





Norman Lamont,

Knockdow.

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THE LIBERAL RECORD

Of 1907 and 1908.

A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

MR. NORMAN LAMONT, M.P.,

Yr. of Knockdow,

At Rothesay, on 12th January, 1909,

Provost MILLER presiding.

Published by the Buteshire Liberal Association.

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THE LIBERAL RECORD

OF 1907 AND 1908.

In Rothesay Public Hall on Tuesday evening, 12th January, Mr Noman Lamont, M.P., gave his usual address to his Bute constituents during the Parliamentary recess. Provost Miller presided, supported by ex-Provosts Walker and Burness, ex-Bailies Brown, Cunningham, Muir, and Lyle, Councillors Thompson, Hill, Buchanan, and Burnie, Parish Councillor Slaven, Rev. Thomas Jeffrey (Kilchattan Bay), Rev. S. Crabb, Dr. Lawson, Capt. Kennedy, Capt. M'Dougall, Capt. M'Gowan, Professor Coates, Messrs Wm. Cuthbertson, J.P., James Moir, John Macnab, Donald Grant, Geo. Hill, John Macfie Harry Leitch, D. M. Ferrier, James Howitt, Andrew Holmes, J. Farrell, Matthew Paterson, H. Mackinnon, George Martin, David Rankin, Alexander Macnab, John Paterson, James Brown, Wm. Robin, J. F. Wallace, A. Galloway, Rae, Ritchie, Stewart, Mackay, &c. The hall was well filled in every part. While the audience was assembling the Rothesay Orchestra contributed a number of lively airs.

The Chairman said it must be pleasing to their member to see such a large and

appreciative audience. It was with deep concern that his constituents heard of his accident while hunting in the Tyrol last September, and the members of the Communn Gaidhealach regretted that he was unable to be present at the Mod. They, along with the general community, rejoiced that the accident did not lead to permanent disablement, and that he was with them now in his usual good health. On behalf of the Magistrates and Council he had to thank Mr Lamont for his attention to municipal affairs since he became their member. The Provost went on to say that while he did not intend to speak on any controversial question, he could not refrain from referring to the Old-Age Pension Bill, which was extremely popular in Bute — (applause) — and Mr Lamont and the others who had supported it in Parliament were now receiving many blessings, and were in the position of knowing that through their instrumentality many aged persons would have the closing days of their life made brighter. (Applause.)

Congratulations and Explanations.

Mr Lamont, who was received with loud applause, again and again renewed, said he could not refrain from congratulating their Chairman upon the high dignity to which he had lately been called—(applause)—and in view of the long and signal services which Provost Miller had already rendered in other municipal capacities, he felt he might also congratulate the

burgh that in its present civic head it had one who would worthily maintain the traditions of the long line of eminent and distinguished men who had filled the chair of the Royal burgh of Rothesay since it first got its Royal Charter in the 1400th year of our Lord, upon the 12th of January. (Applause.) And he should like also to express his regrets and his apologies that two years had elapsed since he last had the honour to deliver before them what certainly ought to be an annual address. It was true that to the spate of oratory which accompanied the visit of the Scottish Liberal Association last winter, he contributed his share: he also delivered his annual address at Millport and at all the eleven centres in the island of Arran, but it was a matter of particular regret to him that pressing private business abroad prevented his doing so at Rothesay, because he held that it was not only a convenient custom but almost a moral obligation on an M.P. to make every year to his constituents a full confession of his deeds and misdeeds—(laughter)—and after undergoing a further inquisition at the hands of the ever-vigilant heckler, to receive absolution or to do penance, according as a vote of confidence was granted or withheld. (Laughter and applause.) The most valuable discipline of all was the private searching of heart inseparable from the careful review of his own parliamentary actions which accompanied the preparation of an annual address.

