622). As no cabinet had been held between 6 and 11 Aug., Ashbourne was perhaps trying to give a retrospective coherence to the choice (which conflicted with Carnarvon's recommendation), although this involved concealing the actual day on which announcement was made.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald Fitzgibbon (1837-1909), who was in 1877-8 Holmes's immediate predecessor as Conservative solicitor-general for Ireland, had been a lord justice of appeal since 1878. A member of the Church of Ireland, he had known Churchill well since 1876.

<sup>14</sup> According to the *D.N.B.* (art. Fitzgibbon), nearly 1,500 schools or colleges and an endowment income of £140,000 a year were eventually affected by this Act.

<sup>15</sup> This passage appears to have been consulted by Winston Spencer Churchill when writing his *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906), i, 435-6.

Churchill who was a member of the commission, but he got no encouragement from either of us. At length one morning in the beginning of August when the sands of the session were running down, he arrived in London; and while breakfasting with Lord Randolph, developed and enforced his views.<sup>16</sup> They went together to the chancellor of the exchequer [Sir Michael Hicks Beach] who at first received Fitzgibbon's proposal with derision but ultimately consented to speak to me about it. He told me when I went to Downing Street in response to his message that he knew little about the bill; but that if I would undertake the conduct of it and the house could be got to accept it, he would offer no objection provided the session was not prolonged.

Shortly after this Fitzgibbon appeared in the Irish Office.<sup>17</sup> . . . I had no doubt that if the bill were passed with his amendments, the country would benefit, but this necessitated its being redrafted from beginning to end; nor could it be so advanced a single stage without the concurrence of the nationalists. With a light heart Fitzgibbon undertook to overcome these difficulties.

During one of the hottest days in the year, Cullinan our draftsman and he with their coats off worked at the amendments, which in the evening were ready for the printer. His negotiations with Sexton were a beautiful specimen of diplomacy on both sides. It would have been fatal for them to meet in the Irish Office or at the patriot's lodgings, and according to my recollection they were brought together by the medium of a cabman.

The regular opposition—represented by Sam Walker<sup>18</sup>—was conciliated by a promise to make one of his constituents an assistant commissioner; and the greatest difficulty of all—the obtaining of John Naish's<sup>19</sup> consent to act as judicial commissioner—was also overcome in a way which I never understood. The most amusing incident however was Sir William Dyke's indignation. He had been he said a whip for twelve years, familiar with all the traditions of the house; and it was not playing the game to enter upon important legislation the last week of the session.<sup>20</sup> He would therefore wash his hands of it.<sup>21</sup> But as they

<sup>16</sup> 'Fitzgibbon is very acute & has more knowledge on the subject [education] than anyone else in Ireland' (Churchill to Carnarvon 27 Aug. 1885, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/55/15).

<sup>17</sup> Fitzgibbon's relations with Holmes were marred by incompatibility of temperament. In later years on the bench 'they often differed during an argument, and then a great clash of mentalities arose' (Ross, *The years of my pilgrimage*, p. 201). But Fitzgibbon had a high opinion of Holmes's political abilities (Fitzgibbon to Churchill 11 Dec. 1885, Churchill MSS X/1161).

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Walker, Q.C., M.P. (Lib.) Londonderry County, 1884 (10 Jan.)-1885: solicitor-general for Ireland, 1883 (Dec.)-1885.

<sup>19</sup> John Naish (1841-90) entered the Irish bar in 1865, becoming a Q.C., 1880; law adviser to the Castle, 1880: solicitor-general for Ireland, 1883: attorney-general, 1884: Irish privy councillor and lord chancellor of Ireland, May-July 1885 and Feb.-June 1886: lord justice of appeal, 1886-90: a catholic and a Liberal.

<sup>20</sup> The act became law on the last day of the session, 14 Aug. 1885.

<sup>21</sup> But he was generous in giving praise where praise was not due. 'I think you have done wonders as to this education question' (Dyke to Carnarvon 23 July 1885, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/58/136).



had not been soiled with much Irish business since he came into office, the matter made little difference.

The amendments which I had to move for the purpose of altering the original bill into its new shape, covering pages of the order book, were unintelligible to everyone except Sexton and myself; and I doubt if we fully understood them. However more by good luck than good guidance the measure emerged as an act with thirty eight fairly drawn sections; and I never heard of its construction giving rise to any difficulty.

