UNCONQUERED.

(*United Ireland*, June 19.)

THE most prominent figure in the whole world at this moment is that old man of seventy-seven who leads in this desperate war of justice against privilege, prejudice, and caste. He towers by the head and shoulders over the great men of the age. He stands out from the ordinary ruck of humanity in clear distinct relief as a man on a sunlit hill outlined against the sky. He has no prototype in history or in fiction. His character and career are alike without parallel. Now that there is a brief lull in the political storm the time may not seem inopportune to glance quickly back on his life, whom soon again we hope to see "striding the blast" that must sweep his opponents into space. It is hard to realise—it is impossible to realise—that he is in the seventy-eighth year of his age. The more we think of it the more our wonder grows. Let us take some old man of our acquaintance, some man whose years stretch seven years beyond the allotted span of man's life. Let us try to fancy him bearing the constant work, the late hours, the fierce, mental strain of the House of Commons in which strong young men age and wither before their time. Fix on some old fogey friend, with all his half-child-like ways and fancies and comforts, living a *quasi*-mechanical life; fancy him, the Prime Minister of England, swaying the destinies of the Empire, boldly embarking in a colossal struggle, electrifying, enthralling the House of Commons by his eloquence, stirring men's hearts in their own despite, and winning reluctant applause even from the most malignant opponents. We cannot fancy it. The physical power of the old man is as wonderful as his intellectual pre-eminence, and scarcely less sublime. His first birthday, the 29th of December, 1809, stretches away back into the infancy of the century that is drawing to a close. Nor was "the God-like reason" with which God endowed him permitted to "rust unused." Of that long life fifty-five years were devoted to the untiring service of his country. He *was* the youngest as he *is* the oldest member of the House of Commons. at the age of twenty-two years—before the great majority of men now living on the earth had been born—Mr. Gladstone was elected as Conservative representative of the borough of Newark. It is curious to note that even then the heart of the ardent young Tory was with the people. We subjoin a single paragraph from his first election address. It has that earnest eloquence which age cannot wither or custom stale. "Principles," he declared, "are now arrayed against our institutions, and not by truckling, not by temporising, not by oppression nor corruption, but by principles they must be met. Amongst the first results should be a sedulous and special attention to the interests of the poor founded upon the rule that those who are the least able to take care of themselves should be most regarded by others. Particularly it is a duty to endeavour by every means that labour may receive adequate remuneration, which, unhappily, amongst several classes of our fellow-countrymen is not now the case. Whatever measures, therefore, whether by correction of the poor-laws, *allotment of cottage grounds or otherwise*, tend to support this object I deem entitled to the warmest support." Mr. Chamberlain's original three-acres-and-a-cow policy, therefore, would seem to be but slightly developed from the policy announced some years before he was born by the leader whom he has so recently betrayed. What might not be expected from a young man who won constituencies and formulated humane reforms while his contemporaries were at college? What could be expected that was not amply realised in his subsequent career? He strode on from service to service and from triumph to triumph. Within the recollections of middle-aged men his history is the history of the advancing Liberal party in England. He dropped old prejudices as he proceeded. His heart and mind opened more and more as he advanced in years. And the youth who in October, 1832, won the pocket-borough, Newark, as the Tory nominee of the Duke of Newcastle, is in 1886 the leader of the British democracy which he has enfranchised. Such a development is, indeed, rare. Radicals and reformers are only too often hardened and crusted by approaching age into rigid and narrow-minded Conservatives. There was as much sober truth as sarcasm in Lord Randolph Churchill's declaration at the last election that he hesitated about opposing John Bright for Birmingham in the belief that he might possibly contest the seat himself on a Conservative platform. Mr. Bright might have done so without much violence to his latter-day speeches or convictions. Mr. Gladstone was of a different type. His heart and mind ripened like a winter pear under the snows of age. If Mr. Bright shrank back farther and farther into his shell as years rolled by and night approached, Mr. Gladstone is best typified in the exquisite lines in which Oliver Wendell Holmes moralises over the *Chambered Nautilus*:

> "Build thee more stately mansions O my soul,
> As the swift seasons roll,
> Leave thy low-vaulted past,
> Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
> Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast
> Till thou at length are free,
> Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea."