Well, seeing it was two years since he spoke in this hall, he had read with a care usually bestowed upon a man's old speeches only by his political opponents, the speech he delivered two years ago, and he found in that speech that he grouped under six heads the great dominant questions of the day upon which the Liberal Party had fought and won the preceding General Election, and in the solution of which lay its present and its pressing duty. These six questions were (1) Fiscal Reform, (2) Education, (3) economy and efficiency in national defence, (4) the question of South Africa, (5) the temperance question, and last, but not least, the question of the land. (Applause.) Now, he thought it would be for many reasons convenient if he adhered to that classification to-night, not only that they might note the progress made in the last two years in the solution of these questions, but also because, although a multitude of other questions were being dealt with by legislation, and other matters arose from time to time to complicate or to obscure the issue, the fact remained that upon their success or failure in dealing with these six cardinal issues the Liberal Government would be judged at the bar of history. (Applause.)

The Past Session.

Before proceeding with these questions, however, he would like to be allowed to say a few words as to the amount of work they had accomplished. There were those,

even in the Liberal Party, who two years ago thought it impossible that the House of Commons should continue to work at the same high pressure that had marked the session of 1906, when Parliament sat no less than nine months, and added 56 Acts of Parliament to the law of the land. Well, that standard had not only been maintained: it had been surpassed. (Applause.) In 1907, although there was no autumn session, Parliament sat early, and sat all August. In 1908 Parliament sat a fortnight longer even than in 1906, and in each of these two years about 60 Acts of Parliament received the Royal Assent. Every one of the great Departments of the State had been active in promoting legislation within its own domain. Where all departments had been so active, it was almost invidious to single out one for special commendation, but the Home Office, under its chief, Mr Gladstone, and his admirable lieutenant, Mr Herbert Samuel, had not only passed the greatest number of measures but the most important into law. Not only the Children's Act, the Miners' Eight Hours Act, the Prevention of Crimes Act, and a host of minor measures, but they also piloted through the House of Commons the ill-fated Licensing Bill. (Applause.) It was impossible in the time allotted to him to give even the bare names of the 120 Acts. But there was being prepared at headquarters a list of them, giving a brief explanation of the effect of each. He hoped that, by the

courtesy of the local press, this information might be made available to them. This increased output of nearly 120 Bills during the past two sessions had only been possible on account of two things—undiminished zeal and energy on the part of members, working through and by the new Grand Committee system established by their late leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. When started, it did not meet with universal approval. Even yet efforts were made to disparage it. For himself, he regarded it as an unqualified success, not only causing an increased output, but giving more adequate opportunity for discussing Bills before they were passed into law. He would give an example of this from the Scottish Education Bill. They had perhaps heard complaints as to the length of time this Bill was in the Scottish Grand Committee. That Committee had sat twice a week for two months. He thought he had been present at every sitting, and he did not consider the time devoted to the discussion of that measure as in any degree excessive. It was immensely improved during the Committee stage; and he hoped that every future Scottish Bill would be as fully discussed, and as greatly improved. Another example was to be found in the Housing Bill, a very far-reaching measure, introduced by Mr John Burns. The Standing Committee spent the whole autumn session upon its complicated clauses, and at the end, the heads of the Local Government Board themselves

admitted that it came out a better Bill than it went in. It did not pass into law, but the time was not wasted, for it would be introduced in amended form at the very beginning of next session, and they hoped it would therefore receive the Royal Assent at a very early date.

The Fiscal Question.

He would endeavour to be brief on this question, because he believed that upon it the mind of Scotland was made up—(applause)—and that it was not necessary, as in that less highly educated and less highly civilised country south of the Tweed—(laughter)—to keep harping for ever on that oft-told tale. The doctrine of Free Trade was as vital to their national greatness as the maintenance of the two-power naval standard. They had not heard much in Parliament last year of the question of fiscal policy, but doubtless they would have a full-dress discussion during the Debate on the Address: and much would be made by the Protectionists of the decline in 1908 of our import and export trade. In this connection he would like to quote what he said in this hall two years ago. "There are cycles of good trade, and cycles of bad trade. The trade of every country comes in cycles. We are fortunate in being in the midst of a cycle of good trade. That cannot last for ever. A cycle of bad trade must come again, and then you will see the little band of Tariff Reformers issuing from the nooks and crannies of the Midlands of