While I was in London, Frederick Walsh—one of the bankruptcy judges—died and Ashbourne and I were thinking of Walter Boyd as his successor, when much to our surprise Lord Carnarvon wrote saying that John Monroe, then solicitor-general, would fill the vacancy.<sup>22</sup> I thought that there was some mistake but on my return to Ireland I discovered that he had serious thoughts of accepting it. I conveyed to both Lizzie and him that in my opinion to do so would be a piece of folly and after some hesitation he gave up the idea. I am afraid however that they both fancied that I wanted it for someone else and that I had not been as friendly as I might have been. The letter that gave me this impression reached me at Boulogne whither I had gone to spend a few days in Ashbourne's chateau and where Lord Randolph Churchill<sup>23</sup> and Fitzgibbon were also guests.

This was the only holiday that I had this year; but except that I was obliged to be a good deal in Dublin, our autumn was spent in much the same way as heretofore. . . . Sir Robert Fowler,<sup>24</sup> then lord mayor of London spent a Sunday [at Holmes's house].

. . . In . . . October 1885, we had Lord Randolph Churchill at Monkstown House [Co. Dublin] for the best part of two days.<sup>25</sup> I had been introduced to him when I was law adviser but I had only spoken

<sup>22</sup> Ashbourne for a short time regarded Monroe's appointment as settled, considered it to be 'admirable' but thought Monroe too good for it (Ashbourne to Carnarvon 12 Aug. 1885, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/56/82). Monroe and Holmes were firm friends and related by marriage.

<sup>23</sup> This was the first of three meetings between Holmes and Churchill in the vacation of Aug. 1885–Jan. 1886, the second being at Holmes's house near Dublin early in October, and the third being Fitzgibbon's Xmas party, also in Ireland. This in its way conveys the intense involvement Churchill maintained in Irish affairs during a period when his Indian burdens were exceptionally heavy.

<sup>24</sup> Sir Robert Nicholas Fowler, Bt., M.P. (Cons.) Penryn 1868–74 and City of London since 1880: father-in-law of A. E. Pease, M.P. (Lib.), York City.

<sup>25</sup> This visit is described by Winston Spencer Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906), i, 459–61. The biographer knew Holmes about the time he was writing the life, and the important dictum 'Now, mind. None of us must have anything to do with home rule in any shape or form', attributed to Lord Randolph on this visit, may well have been based on conversations with Holmes.

Churchill communicated his impressions to Salisbury: 'I had much talk with Holmes, att. gen. to whose house I went this morning on landing. He is very satisfactory. There is nothing alarming in the state of Ireland at all. . . . Holmes thinks that the development of boycotting has much to do with the desire of the National League to obtain funds by forcing the more affluent class of farmers & tradesmen to join' (1 Oct. 1885, Salisbury MSS, class E and a reference in L. P. Curtis jnr., *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–92* (1963), p. 55).

to him once or twice before I entered parliament. He was a man of strong likes and dislikes, and he probably could not have explained the grounds of many of them. Soon after I became attorney-general I noticed that he took an interest in me; and thence until his death he was not only most friendly but also confidential. It cannot be denied that he was as erratic as he was brilliant; and that his career was marred by faults of intellect and temper. At the same time he was often visited with censure that he did not deserve, and charged with offences that he had not committed. He had none of that statesmanship that aims at something higher than the triumph of whig or tory; his political action was guided purely by party consideration, but in this respect he did not differ from his contemporaries and while he was more capable, he was not less honest than they.

His visit to us cleared up satisfactorily two or three matters that had given me some anxiety; for example he relieved my mind as to his attitude towards home rule. It had been freely said that he had committed himself with the Parnellites on this subject; but when we went into the library after breakfast he began a political talk by saying that this was quite untrue, that he had many understandings with the Irish members which were faithfully adhered to on both side but that he had never either directly or indirectly countenanced home rule and that any hesitation in regard to it would be fatal to the tories.

He also put an end to an embarrassing situation in which John Monroe found himself. The latter had become a candidate for North Armagh at the request of some of his friends who were electors; but Colonel Saunderson<sup>26</sup> was also in the field as an Orange champion. It was clear to me that it would produce the worst impression in Ulster for the solicitor-general to persist in such a contest; but I had a delicacy in speaking about it after the business of the bankruptcy judgeship, and no one else seemed to care. I therefore suggested to Monroe to consult Lord Randolph who of course advised immediate withdrawal.<sup>27</sup>

Ireland and Irish affairs have proved fatal to the reputation of many statesmen, and to none more than to Lord Carnarvon. When he consented to become viceroy for six months<sup>28</sup>—for he made it a condition of his acceptance of the office that he would then retire—the government was congratulated on its happy choice. He was supposed to possess exceptional administrative ability; and the fact that he had twice retired from high office in the cabinet because he did not approve of its policy had gained for him the greatest respect. He disappointed me from the first, with some ability and many accomplishments he was weak, vain and emotional. His interview in London with Parnell, brought

<sup>26</sup> Col. Edward James Saunderson (1837-1906), M.P. (Lib.) Cavan, 1865-74: (Unionist) North Armagh, 1885-1906: revived Orangeism in Ulster in the early 1880's, and became leader of the Irish protestants in the commons from 1885.