Even in his salad Tory days, as we have seen, his heart was with the people, but his zeal grew deeper and waxed warmer as his genius was matured by age and experience. His predominant influence in England is but the fair price paid for the numberless and invaluable services he has rendered the Democracy—services successively denounced as confiscation, revolution, and treason to the Constitution by the party with whom the model Democrat, Mr. Chamberlain, now unites to oppose him. Mr. Gladstone's triumphs have been numerous and splendid, but he has not been without his defeats. The closest parallel—*si licet parvos componere magnis*—to the historic scene of June 8th, 1886, is to be found in the exciting debate and division on the Reform Bill introduced by Mr. Gladstone after the Easter Recess in 1866. It was not a very terrifying Reform Bill as we look at such things in our days; it proposed to enfranchise 400,000 voters at the outside. But it met with a terrible opposition. Then as now the danger was from a party of disaffected and treacherous Liberals who lent backbone to the Opposition, and who then for the first time, became known as the inhabitants of the Cave of Adullam. The title, it will be remembered, was given by Mr. John Bright, who, in his old age, has been coaxed into a cave himself. He was denouncing Mr. Horseman and Mr. Lowe, who were the Hartington and Chamberlain of that revolt. "They had retired," he said "into what might be called their political Cave of Adullam, into which they have invited everyone who was in distress and everyone who was discontented, and made themselves captains over them." The speeches in the debate read like the speeches with which the country has been recently inundated, and will be until after the general election. That tame little Bill was denounced with the same ferocious and unreasoning vehemence and virulence as the Home Rule measure. It would be the breaking up of the Empire and the destruction of the Constitution. Take a specimen at random from the speech of Mr. Lowe. "Surely," he declared, "the heroic work of so many centuries, the matchless achievement of so many wise heads and strong hands, deserves a nobler consummation than to be sacrificed at the shrine of revolutionary passion or the maudlin enthusiasm of humanity." There have been many franchise extensions since that day. Mr. Lowe has voted for some of them himself, and has got his peerage as a reward, but the heroic work, the matchless achievement," etc., are still in vigorous existence. It was a significant incident in that campaign that when the Liberals were driven from office a larger measure was forthwith introduced and carried by the Tories. But the most startling parallel of all is to be found in the peroration of the two speeches delivered by Mr. Gladstone on those two memorable occasions at the close of the debates. Through both these runs the presentment of an immediate defeat and the conviction of a future victory. Twenty years ago, addressing the motley opponents of reform, he declared:—

"You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side. The great social forces which move onward in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our debates does not for a moment impede or disturb—these great social forces are against you. They are marshalled on our side, and the banner which we now carry in this fight, though perhaps at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, yet soon again will float in the eye of heaven, and will be borne by the firm hands of the united people, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and not far-distant victory."

Compare this with the still sublimer peroration addressed the other night to the mix-cumgatherum majority—the rabble rout of Tories and Whigs who were already exulting in their anticipated triumph:—

"You have wealth, you have rank, you have station, you have organisation, and you have power. What have we? We think we have the people's hearts (cheers). We believe and know that we have the promise of the harvest of the future (loud cheers). As to the people's hearts, you may dispute it, and dispute it with perfect sincerity. It is a matter about which you may ask for proof. As to the harvest of the future, I doubt if you have so much confidence, and I believe that there is in the breast of many a man who means to vote against us to-night a profound misgiving, approaching even in some places to a deep conviction (hear, hear), that the end will be as we foresee it, and not as you foresee it, but that the ebbing tide is with you and the flowing tide is with us (loud cheers)."

There is an inspiring prophecy in the words. We pray God the glory of the approaching triumph may be his. Defeated he has been, but conquered never. He may justly arrogate to himself the proud humility of the greatest knight of Arthur's table, who declared:—

> "Thrown have I been not once but many a time,
> Victor from vanquished issues at the last,
> And overthrower from being overthrown."

Ancient history, it has been well said, was made by geography and modern by geology. The indented coast-lines of the Mediterranean peninsulas were a condition of their supremacy in the ancient world, while the greatness of England and the United States is largely based upon their coal-fields. Within the last few years another mineral agent has begun to play a great part in the world. All the last developments of Russian policy in Central Asia would have been impossible without the sudden growth of the petroleum industry at Baku. The oil wells have converted the barren shores of the Caspian into perhaps the most prosperous portion of all the Czar's domains. They have changed Baku itself from an isolated outpost to a flourishing seat of trade. They have built the railway between that port and Tiflis; they have added to the importance of Batoum; they have created great fleets upon the Caspian and the Volga, and added to the receipts of all the central Russian lines that converge at Czaryzin; lastly, they have brought the Transcaspian railway, the great factor in the Central Asian politics of the near future, within the range of practical politics. It is satisfactory to find that the supplies of petroleum are not confined to the western end of the Central Asian line. Discoveries have been made at what the Russians hope will soon be the south eastern terminus. The oil-wells of Sibi already feed the locomotives of the Indus Valley road, and will probably soon supply the Pisheen frontier trains. That adds much to the value of the prospective terminus of M. Lessar's system; unluckily it also increases very appreciably that gentleman's difficulties in getting there.