England, piecing together their tattered garments, furbishing up their ancient weapons, and sniping again upon the forces of Free Trade." That prophecy had been fulfilled to the letter. (Applause.) The sniping, unfortunately, had resulted in a number of casualties in the South, but only where the obsolete firearms of the Tariff Reformers had been reinforced by the double-barrelled breech-loaders of the brewers. (Applause.) The cycle of prosperity had continued all through 1907. Imports rose to the record figure of £646,000,000. Exports also reached a record of £426,000,000; that was £50,000,000 higher than the exports, also at that time a record, of 1906; and almost exactly double the value of their exports in 1894. Thus their export trade had doubled itself in 13 years, which was not so bad for a country whose exports consisted of dying industries. What wonder if this marvellous rate of progress slackened somewhat; if, as the French said, their trade took a run back in order to jump further, and that was what it was going to do. These cycles of trade depression depended on no Government, Liberal or Conservative, and when they found a politician of the rank of Mr F. E. Smith saying at Liverpool recently that the reduction in their exports was due to the Liberal Government, then it was fair for a Liberal to retort that, bad as 1908 was, it was better than 1905, or any previous year in their history until the Liberal Govern-

ment came into power. (Applause.) His reason for referring to this was because, although the Tariff Reformers lay pretty low during the upward trend, they were now trying to make them believe that the present depression in trade, and consequent reduction in employment, was due to their system of Free Trade. Mr Bonar Law, an eminent and exceedingly able Tariff Reformer, had gone so far as to say that two bad winters would convert the country to Tariff Reform—in other words, that Britain's calamity is the Tariff Reformer's opportunity. Well, no doubt a continuance of this cycle of bad trade would suit Tariff Reform weather prophets, but there were already distinct signs of a rift in the clouds, which led them to cherish the hope that the new year, before its close, would shine upon a marked revival in trade and a consequent diminution of unemployment. (Applause.)

Unemployment.

The fact was that the amount of unemployment, great as it undoubtedly was, had been exaggerated still more, both by the Tariff Reformers and by the Socialists in order to win converts to their respective propaganda. They were attacked, that was to say, from both sides—both from the right and from the left. Well, that had one advantage—it removed the temptation to turn aside from the straight path. Unfortunately for the nation, so long as trade came and went in cycles—and it did that in all countries, Free Trade or Protectionist—

so long as the fruits of the earth depended on good or bad seasons according to the weather, so long would they have seasons of plenty and seasons of dearth, and so long would there be seasons of slacker or more ample employment. Anyone, therefore, who told them that in his own nostrum lay a complete panacea for all the industrial ills the flesh is heir to, was either deceiving them or deceiving himself. At the same time much could be done, and much was already being done, by the Government, by municipalities, as well as by private employers, not only to mitigate and alleviate, but also, as far as they could, to prevent unemployment. But much more could be done both by administration and by legislation, by afforestation, by the creation of small holdings — (applause) — by the taxation of land values — (renewed applause)—by labour co-partnership, a movement of vast possibilities, of which they were only at the beginning; by the establishment of labour bureaux, and the organisation of State insurance for workmen, which had worked so beneficially in Germany, also by the separation of the genuine unemployed from the unemployable. They were expecting the report of the Poor-Law Commission, which would cover all this ground, and he believed it would provide a most valuable foundation for legislation. (Applause.)

The English Education Bills.

Going on to deal with the next question,

that of Education, he pointed out that the education of all the three countries which composed the United Kingdom had received attention from Government. In Ireland the great University problem, which had baffled statesmen of both parties for well-nigh a century, had at last been solved. (Applause.) In England no less than four attempts had been made within the last three years to find a solution of the education difficulty which would remove the injustice inflicted upon the Nonconformists of England by the Act of 1902, and at the same time pass through the needle's eye of the House of Lords. The month of December found them nearer to a settlement than at any previous time. A more reasonable spirit and a more conciliatory temper was displayed on all sides. The example of Mr Asquith and the Archbishop of Canterbury, of Mr Runciman and Mr Austen Chamberlain, of the Bishop of London and Dr Clifford, had been widely diffused among their followers. He thought it was not going too far to say that lack of time alone prevented a settlement of this difficult and pressing reform. The central feature of Mr Runciman's Bill was the right of entry all round, in board as well as in voluntary schools. He (Mr Lamont) had said to them in that hall in the speech from which he had already quoted that he "regretted that the principle of the right of entry was not adopted by the Government in 1906; and that he believed more would be heard of it in the years to come"

