

LIBERALISM.

(Published by arrangement.)

BRIEF RECORDS OF THE PAST.

(No. 1.)

Now that a general election is near, the time is opportune for a review of what Liberalism has done for New Zealand in the past. This brief sketch is not to be regarded as a complete history of the Liberal movement and its successes; but it may fairly claim to provide full justification for our faith in Liberalism and for our confident belief that its triumph will ensure the progress and prosperity of our country and its people for the future.

LIBERALISM AND DEMOCRACY

"What is Liberalism?" Liberalism is Democracy, and Democracy is "the government of the people, by the people for the people."

Liberalism is thus a political system which would secure through the voice of the people, the realisation of Democracy's grand ideal, "the greatest good for the greatest possible number." It is this form of "government by the people, for the people" that true Democracy seeks to obtain; and it is because Liberalism has in the past achieved so much for the people, by pleading their cause, and defending their rights, and advancing their interests, on purely democratic and constitutional lines, that we confidently claim the sympathy and support of the electors of New Zealand for it to day.

FIRST PHASE.—GREY.

During the early years of colonisation and settlement the people were too much engrossed in the struggle for existence to pay much attention to politics; and all that time the wealthier classes were strengthening their hold upon political rights and privileges, and were establishing for themselves a practical monopoly of the land. To Sir George Grey belongs the enduring credit of grasping all this, and of conceiving a policy which might ultimately enable this country to realise those Democratic ideals which that great statesman, almost alone among the distinguished public men of his age, had already come to appreciate at their true value.

Sir George Grey's main work was his advocacy of manhood suffrage and his denunciation of land monopoly. A remarkable tour that he made throughout the dominion did much to kindle the fire of Liberalism, and at last the Continuous Ministry which had held power with short intervals for many years, suffered final defeat. For Grey's propaganda of "one man, one vote," had, by rousing the people against the limited franchise of the time, compelled his opponents to concede manhood suffrage; and as a result the election of 1890, at the close of the great maritime strike, placed the first Liberal Ministry in power, with Mr Ballance as Prime Minister.

BALLANCE.

When this Ministry took office, the country was in a parlous state. Its finance depended on the property tax, which taxed property without reference to its earnings. Economy, in the shape of retrenchment, was the mainspring of policy; enterprise was dead, doles were the remedy for unemployment, and the population was beginning to emigrate.

THE NEW TAXATION.

The new Government took hold with vigorous determination. It made good the promises of its members, by repealing the obnoxious Property Tax. The tax-payer was freed from paying taxes on his buildings and his personal effects, the taxes on all these were transferred to land and income. The need for checking land monopoly was not forgotten, neither was the necessity for encouraging the profitable use of the land neglected. Graduation of taxes was introduced for the first time, and care was taken not to touch the improvements. This was the touch of true Democracy.

It was also the touch of sound finance—a touch which secured good balances for many years and revealed as time went on the financial strength of a self-reliant people.

THE NEW HUMANISM.

But the Liberal Leaders saw clearly that their chief duty was to the people themselves, and from the outset they took a firm hold of the Labour problem. The Liberal Government established a Labour Bureau, set up agencies all over the country, found where men were wanted, and sent them to the work. The Liberal Government fought emigration with immigration and relieved the congestion of the towns. Doles ended, the exodus ceased, and the people who had gone began to return.

It was government of the people, by the people, for the people—true Democracy.

The principle was extended in one remarkable instance by the establishment of the Co-operative Contract system on the railways.

Naturally enough this was a terrible shock to the Conservatives of those times. Here was a shameless interference with the divinely appointed law of supply and demand, and the eternal principle of free competition! But in spite of shrieks of protest and torrents of abuse, the Government persevered, kept these men on the works in gangs carefully selected, and in the end the system went its way to success. The men made good roads and made good money.

Government of the people, by the people, for the people—true Democracy again.

WAGES PROTECTED.