<sup>27</sup> 'With regard to the party dispute in the N., I think in Armagh Monro (sic) ought to retire' (Churchill to Carnarvon, 21 Sept. 1885, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/55/21).

<sup>28</sup> See appendix v.

about by Justin McCarthy, was still a secret;<sup>29</sup> but it ought not to have surprised anyone who knew him. He once told me that his successes as a minister were due to his knowledge of human nature and his tact in dealing with men. Perhaps he was sometimes too tactful. When Parnell left the 'empty house', he was I believe persuaded by Lord Carnarvon's manner that the Tories were prepared to adopt a home rule policy, and I am disposed to trace to this circumstance much of the national peril that followed.

At a later period Lord Carnarvon himself became a home ruler at least in theory, and Sir Robert Hamilton who had great influence over him prepared for his consideration a scheme<sup>30</sup> of home rule differing little from Mr Gladstone's bill of the following year. I did not know this till long after, but it accounted for a conversation<sup>31</sup> we had one winter's evening at the viceregal lodge. Leaning in the gloaming against the mantelpiece and speaking with much earnestness, he sought to obtain from me an opinion that it might be possible to go some way towards granting the nationalist demand. I asked him was he prepared to place Irish property under the control of an Irish parliament and the administration of justice in the hands of an Irish executive? He replied not to the full extent; but he was wholly unable to say where or how the line was to be drawn. Still, whatever may have been his faults of judgment or other shortcomings, intercourse with him was very pleasant. He was thoroughly amiable and kindly. I nearly always found Lady Carnarvon with him; and having learned a handwriting indistinguishable from his, she was able to give him substantial help in his correspondence. He occasionally asked me when I was at the viceregal lodge to lunch at the children's midday meal where he appeared to great advantage. Moreover he was candid and open-minded; he was as ready to listen as to speak, and I have often succeeded in convincing him against his own inclination.

<sup>29</sup> In conversation with McCarthy on 6 July Carnarvon arranged to meet Parnell on 4 or 5 August. In the event the meeting took place in an unoccupied house at 15 Hill Street on 1 August. A full account of Carnarvon's version of the conversation is printed in Hardinge, *Carnarvon*, iii, pp 178–81. The Ashbourne MSS show Ashbourne was kept fully informed by Carnarvon of the secret negotiations with Parnell.

<sup>30</sup> In P.R.O. 30/6/127/19 (3 copies) and in B.M. Add. MS 44681, ff 122–9. This took the form of a printed memorandum, dated 31 Oct. 1885. Hamilton began by stressing the extent and power of the nationalist movement. The question of granting Irish demands subject to the integrity of the empire and the protection of minorities was 'not one of "never" but of "when" and "how"'. His own specific plan was for 'a carefully devised constitution' creating an Irish parliament with a second chamber, power over taxation and minority representation. A majority of two thirds was to be required in dealing with certain selected subjects, and the crown was to retain control of judicial appointments, armed forces and constabulary. The memorandum was circulated among the cabinet (P.R.O. CAB 37/16/57).

Hamilton sent two copies of his scheme to Spencer, 1 Feb. 1886: Spencer forwarded it to Gladstone on 9 Feb., and Gladstone gave it to Edward Hamilton to read on 11 Feb. (Edward Hamilton's diary, B.M. Add. MS 48643 ff 8–9).

<sup>31</sup> See appendix vi.

Immediately before the general election Judge Flanagan intimated his wish to resign.<sup>32</sup> His successor would be a member of the high court of justice with the same dignity and salary as the other judges; but I preferred the work of the common law division and I thought it selfish and even cowardly to abandon my office and my seat for the university at a critical time. I therefore waived my claim in favour of John Monroe who was succeeded as solicitor-general by John Gibson.<sup>33</sup>

The elections began in November and were watched with the keenest interest, as no one could foretell the result of the new franchise in the new constituencies. In the boroughs the tories fully realized their expectations but disaster followed disaster in the counties. When the polls were finished out of a house of 670 members, there were only 250 supporters of the government.<sup>34</sup>

An ex-attorney-general with a seat in the house of commons is expected to give almost as close attention to his parliamentary duties in opposition as when he was in office. Napier, Ball, Edward Gibson [Lord Ashbourne], had all acted on this party tradition with the result that their bar practice soon disappeared; and although I did not hope to be more fortunate in this respect, I was determined to follow their example.