That prediction had also been verified; and he still believed that, short of the secular solution, the only plan was to give a right of entry, during school hours, to teachers deputed by the different denominations, at their own expence, to give religious instruction to the children of their particular flocks. By such means, at least, might religious peace at last open the way to educational progress.

The Scottish Education Bill.

In Scotland, he was glad to say, they had been more successful. A Scottish Education Act had been placed upon the statute-book—an Act not, indeed, ambitious or controversial, but which still contained many useful if minor reforms. There were three great outstanding difficulties to be faced in Scottish education—the creation of larger areas, the transference of the Scottish Education Department from London to Edinburgh, and the establishment of a Consultative Committee of experts from all parts of the country, to advise the Scottish Education Department. Well, none of these three great problems had been tackled in this Bill, but they all remained to be dealt with sooner or later, and in his opinion the sooner the better for Scottish education. (“Hear, hear.”) But nevertheless, many important reforms had been secured by this measure. In the first place there was the medical inspection of school children, and the feeding of necessitous children; then there was the

power to provide pensions for teachers, the compulsory provision of continuation classes, and the pooling of Scottish education funds. All these were very great improvements, and at any rate, even if here in Rothesay they did not create any very great change, they would compel other and less advanced School Boards to do what was already being done in Rothesay by voluntary means. He hoped also that the clause giving additional borrowing powers to School Boards would prove to be advantageous—a clause which he succeeded himself in getting embodied in the Bill. (Applause.) He desired to take no credit for this clause, for the credit was due to his predecessor, Lord Dunedin. It had been represented to him—as it was represented to him (Mr Lamont)—during the consideration of the Scottish Education Bill, which he introduced in 1904, and failed to pass into law, that it was desirable in the interest of several School Boards in this county—and no doubt in other counties as well—that additional borrowing powers should be given. In the preparation of the new Bill this clause was—perhaps accidentally—overlooked, and on the matter being brought before his notice, he was exceedingly glad to make use of Lord Dunedin's phraseology, and to complete his work. As originally introduced, the Bill abolished the cumulative vote, but he did not find himself able to support the Government in this proposal. He knew the cumulative vote was a clumsy and anti-

quoted contrivance, but at the same time it did do rough justice to the Catholics and the Episcopalians or to other minorities, whatever they might be, in enabling them to make their voices heard. It appeared to him to be the grossest injustice to take away this privilege, unless they conferred upon them some other means by which to make themselves heard. The Government, when the Bill came back to the House from the Grand Committee, came round to the view he held, reversed their own previous decision, and decided to maintain the cumulative vote. He might add that he hoped sooner or later the cumulative vote would be abolished, and would be superseded by some other means—such as proportional representation—at the same time modern, not clumsy, and fair to all concerned. (Applause.)

National Defences.

The reduction of taxation had been continued throughout the last two years. The income-tax upon earned incomes had been reduced from 1s to 9d per £; the duty upon sugar—he believed he was now permitted to mention the word without being suspected of ulterior motives—(laughter and applause) — had been halved, thus relieving the taxpayers of the country of a burden of about four millions a year. The reduction in taxation could, no doubt, have been larger still, had not Government wisely determined to accelerate the provision for the

reduction of the debt incurred during the South African War, and at the conclusion of the present fiscal year—in about two months from now—no less than 45 millions would have been paid off from that debt, thus relieving the taxpayer of an additional interest-charge of more than one million a year. (Applause.) But in spite of these economies, the national defences had been maintained at a high level—indeed, it was not too much to say that the level of efficiency had been considerably increased. In the matter of the Navy this went without saying, because no Government, of whatever party, would dream of letting the standard of naval efficiency go below what was considered safe by its naval advisers. In the Army, a few of the regiments raised during the South African War had been disbanded. On the other hand, the Territorial Army had been established. (Applause.) The Territorial Army was still in its infancy, not having yet completed its first year, but it had met with a magnificent response from every part of the country—notably the Midlands of England, and although Scotland had not shown up so well, no less than two-thirds of the men had been obtained. About this time last year he was the object of considerable vituperation in the matter of the disbandment of the two local Volunteer companies. Well, he never complained of vituperation — he rather liked it, it acted as a tonic. But at the present time every impartial man would admit that

