

GENERAL ELECTION, 1906.



NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1906.

TO THE ELECTORS OF THE ROMFORD DIVISION OF ESSEX.

GENTLEMEN,

Many electors in this constituency have invited me again to offer myself as a candidate for the honour of representing you in the House of Commons.

Fully recognising the responsibility thus placed upon me, I venture, having lived and worked among you for many years, to submit my opinions with regard to the main questions of the day, and to appeal for your support.

It is of course impossible, within the limits of an address, to deal with every subject in which you may be interested, but I shall be happy to answer by correspondence or at Public Meetings inquiries upon topics not included herein.

OUR FISCAL POLICY.—One of the main issues upon which the judgment of the nation will be demanded is the scheme of fiscal revolution brought forward nearly three years ago by Mr. Chamberlain. It is my conviction, after long study and inquiry, that the proposals of the so-called "Tariff Reformers" are fraught with the greatest danger to the trade of our country, to the welfare of the people, and to the unity of the Empire. I am confirmed in this opinion by—

- (1) The impartial investigation by the Board of Trade.
- (2) The view of the greatest statesmen who have controlled our national finance that protection would be destructive to our commerce.
- (3) The experience of an immense number of our leading manufacturers, who have shown that success can be achieved without recourse to artificial nourishment at the expense of the nation.
- (4) Reference to the records of the condition, first, of our own people in the days of Protection in this country, and secondly, of those in foreign countries where protection prevails at the present time.

To the utmost of my ability, therefore, I should oppose what Lord Goschen has denounced as "a gamble with the people's food."

FOREIGN AFFAIRS.—Our attitude to the other nations of the world should be uniformly courteous, dignified and firm; vigilant in defence of undoubted rights; never needlessly bellicose, never craven. Our influence should be constantly used to prevent international wars and to promote peace among the nations of the world.

COLONIAL POLICY.—I oppose the handing over to cosmopolitan financial syndicates, however influential, of vast territories acquired by the blood and treasure of our fellow countrymen. I believe in according the greatest possible encouragement to our self-governing colonies, and am in favour of the proposal that their representatives should meet in London periodically to discuss matters of mutual interest.

CHINESE LABOUR.—The importation of Chinese coolies into South Africa at the bidding of the foreign mine owners is condemned by the experience and sentiment of our self-governing colonies. I believe it to be wholly unnecessary, prejudicial to South Africa's real interests, and unjust to British labour, which was promised employment at the close of the late war.

THE NAVY.—Thanks to Free Trade, we now own nearly half the shipping of the whole world. This fact and the geographical situation of the various units of the British Empire render it imperative that we should maintain a powerful navy in the highest degree of efficiency. No great reduction of naval expenditure can or should be anticipated, but I believe that a more thorough scrutiny of the estimates and accounts would lead to wise economies.

THE ARMY.—The needs of our Empire call for the maintenance of a highly efficient and very mobile force available for foreign service. This end can be attained by means far less costly than are entailed by the present wasteful system of the War Office. I am utterly opposed to conscription, and therefore deplore the Conservative Government's hostile attitude to the Volunteers, believing that a strong voluntary citizen army is our best security, after the Navy, for home defence.

IRELAND.—The adoption in recent years by the Conservative party of the principle of Land Purchase—which formed so important a part of Mr. Gladstone's proposals in 1886, and was then so bitterly opposed by Mr. Chamberlain—and the appointment by Mr. Balfour of Sir Anthony Macdonnell, an Irish Catholic and an avowed Home Ruler, as virtual head of the Governing Staff in Ireland, together with the Devolution proposals of Lord Dunraven and other leading Unionists, and the resignation of Mr. Wyndham, tend to show, in my opinion, that an attitude of indifference towards the legitimate aspirations of the Irish people cannot be long maintained by either the Conservative or the Liberal party. As a further stage in the policy inaugurated by Mr. Gladstone and carried on by Mr. Balfour, I would support any well-considered scheme to relieve the Imperial Parliament of the congestion from which it has too long suffered, by an endeavour, in the words of Mr. Asquith, "step by step, more and more to associate Irish ideas and the Irish people themselves with the management of purely Irish affairs." This same freedom in local matters I would also advocate for England, Scotland, and Wales.

THE LICENSING ACT and TEMPERANCE.—I regard the recent Licensing Act as conceived almost entirely in the interests of the Brewers, and as unjust alike to the License holder and to the public, and I am in favour of its early amendment.

One of the gravest problems of our time is the insobriety which prevails amongst all classes of our population, engendering, as it does, crime, lunacy, and poverty. I have no ready remedy for this gigantic evil; but I think it should not baffle the resources of wise statesmanship to grapple with it with a large measure of success; and whilst I decline to pledge myself in advance to any specific proposals, my very careful and favourable consideration will be given to every measure brought forward with a view to lessening and remedying the evils of intemperance and to removing its causes. In this connection I have much confidence that the common-sense and discretion of the people would ensure that any step in the direction of popular control would not lead to injustice.

EDUCATION.—I wish to see a thoroughly national system of education, under such conditions of popular control that the whole nation may feel itself interested and responsible. The entrance gate to the teaching profession should be open wide to merit and industry; without any barrier in the shape of religious tests. Our facilities for, and methods of, **technical** Education should be second to none in the world, if we are to retain our commercial pre-eminence.

Mr. Balfour, in his election address of 1895, promised in the name of his party to make the cost of Education a charge on the Imperial Exchequer, but his promises have not been fulfilled. The burden is felt chiefly in poor districts, and especially in the areas over the London border.

I am strongly of opinion that the cost of Education should be a national rather than a local charge, and I have every hope that the Liberal Party will at an early date deal with this pressing question, and thus relieve the over-burdened ratepayers of an impost which they can no longer bear.

OLD AGE PENSIONS and the POOR LAWS.—These subjects must be considered together. Expenditure upon the former will ultimately reduce the cost of administering the latter. Money which might have been made available for this purpose has been wasted during ten years of Conservative government upon wars, extravagant administration of the public services, and doles to the rich. I am, however, hopeful that the efforts of a Liberal Government to restore national credit by exercising economy in national expenditure, together with a further graduation of the income tax and death duties, will sooner or later enable us to establish a system of provision for the latter years of our aged

and deserving workers. This would ultimately result in reducing our enormous poor law expenditure and would so relieve the rates.

I am emphatically in favour of the following and other Reforms:—

Nationalization of the Poor Rate.

A graduated Income Tax; especially a reduction of the amount exacted from persons with small incomes.

The Extension of the Workmen's Compensation Act to ALL workmen.

Reform of the Land Laws.

Improvement of the Dwellings of the People.

Registration Reforms.

Amendment of the Unemployed Workmen's Act.

In conclusion, I regard it as the duty of a member of Parliament to render an account of his votes and actions in the House of Commons, and if elected, I pledge myself to meet my constituents in the principal centres of the Division at least annually.

I need hardly say that I am able and prepared to devote the necessary time to your service.

Believe me, Gentlemen,

Yours faithfully,

John Henry Bethell

88 ROMFORD ROAD,
STRATFORD, E.