I cannot pretend that the prospective loss of a large part of my income gave me no concern. Olivia realized as fully as I did that it would entail many distasteful economies; but we regarded it as one of the unavoidable incidents of life to be borne with patience and equanimity. The depression . . . arose from another cause and will be understood by all who remember the feeling of alarm and uneasiness with which Irishmen, loyal to the union, heard that the most influential of English statesmen was about to adopt a policy which if carried out must end in their destruction. For six months their fate was in the balance, and although from the first there were not wanting indications in the political outlook that forbade despair, there was enough of uncertainty to cause despondency.

<sup>32</sup> Flanagan was evidently approached by Ashbourne in early Nov. 1885 with the idea of resignation. He agreed on the condition that he was given a seat in the English privy council. Salisbury refused the request and Carnarvon suggested that the matter should be allowed to rest. Ashbourne, in the interests of his brother's promotion, saw Flanagan a second time but could get no modification of condition. Carnarvon then wrote again to Salisbury on 15 Nov. stressing the need to grant Flanagan's stipulation because 'a whole chain of legal and judicial appointments depends on it'. Salisbury gave in on the 19th and Gibson wrote the next day accepting the appointment (Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/57/83-100). Salisbury was probably acting on Halsbury's advice (Salisbury to Halsbury 16 Nov., Halsbury MSS).

<sup>33</sup> John George Gibson, younger brother of Lord Ashbourne, was appointed solicitor-general for Ireland in Nov. 1885. He was M.P. (Cons.) for Liverpool (Walton) at the time.

<sup>34</sup> In the new parliament, according to official sources, there were 249 conservatives, 335 liberals and 86 Irish nationalists (*Annual Reg. 1885*, p. 187).

The book on which John Morley is now engaged will probably disclose the mental process which preceded Mr Gladstone's new departure. The vulgar explanation that it was a sacrifice of principle to a desire for office seems to me wholly incredible. A sudden change in political opinion is regarded with suspicion when it coincides with self-interest; but Gladstone had nothing to gain and much to lose by identifying himself with home rule. The Parnellites could not have prevented him from becoming prime minister, even if they had desired to do so; and when they saw that they had nothing to hope for from the Tories, they would have favoured his return to power. Once in office he would probably have remained there. Most of his supporters were pledged to what was called the 'unauthorised programme' promulgated by Chamberlain; and if he had thought fit to adopt it as his policy, the whole party would have followed him with more or less enthusiasm. Home rule, on the other hand, had during the general election been only mentioned by liberals to be repudiated;<sup>35</sup> and he must have known that a change of front in regard to it would put an unparalleled strain on party loyalty. For these and other reasons I am satisfied that his conversion was sincere. It was probably not so sudden as it seemed at the time.

It is remarkable that during the fifteen years of the home rule agitation, Gladstone, although in power for nearly two-thirds of that period, had never expressly declared against it. Once at a festive gathering in Aberdeen he had treated it with some ridicule; but save on that occasion, he had not subjected it to hostile criticism.

He had been in parliament for thirty-six years before he gave any evidence of interest in Irish affairs. The rest of his political career was occupied with little else; and I doubt not that his attention having been turned to the Fenian rising and to the Clerkenwell and other outrages, he gradually came to believe that he was the man especially appointed by divine providence to make Ireland peaceful and contented. Disappointed by repeated failures and finding that notwithstanding his remedial legislation the Parnellites were the bitterest opponents of his government, he began to think that the problem could only be solved by yielding to their demands.

Lord Chancellor Sullivan,<sup>36</sup> who died in [April] 1885, told John Naish, then attorney-general, shortly before his death, that he had just been reading a very disturbing letter on this subject; and Naish understood

<sup>35</sup> This is not strictly true. No liberal leader gave anything resembling a commitment to an Irish legislature and Hartington came out against any Dublin board even when shorn of legislative authority. But Chamberlain at Warrington (8 and 15 Sept.) proposed a modification of his central board scheme (removing any suggestion of legislative powers) and Dilke supported the change. Gladstone was content with a principle that could barely be criticized: 'every grant to portions of the empire of enlarged powers for the management of their own affairs is, in my view, not a source of danger, but a means of averting it' (Midlothian address). What Holmes's statement indicates is the traditional looseness in using the words 'home rule'.