their national defensive forces stood far better than they had ever been before—that they were better equipped, better organised, better adapted to the requirements of war than at any previous time in their history. (Aplause.) And he thought it should be gratifying to all here that two branches of the Territorial Army had been established here, namely, the Buteshire Mountain battery, and also the 3rd Highland Ammunition Column of the Royal Garrison Artillery, so that everyone desirous of giving military service had the opportunity of doing so. He hoped these two forces would in course of time become just such objects of credit and of pride to the community as were the old Volunteer forces, or the still older Buteshire Militia, which his grandfather had the honour to command. (Loud applause.)

South Africa.

In South Africa notable progress had been made during the last two years. In South Africa, more perhaps than in any other region, was it true that no news was good news, because good news was bad "copy" for the newspapers, and the fact that at the present time they read so little about South Africa in the papers was due to this, that the two races were settling down in good earnest to build up on a sure and lasting foundation a new community under the British flag. The two new Constitutions granted by the Government to the Transvaal and the Orange

River Colony were working harmoniously and well, negotiations for federation were far advanced, and it was probable, almost certain, that before two years were out they should see a new great federal dominion, like the Dominion of Canada and the Commonwealth of Australia, added to the jewels of the British Crown. (Applause.) One word as to Chinese labour, a question on which this audience knew that he had felt and still felt very strongly. The Chinese coolies had been reduced from 63,000 to 12,000 — (applause) — and Lord Selborne, the Governor, in his opening speech to the Transvaal Parliament in 1908, spoke as follows:—"The policy as regards indentured Chinese labourers which was adopted last session has been justified by complete success. Since March, 1907, and up to the end of May, 31,157 Chinese labourers had already been repatriated, while the number of native labourers coming from all parts of South Africa to the mines had been and continues to be more than sufficient for all requirements. It is satisfactory also to note that, while the gold output has been steadily increasing, the cost of mining has been undergoing steady reductions, and as a result of the efforts of the Government, and of the leaders of the mining industry, that industry is to-day on a sounder basis than ever before, both as regards its present position and further expansion." That statement by Lord Selborne, a Conservative and a member of the very Cabinet that introduced Chinese labour, was

sufficient to justify every statement about Chinese labour made from his platform either at or prior to the General Election. (Applause.) Before the end of the present year, he believed the last Chinese coolie would have left South Africa, and he was certain that so disastrous an experiment would never be repeated under the British flag. (Applause.)

The Temperance Question.

He next came to the question of Temperance, which had, of course, been the predominant political issue during the past year. The Government's English Licensing Bill was not only a good Bill, but a grand Bill—(applause)—and he was glad indeed that it was during his membership of Parliament that this Bill had been introduced, and that he was afforded the privilege of supporting it. (Applause.) It had been suggested locally that he had been somewhat lukewarm in his support of it, because during the month of October his division record was a remarkably low one. Well, he pleaded guilty to that low division record, but as the Chairman had already reminded them, the same cause which unfortunately prevented his attendance at the Gaelic Mod also kept him a prisoner in Glasgow and at Knockdow during the month of October, and it was only during the last few days of that month that he was able to be in his place at Westminster. He was also free to confess that he abstained once purposely from a division, and three times voted against the Government, twice in favour