The same principle of subordinating all the abstract theories of Conservatism to the general welfare was illustrated in the Truck Act of 1891. Up to that time, an employer could make money out of his men by forcing them to take their wages in part in the form of goods that he sold or commodities that they helped him to produce. The Truck Act made wages payable in money only, and the men were free to buy where they liked at ruling prices. Naturally there was further outcry at this "interference" of Government with the employers' "right" to cheat the wage-earner. But the champions of Liberalism had their answer always ready—it was "government for the people." And so they went on to protect the wages of men working for contractors. In 1892 the Liberal Government passed through the Legislature the Contractors' and Workmen's Lien Act, giving the worker absolute security for his wages.

SWEATING ABOLISHED.

Most people nowadays have forgotten that at that time—less than 30 years ago—factories and shops were conducted simply on a go-as-you-please system, and entirely in accordance with the employers' views and interests. Generally speaking sweating was rampant. Women and young persons were victimised by overwork on a starvation wage, sanitary conditions depended entirely on the employers' tastes. Protection against accident from machinery was almost unheard of; hours were enormously long, wages were for the most part absurdly low, weekly half-holidays were unknown, and statutory holidays were remarkably few. The Liberal Government began at once

the process of reform, and in 1891 it passed its first Factories Act, applying in all its provisions the one invariable test of the people's welfare. It protected children and young people working in factories, limiting their hours within reason. Moreover, it fought for and secured sanitary conditions and a weekly half-holiday.

In the next year it struck the shops, and aroused even stronger protests than before. It is well to remember this, for the thing was typical. Every attempt at change was met in that way, not only in the matter of factories and shops, but all along the line of Liberal achievement.

THE NEW UPPER HOUSE.

Another matter that the Liberals took in hand in this eventful year was the reform of the Legislative Council. In those days the Upper House was the main bulwark of Conservatism, chiefly because of the system of life tenure. The Liberals first nominated a number of Labour members, then cut down the term of office to seven years. This change was a real reform in the interest of Democracy.

And Liberalism is Democracy, first and last and every time.

THE NEW LAND POLICY.

The framing of the Land Act of 1892 was the next important reform. This great and good work was begun by Sir John McKenzie, the Minister for Lands in the Ballance Ministry. To encourage settlement, with security of tenure and help to all from the State was the one great object at which the Act aimed.

This great measure preserved most of the existing tenures, abolished some, amended others in the direction suggested by Liberal principles, and added new ones. Among these was the lease in perpetuity, which made the holders tenants of the Crown, under the control of the State, which insisted on residence, and fixed the conditions of cultivation. The disadvantage—it was the object of much hostile criticism in the beginning—was that the tenant obtained the unearned increment.

In the end Mr McKenzie prevailed, after a tremendous struggle in the Legislature, the incidents of which will be long remembered. The result of his victory was the immediate spread of settlement, and it was encouraged later by the scheme of financial assistance devised by the Liberal Government for the benefit of the settlers.

BIG ESTATES BROKEN UP.

Another great achievement on the part of the democratic Liberal Government was the Land for Settlement Act passed in the same year, under which the State obtained the power of acquiring landed estates for closer settlement compulsorily, on terms fair to the holders. The lease-in-perpetuity was the tenure applied under this system. Thousands of settlers acquired good homes, millions of money were applied to the purchase; from the start to the present time failure was rare and default a negligible quantity. The triumphant success of Cheviot and other settlement estates thus acquired remains a standing proof for all time, of what can be done, in spite of opposition, by "Government of the people, by the people, for the people."

CHEAP POSTAL RATES.

In the first Ballance year Sir Joseph Ward signalled his tenure of the Post Office portfolio by passing the Post Office Act, of 1891, which gave us inland penny postage, and gave wider use to the postal note system. It was the beginning of a great career. In bringing down that measure Sir Joseph, as Mr Ballance's youngest Lieutenant, was merely proving that Liberalism, like Democracy, forgets nothing, and neglects nothing that can be useful to the general community.

This was but the first of the many special achievements by which Sir Joseph Ward justified his inclusion in the Ballance Ministry, and won his claim to be regarded as an indispensable factor in all Liberal Ministries for the future.

(To be continued.)

FIRE
ACCIDENT
MARINE

The **Phoenix** (Established 1782)

Funds, £17,000,000.

Claims Paid, £98,000,000.