<sup>36</sup> Sir Edward Sullivan, Bt (1822-85), lord chancellor of Ireland from 11 Dec. 1883 to his death, 13 Apr. 1885.

from this and other circumstances that a change of policy was in the air. No one however realized more fully than 'the old parliamentary hand' how far theoretical speculations are removed from practical politics; and I doubt if he would have regarded home rule as coming within the latter sphere if he had not been convinced that the Tories were prepared to concede it.

Although Lord Carnarvon's meeting with Parnell was not made public till the following June,<sup>37</sup> I feel sure that it had reached the ears of Mr Gladstone long before it was known to Lord Salisbury's ministers. His [Gladstone's] letter to Arthur Balfour<sup>38</sup> offering to assist in carrying a measure of home rule was probably sincere; and written in the belief that the government was more or less committed to this policy.

I first heard of this now famous letter on 27th or 28th of December when Lord Randolph Churchill came to Ireland to join Lord Justice Fitzgibbon's Xmas party. On the day of his arrival, he breakfasted and lunched with us; and in telling me of it he could scarcely restrain his excitement. It confirmed the vague rumours already prevalent that Gladstone would return to power as a home ruler: and Lord Randolph's comment was 'Surely the Lord has delivered him into our hands'. Before his return to England he spent another day with us, when I had Colonel Saunderson to meet him and when he arranged the rough outline of the campaign in Ulster.<sup>39</sup>

The new parliament was to assemble on the 12th January.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the precedents of 1868, 1874 and 1880 the government, although defeated at the polls resolved to meet the house of commons; but it could only expect to survive a few days.

. . . My life during the ten days that intervened before the house of commons met for the despatch of public business had several interesting features. It was necessary for the government to have some Irish policy to submit to parliament; but no one of cabinet rank seemed to

<sup>37</sup> In a speech on the second reading of the home rule bill, 7 June 1886 (*Hansard* 3, cccvi, col. 1181).

<sup>38</sup> Following Gladstone's visit to Eaton Hall on 15 Dec. 1885, a number of letters passed between Balfour and Gladstone in late December and early January. They have been printed in Viscount Gladstone's *After thirty years* (London, 1928), pp 396-8. The originals, together with copies of some of them, are in the Gladstone MSS, B.M. Add. MSS 44493-4 and the Balfour MSS, B.M. Add. MS. 49692.

<sup>39</sup> The relations between Churchill and the Ulster tory M.P.s were extremely uneasy as a result of the Maamtrasna debate. On 16 Nov. 1885 Churchill had written to Salisbury bitterly attacking the 'foul Ulster Tories who have always ruined our party' (Salisbury MSS, class E). Churchill made no secret of his attitude, writing to Carnarvon (21 Sept. 1885, P.R.O. 30/6/65/21) and Beach (25 Sept., St Aldwyn MSS, PGC/20) in the same strain. It was at the meeting referred to here (29 Dec.-1 Jan.) that Col. Saunderson told Churchill of the extent of Ulster unionist dissatisfaction (R. R. James, *Churchill*, p. 226). The rapprochement which now began culminated in Churchill's dramatic visit to Ulster in Feb. 1886. D. C. Savage's article 'The origins of the Ulster unionist party 1885-6', above, xii, p. 193 ff., described the nature of the loyalists' campaign during the months when home rule seemed imminent.

<sup>40</sup> Peel was re-elected speaker on that day. The Queen's Speech was not read until 21 January, the intervening time being spent in administering oaths.

have considered what it ought to be. In a long interview<sup>41</sup> I had with Sir Michael Beach [chancellor of the exchequer], I offered suggestions for the suppression of the National League by legislation<sup>42</sup> somewhat similar to the 'dangerous associations' section of the crimes act of 1887, but Churchill was then strongly opposed to anything that would look like the renewal of coercion. Meanwhile there was no minister really responsible for Irish administration. Sir William Dyke had resigned and a successor had not been appointed.<sup>43</sup> The term for which Lord Carnarvon had accepted office had expired;<sup>44</sup> and he was either careless or despairing. Ashbourne was already entering on that curious phase of statesmanship to which he has since adhered—fussiness in small things combined with a complete detachment from all matters involving responsibility.