of the amendment to include grocers' licences, and once against the proposed extension of the time-limit from 14 to 21 years, as he considered 14 years far too long already. So much for his own small part in these great matters. Now for a word as to the main criticisms directed against the Bill. They were three in number. First, that it failed to deal with the regulation of clubs; secondly, that it failed to deal with off-licences; and thirdly, that it was "confiscation." As to clubs, he supposed that every temperance reformer would agree that it was desirable to bring clubs in England under regulations at least as drastic as those already imposed in Scotland and Ireland: and also that it was intensely desirable that the number of off-licences should be reduced. But when they found a party, which had never hitherto shown much zeal in the cause of Temperance, suddenly developing an affection for these two branches of reform, it aroused suspicions of their sincerity. And when that same party complained that the Bill was already too complex and overburdened, and in the same breath urged them to complicate and over-burden it still more by dealing with these two further branches of the subject, their suspicions were confirmed. Fortunately it was easy to put them to a test. If the Conservative Party were so zealous in the matter of clubs and off-licences, why didn't they deal with them in their Licensing Act of 1904, when they had a large majority in the House of Commons, and a willing, an obedient, and a subservient House of Lords. (Loud cheers.)

As to the "Confiscation" cry, he regretted that the Government had ever touched the question of compensation. It was not a matter for the Government: it was a matter for the trade. He regretted they did not adopt the suggestion of the Peel Minority Report that a time-limit of seven years be given to the trade, leaving the trade to make its own arrangements as to compensation or insurance against loss of licence in any way they liked, without Government interference. But whatever the Government proposals were, whether they were tactically wise or tactically unwise, they certainly were not confiscation. If, indeed, there was any confiscation in the matter, it had been that of the trade in confiscating a gigantic monopoly, which by every right belonged to the State and to the people. (Loud applause.) And in this matter they saw the same curious confusion of mind, the same curious confusion between *meum* and *tuum*, which sometimes appeared in the speeches of members of a party who talked about "chucking" away safe seats which were not theirs to "chuck." (Loud applause.) The Bill was called confiscation because it would reduce the dividends of the shareholders in the brewery companies, and these shareholders, as they knew, were all widows and orphans. (Laughter.) Well, he would like to ask Councillor Burnie, who was an expert in these matters, whether he could produce any kind of temperance Bill that would not diminish brewery dividends? They were often told from Conservative platforms

that they could not make people sober by Act of Parliament; they must rely on the effect of moral suasion, on the force of example, on the result of education, and of the various religious and philanthropic agencies. Suppose, then, they succeeded by moral suasion in converting one-half of the population to total abstinence, would that not diminish drinking? If they diminished drinking, they would diminish the liquor consumed. If they diminished the liquor consumed, they would diminish the profits of the breweries. And if they diminished the profits of the breweries, they would diminish the dividends of the shareholders. The fact was that the cry of confiscation amounted to a demand that the people of this country should never drink less than they did now, so that the dividends of the brewery shareholders should always be maintained. (Applause.) Another objection was that the Bill would interfere with the "quiet jollity of the people." If the Bill had been passed into law, at the end of 14 years the public-houses in England would have been reduced to the same percentage to the population as already prevailed in Scotland. Well, he himself had never noticed, even in those parts of Scotland best-known to Lord Robertson, any lack of facilities for the "quiet jollity of the people." ("Hear, hear," and applause.) Well, what was the result of their prolonged labours upon the Licensing Bill? After the thirty sittings the House of Commons spent on it, the Bill was sent up to the House of Lords. There, after a

brilliant debate lasting for three days, a debate in which all the brilliance, all the eloquence, all the argument, all the victory lay on the side of those who in the division lobby suffered a glorious defeat—(loud applause)—it was thrown out. But in spite of the brilliance of the defence, it was a mock trial—(“Hear, hear.”)—the victim had already been condemned to death, and lay a bleeding sacrifice on the altar of Bacchus in the ball-room of Lansdowne House. (Loud applause.) But that sacrifice had not been all in vain. In the first place the children’s clauses were saved—indeed, Scotland had gained by that, for while the Licensing Bill only applied to England and Wales, the Children’s Act applied also to Scotland and Ireland. In the next place the Licensing Bill acted as a shield and buckler to other important Government measures such as the Miners’ Eight Hours Act, for if there had been no Licensing Bill, the whole of the heavy artillery of the Opposition would have been directed against the next most important measure of the Government, and the Eight Hours Bill would have been rejected by the House of Lords. (Cheers.) Thirdly, it had convinced the Government that, if they could not deal with the Licensing question by legislation, they must deal with it by taxation, which the Lords could not touch. They could make the licensing duties correspond, as they did in the United States, to the value of the business done on the licensed premises, and by that means make the trade which was responsible for at least half of the poverty of