In this state of affairs, Lord Randolph asked me one day to meet him and W. H. Smith in the committee room of the Carlton Club. There was an air of mystery in the way in which we came together and separated that accorded well with the subject of the conference—the simultaneous arrest of all the nationalist members on a charge of high treason! He said the idea originated with Lord Halsbury [the lord chancellor]; but he was unable to explain the nature of the treasonable practices to be imputed to the accused. At first I treated the matter somewhat lightly, pointing out that in the absence of all evidence or even suspicion, what he proposed would be outrageously illegal; but to my horror I found that his mind was firmly fixed on it. He said that with full knowledge of the risk, he was prepared to accept complete responsibility by becoming chief secretary<sup>45</sup> and that he intended to submit the project to the cabinet at a meeting which I would be asked to attend.

I left the Carlton Club in anything but a happy frame of mind. I knew that if Lord Randolph's scheme was adopted, the reputation of everyone engaged in carrying it out would be ruined; and I was quite resolved that I would cease to be attorney-general before it was proceeded with. No doubt it was almost inconceivable that such a proposi-

<sup>41</sup> This interview probably took place in Beach's room in the house of commons on 14 January. Beach writing to Churchill on that day mentioned that he had asked Holmes to come to his room at about 2.30 p.m. 'so as possibly to escape the spies' (Churchill MSS XI/1292).

<sup>42</sup> In other words the policy of Salisbury and the Iddlesleigh group. He had previously discussed the question with Carnarvon (Holmes to Carnarvon 13 Jan. 1886, Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/56/32).

<sup>43</sup> Dyke resigned on 16 Jan. 1886. 'Last night Dyke came to Beach & afterwards to me—& explained that he did not want to go on as Irish secretary—that Carnarvon had never let him know anything that was going on—& that for that, & for other reasons more special to himself he did not feel equal to doing the work in the house of commons' (Salisbury to W. H. Smith, misdated, but 17 Jan., Hambleden MSS PS9/104).

<sup>44</sup> See appendix v.

<sup>45</sup> 'I think there are three men in the government who would answer to the requirements of the position—Lord Cranbrook, Mr Smith, and (please don't be shocked) myself' (Churchill to Salisbury 16 Jan. 1886, Salisbury MSS class E).

tion would be adopted by any deliberative body, but what alarmed me most in this connection was the attitude of Mr Smith; I did not know at the time why he was brought into conference; but when I heard what was to be the subject of consultation I was glad to see him there. He had a high reputation for practical sagacity, and I felt sure that he would understand the folly of the proposal, but while avoiding any definite opinion, he seemed to convey that he approved of it. Lord Randolph had probably learned already what I came to know afterwards, that this was 'pretty Fanny's way'. In the many consultations in which I met him either alone or with others at a later period, he never originated anything, he never condemned anything. He listened to the views of others with a kindly tolerance, but one would wait in vain for 'light or leading'.

In the course of a day or two, I had my first experience of a cabinet council.<sup>46</sup> A request to be in attendance came from Lord Salisbury's private secretary; and it was with a feeling of awe that I came into the presence of the mysterious body to which the national destinies are entrusted. My reception was much less formal than I had anticipated. I thought that I would be treated as an outsider, and that after having given such information and having answered such questions as might be sought or asked, I would be dismissed at once. I found however on this as well as on several subsequent occasions that I was expected to take part in deliberations. I was given a seat at the table between Lord Randolph Churchill and Lord George Hamilton [first lord of the admiralty]. I heard the former introduce the subject; I was invited to state my views; a general conversation followed, and at length a decided expression of opinion by the prime minister put an end to the discussion.

In the following year [i.e. from August 1886] I attended four or five cabinet councils held in accordance with the present usage in the Foreign Office; but on this occasion the meeting took place in the room in Downing Street which had been used for the purpose from the beginning of the last century, if not from a still earlier date. It was a dingy and quaintly shaped apartment, quite destitute of features of state or dignity, and my attention was called to what I was told was a matter of long tradition—the presence on a side table of a plate of sailor's biscuits and a jug of water as a provision for hungry or thirsty statesmen.

I think it was in the same room—it was certainly in a room in the same house—that Sir Michael Beach on 20 January [1886] gave his state

<sup>46</sup> This refers to the cabinet of 15 Jan. 1886. Churchill wrote to Salisbury on 13 January recommending Holmes's attendance: 'I would venture to suggest the extreme desirability of the cabinet hearing on Friday the 15th the views of the Irish attorney-general. He is at the present moment the soundest authority on *fact*' (Salisbury MSS class E). Cranbrook afterwards recorded a disappointing performance: 'the attorney-general for Ireland had *no evidence*, could get none of the palpable facts, offer none for our enquiry, and all was a problem' (Cranbrook's diary, 16 Jan.). Holmes was evidently brought in by Churchill to provide proof of the need for strong executive action against the National League, before the meeting of parliament, and without parliamentary sanction. According to Cranbrook (acting in alliance with Churchill in this cabinet) he failed to do what was required of him.



dinner at which the Queen's Speech to be delivered the next day was read. I had already seen it; and it throws some light on the way in which such documents are composed, when I say that one paragraph of it was written by myself.<sup>47</sup> I noticed that, while emphatically repudiating home rule and regretting the disorder prevalent in Ireland,<sup>48</sup> it was silent as to any remedy. I suggested the addition of a promise, couched in somewhat ambiguous terms, that if, as was to be feared, the means at the disposal of the executive should prove insufficient to cope with the emergency, parliament would be applied to for further powers. The paragraph as written by me was accepted without alteration; and formed part of the speech of Queen Victoria on the last occasion on which she was present at the opening of the session.

I met Lord Randolph after Beach's dinner in the smoking room of the Carlton Club. I thought that he had been annoyed by my opposition to his mode of dealing with the Irish members and I had not seen him for some days. I found him however as friendly as ever. He told me that W. H. Smith was to be the new chief secretary,<sup>49</sup> adding something

<sup>47</sup> See appendix iv.

<sup>48</sup> On 4 Mar. 1886, in reply to Holmes's motion, Gladstone gave the following figures showing the development of agrarian unrest in Ireland:

	May 1885	Oct. 1885	Jan. 1886
Persons totally boycotted	53	165	—
Persons partially boycotted	174	714	—
Total	227	879	900

Agrarian crimes (including threatening letters):

October 1885	106
November	84
December	89
January 1886	96
February 1886	71

Gladstone was thus able to demonstrate that Conservative declarations of satisfaction over governing Ireland without coercion, which were prominent at the time of the general election, had in fact coincided with the peak of agrarian unrest (*Hansard* 3, ccxii, cols 1946–7).

<sup>49</sup> Salisbury offered the appointment to Smith by letter on 17 Jan. (Hambleton MSS PS9/104, Cranbrook's diary 18 Jan.). Carnarvon, who was not consulted, only learnt of the appointment after it had been announced. Salisbury, apologizing, claimed that it had only been settled on 20 Jan. (Carnarvon MSS, P.R.O. 30/6/53/69). Evidently Smith had to be persuaded, and Churchill during a conversation with him on 20 Jan. used 'every argument' to get him to accept (Churchill MSS XI/1307b). The public announcement appeared in *The Times* of 21 Jan. Smith left for Dublin by the evening packet on Saturday, 23 Jan., and was sworn in on the 25th.

Cranbrook succeeded him as secretary of war on 23 Jan. 1886 though Smith continued to hold the seals of office. He resigned the chief secretaryship on 10 Feb. and the war office on 6 Feb. (Smith to Cranbrook 13 Feb. 1886, Cranbrook MSS T501/260). Smith, threatened in February with 'pains and penalties' for holding two offices at once, wrote to Salisbury to get the circumstances of his unusual position cleared up. Apparently Smith's formal resignation, and Cranbrook's acceptance, of the war office were to have taken place at a council on 28 or 29 January (Smith to Salisbury, 13 Feb., forwarded to Halsbury, 16 Feb., and in Halsbury MSS).

complimentary to myself in connection with the assistance which I might be able to give him.

. . . The debate on the address began . . . the following afternoon. It was said—I know not with what truth—that a majority of the leaders of the opposition were anxious to keep the ministry in office until Easter; and there certainly seemed to be no desire to prolong the discussion which was on the point of collapsing on the first night. But it is impossible for an English government to exist with nearly two thirds of the house of commons against it. If an occasion for resignation is not forced on it by its opponents, it is obliged to make one for itself; and the Irish question seemed to offer a good opportunity.

Mr Smith went to Ireland on either 22nd or 23rd<sup>50</sup> of January with the double object of being inducted into office and of discovering a policy. He did not appear to have made much progress in the last mentioned direction when I saw him in Grosvenor Place just before he started; nor was I sanguine that I would find him in a more decided frame of mind on the following Tuesday when we were to meet in Dublin. In this however as in all other matters during the year 1886, Lord Randolph was the moving spirit on our side of the house. Hitherto he was strongly opposed to repressive legislation, but I now noticed that with ready opportunism he was preparing for a change of front. On the second night of the debate<sup>51</sup> on the address I was permitted in a reply to a speech from Sexton to make as strong a case as I could against the tyranny of the National League;<sup>52</sup> and on the next day [i.e. Saturday 23 January], Lord Randolph intimated to be that he was becoming a convert to strong measures.<sup>53</sup>

The final resolution was taken suddenly. On the Monday evening<sup>54</sup> I was to cross to Ireland to keep my appointment with the new chief secretary and when I left the house of commons at seven o'clock no new departure was anticipated. An hour later I was caught on the Euston platform by a messenger sent after me by Beach; and on going back I

<sup>50</sup> In fact the 23rd. According to a mistaken report in *The Times* (25 Jan.) he was accompanied by Holmes and Ashbourne.