the country contribute to the relief of the other half by means of Old-Age Pensions. (Applause.) That taxation would apply to the whole of the United Kingdom, but could they not do something special for Scotland? ("Hear, hear.") It was three years now since they had come into power, and they had not yet had a Scottish Licensing Bill. Already they had in Scotland only the number of licences in proportion to population which this Bill had proposed as the limit in England. Already they had drastic regulations for clubs. Already they had Sunday closing. Yet every man and woman in that audience knew how much there was yet to do. The need was even greater than in England, because the effects of their national drink — must he call it their national drink? — were infinitely more appalling than the effects of the beer that was drunk in England. (Cheers.) He urged on the Scottish temperance reformers that now, when the Government was considering the legislative programme for next session, was the time for sending in their petitions, and insisting that next session of Parliament should see the production of a Scottish Licensing Bill. ("Hear, hear," and loud applause.)

The Scottish Land Question.

He came now to his last point, the question of the land. (Applause.) He had considered long and anxiously whether and how far it was desirable that he should here and at this time refer to the matters connected with the Scottish Small Landholders' Bill. But whatever

other considerations there might be, he had felt, on reflection, that it would not be right or fair either to himself or to them, that he should ignore or pass by in silence what, to him at any rate, was one of the most important political events of the year—he meant the censure passed by the Scottish Liberal Association upon the 18 Highland and other members for their action in connection with this Bill. He voted for the second reading of the Bill, and he would vote for it again—(applause)—he supported the Bill through its other stages and he would support it again; he held to every word he had said on this subject at the three Elections he had fought in this county; and he approved and endorsed every word said by Mr Asquith, speaking on behalf of the Liberal Party at Inverness five years ago. At the same time he never concealed his opinion—and he did not conceal it now—that he did not regard the Bill as an ideal measure. It might go further, and accomplish more, and yet create less exasperation among its political opponents. At the same time it would be an enormous improvement on the existing state of affairs, and would be a charter of liberty to those of the agricultural community who were least able to take care of themselves. (Applause.) That was why he and the other 17 members wanted the Bill. Did they think that if they thought it was a bad bill they would care whether the House of Lords rejected it or not? Did they think that if they considered the Bill injurious they would press

the Government to save as much as possible of it? It was because its provisions contained so much benefit to the small holders of the country that they pressed the Government again and again to endeavour to save as much of it as possible, or at any rate by negotiation to ascertain how much it was possible to save. As Lord Rosebery said in another connection the other day, "If you have not done that, you have not exhausted the political resources of which you are masters." Now, there were two amendments to the Bill which he did not advocate for themselves, but because he believed their adoption would lessen the objections to the Bill, and enable it to be passed into law. The first was in regard to landlords who objected to the creation of new small holdings upon their estates. Supposing the Government said "We will lease from you compulsorily, giving you a reduced rent because you will not work with us, and we will sublet the land to the new smallholders with whom you refuse to deal direct." That would not only guarantee the landlord in his rent, but make the position of those new small holders much more tolerable. The other objection was to the creation of an independent Department of Agriculture for Scotland, which was based on the fear that the Diseases (Animals) Act would not be uniformly administered, and they might diminish that objection by creating a sub-department, leaving to the British Board the administration of the Diseases Act, and delegating to the Scottish sub-department all matters relating to the creation of new small hold-