<sup>51</sup> i.e. 22 Jan. 1886.

<sup>52</sup> *Hansard* 3, cccii, cols 214-25. Holmes's speech gave a clearer indication than any that had preceded it of a growing ministerial disposition to deal firmly and legislatively with the National League. Beach and Churchill alone were responsible for the failure to enunciate such a policy more decisively at this stage (Salisbury to the queen, 21 Jan., *Letters of Queen Victoria*, 3rd series, i, 13).

In the course of his speech Holmes gave the following details about the growth of the league:

Year	Branches
1883	242
1884	592
July 1885	800
31 Dec. 1885	1,280

<sup>53</sup> 'The recalcitrant members of the cabinet [Churchill and Beach] have changed their minds about coercion, under party pressure, and a bill will probably be introduced in two or three days' (Salisbury to the Queen, 24 Jan. in *Letters*, i, 17).

<sup>54</sup> 25 Jan. 1886 (Smith to Salisbury, Salisbury MSS D/59/116).

learned that it was resolved to introduce at once a bill for the suppression of the League.<sup>55</sup>

Notice of this was given by the leader of the house with dramatic effect on the following evening;<sup>56</sup> and Mr Smith, who was recalled from Dublin as I was from Euston, got credit for a ferocity of disposition of which he was entirely innocent. Of course no one supposed that such a measure would become law. The chances were against it ever seeing the light; and indeed it would be boldly asserted that it had no existence beyond the title; but this was not the fact. In anticipation of events, I had such a bill prepared and printed,<sup>57</sup> although I am not sure that it was read by anyone except the office draftsman.

The announcement of drastic legislation had the immediate effect of putting the government out of pain. If the opposition had allowed the motion of which Beach gave notice to be debated, it would have been obliged to formulate an alternative policy; and Mr Gladstone was not yet prepared to do so. Accordingly, he and his front bench supported an amendment to the address in favour of agricultural labourers; and in or about midnight on Tuesday the 26th it was carried against the government.<sup>58</sup>

(to be continued)

<sup>55</sup> Other sources (Salisbury to the queen, 26 Jan., in *Letters*, p. 19; Cranbrook's diary, 26 Jan.; Churchill to Smith 26 Jan., Churchill MSS XI/1334) agree that the decision to introduce a bill to suppress the league was taken in cabinet on 26 January.

<sup>56</sup> *Hansard* 3, cccii, col. 416. Immediately on the resumption of business on 26 January, Beach announced that Smith would move a bill on Thursday 28th 'for the purpose of suppressing the National League and other dangerous associations, for the prevention of intimidation, and for the protection of life, property, and public order in Ireland'. A land bill would follow. If the debate on the address had not been concluded by the 28th, a postponement was to be moved.

<sup>57</sup> The coercion bill 'is in fact drawn' (Salisbury to the queen, 21 Jan., in *Letters*, 3rd series, i, 13). A bill was prepared by Ashbourne and discussed at the cabinet on 16 January (Salisbury to Churchill, 16 January, Churchill MSS XI/1302b). No copy of a Conservative coercion bill is to be found in Parliamentary Papers and there is no copy preserved among either the Carnarvon, Salisbury, Smith, Ashbourne, or cabinet papers.

The existence of a later and probably largely distinct bill, drawn up afresh after a cabinet decision on 26 January, is however made clear in a letter from William F. Cullinan, the Irish Office draftsman, to Ashbourne in the Ashbourne MSS, dated 29 Jan. 1886:

'I send you our draft bill for suppressing the Land League, reprinted with amendments marked in pencil. The first edition was dated 27th Jan., the day after Sir M. Beach announced the bill. This edition is dated 2 Feb., the amendment having been suggested by W. H. Smith after he returned from Ireland.

Copies of the bill have gone, by Mr Smith's directions, to himself, to you, to Holmes, and to Lord Salisbury, and to no other person. I send also a memorandum on the peace preservation acts, 1782-1882.'

Smith wrote to Ashbourne on 29 January that he had been through the bill with Holmes and thought they could make a good measure of it, but was relieved that he would not have to introduce it.

<sup>58</sup> Ministers were defeated, 331-252.