ers. Could anyone say that in accepting two such amendments they were in any way violating Liberal principles (Applause.) In this world they seldom got all they wanted: they strove after the ideal, but often had to be content with the practical. Even the Eight Hours Bill was really an Eight-and-a-Half Hours Bill. The extra half-hour was the price they had to pay to the House of Lords for allowing the Bill to pass. But coal miners, and their representatives in Parliament, were practical people. (Cheers.) There had lately passed from the councils, a statesman full of years and of honours, who had filled almost every office, except the highest, in the State, and whose name was revered by every Liberal. To him, in November, a farewell banquet was given, and in his farewell speech he used the following memorable words:—"Lord Palmerston's last Government was not an advanced Government, but I did in that Government what I have done ever since—I took what I could get, and I waited to get more—believing that this was a wise and sound principle in public life." He agreed with the Marquis of Ripon—(loud cheers) and he was determined that if, when this Liberal Parliament came to an end, the question of small holdings in Scotland had not been settled, the failure should not be laid at the door of the member for Buteshire. (Loud applause.) He took this opportunity of thanking those of his constituents, and those other friends, known and unknown, throughout Scotland, who wrote to him in approbation of his attitude.

No man, still at the beginning of his political life, went out with a light heart alone into the wilderness, and their support had been very welcome. (Cheers.) But he was fully conscious that there must have been many good Liberals and friends in this constituency who did not share his view of these things. To them also he expressed his thanks for their forbearance and their courtesy, and also for their recognition of the right of a member of Parliament to a reasonable exercise of individual independence and private judgment. (Applause.) He had laid bare before them his views, his actions, and his motives in this matter. He was quite impenitent—he stood in no white sheet. Every speech he had made he would speak again—every letter he had written he would write again—every vote he had given he would give again. (Applause.) He regretted exceedingly that it had been necessary for him to sever his connection with the Scottish Liberal Association, but as long as he continued to be their representative he should suffer no outside body, however powerful, to dictate to him what his parliamentary views or his parliamentary actions were to be. (Applause.) His responsibility in this matter, and in all matters, was to them, and to them alone. (Applause.) He placed himself entirely in their hands, and it was for them to say to-night whether his actions had merited or forfeited their confidence and their support. (Loud and prolonged applause, during which the hon. member sat down, after speaking for about an hour and a quarter)

Questions were invited by the Chairman, but none were asked.

Prof. Coates moved—"That this meeting thanks Mr Lamont for his address, and expresses its renewed confidence in him." They had heard the lucid speech of their member, and whether they agreed with every word he said or not, they must agree that the constituency was represented by an honest man. (Loud applause.) A man who was not afraid or ashamed to say what he believed to be the truth, wherein he differed from his party and why he did so. The fact was that the hon. member used his own intelligence—he was not a machine. (Loud applause.) While some of those present were good old crusted Tories, some Liberal Unionists, a great many Radicals, and a few of them out-and-out Socialists, they all deep down in their hearts loved and admired an honest man, and it was because they recognised in Mr Lamont sterling honesty, and that he had given them his very best, that he asked them to carry this resolution. (Loud applause.)

Ex-Provost Burness, in seconding, said he was sure they would all agree with him that their member was one of the honestest members of the House of Parliament that they had in the United Kingdom. He corroborated the Provost's remarks as to the great attention that Mr Lamont had given to the town of Rothesay and its municipality. He thanked Mr Lamont personally for the many kindnesses he had showed to him during his term of office as Provost, and had no doubt whoever filled the office would have the same attention.

He thought they were happy in having in Mr Lamont a member such as very few counties in Scotland had got, one who was so honest in his principles, and who had conducted himself so well during the time he had represented them.

The Chairman put the resolution to the meeting, and it was carried unanimously, platform and audience rising and cheering vociferously.

Mr Lamont, in responding, thanked them from the bottom of his heart for this great and enthusiastic vote of thanks and confidence, and all the more because, as he had already explained to them, of the very difficult circumstances in which he had been placed, during last year. He had to act to a great extent upon his own judgment, and on the spur of the moment, and although he had had opportunities of consulting with a representative committee of his Arran constituents, he had not been able to take the voice of the whole of his constituents, and therefore he felt the great responsibility of taking independent action on this matter of the Small Holders' Bill. He gave the matter his fullest and most prolonged consideration, and it was with the greatest gratification that he received to-night their unanimous endorsement of his action.

A vote of thanks to the Chairman, proposed by Mr Lamont, closed the proceedings.







