

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—In your issue of August 1 you publish a minute of the Liberation Society in which is recorded the following :—

“The unprecedented exertions of those engaged in the production of intoxicating liquors, aided by the supporters of national establishments of religion . . . have destroyed the majority in favour of religious equality,” &c.

As one actively engaged in speaking and canvassing at Walsall, South Derby, and Alnwick, and in close contact with the electors of those districts, might I be allowed to question in your columns the accuracy of the impression under which the framers of that minute appear to be labouring ?

I can rely on no better *data* than the result of conversations between myself and the poorer class of electors with whom only my intercourse was held. I have no hesitation in recording that the “parson and beer” had not so much to do with the result as the framers of the minute would appear to presume. At Walsall there was a publichouse said to be the stronghold of Radicalism, and I spent some time in it.

The landlord was a strong supporter of Sir Arthur Hayter, and when I entered nothing but politics were being discussed. One man was hotly abused for being a turncoat and supporting the Conservatives, as he had always voted before with the Radicals. But his retort was, “England for the English.” He was not going to stand 80 Irish members coming over here to be in our Parliament, while we had nothing to do with theirs. One was asked the landlord when his house was going to be shut up without compensation. The answer was, the Liberals would never touch him. The chances of the rival candidates were talked over ; one man stated that Sir A. Hayter had never been in the borough since he was elected, while Mr. Gedge had been with them weekly for 18 months.

I attended a Separatist meeting which was addressed by a local Nonconformist minister. I noticed at all these meetings Home Rule was tabooed. This gentleman confined himself to the Local Veto, and shortly put it thus :—“My intelligent friends and brother workers, the Liberals do not want to stop your beer. We only give each of you the key of the cellar, so that you may drink or not as you like.” This statement was received with loud cheers ; a voice from the crowd cried, “but you give to two who don't want to drink a key each, while you don't give a key to a third who likes his glass of beer.” This remark was hooted down.

It was pitiable to hear the complaints of short work amongst the miners. The Church or beer question did not appear to affect them. Their only anxiety was to keep their families from want, which was staring them in the face. At the last election promises had been made that if Sir A. Hayter were elected they would get better wages, instead of which times were getting harder. They had heard that their mining agent had received about £18 for speaking for the Liberals, and had boasted at a meeting that he would bring his miners “up in a lump to vote for Hayter.” This appears to have offended them, and they voted accordingly.

The Walsall election was not won by a coalition between “Bung and the Church.” It was won because there was a general disgust with the whole Separatist programme—with promises broken ; a general feeling against Home Rule ; a feeling that it was unfair to ruin a poor man's trade and not give him compensation ; a feeling, fostered by the Roman Catholic priesthood, that it was unjust to ruin voluntary schools ; and last, and most important, Mr. Gedge's careful and judicial candidature. For 18 months before the election he had held conversational ward meetings in which he conversed with the electors, who were all invited, and he thoroughly ventilated the various political questions at issue. The organization at the head office under Mr. Middleton was also superb. A long placard was published by the Separatists on the Friday before the election charging Mr. Gedge with having voted against the good of the people in 18 different Parliamentary divisions. It was most important to have this placard answered before the following Tuesday. I was asked to take it to London to the head office to have all Mr. Gedge's votes looked up, and all the *data* obtained from Hansard, ranging as it did through some years ; this involved immense labour. But, although Mr. Middleton was engaged with many other elections, the machinery of the office was in such good order that by Saturday night a full *précis* of his votes was en route to Walsall, and a placard from his agent on Monday triumphantly refuted the placard upon which the Separatists had relied as their last *coup*. Thus was the election won.

Yours faithfully,

E. GARNET MAN.

SOME ELECTION EXPERIENCES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—In your issue of August 8 you were good enough to publish my experiences at Walsall. The impression obtained there that the *Liberationist* minute was hardly fair to the clergy was further intensified by my subsequent experience with the electors in South Derbyshire and Berwick.

I arrived at Derby on the Sunday after Sir William Harcourt's defeat, and was informed by a Nonconformist minister that he was told that the London brewers had sent down a train laden with beer, which was distributed with a free hand (which is absurd), and that on the day of the election the town was in a disgraceful state of drunkenness. This tale was repeated more than once, but against the charge of general drunkenness I hear there appeared a statement from the chief constable, to the effect that there were only three men in the lock-up on the day of the election, and that the town was remarkably sober. The main reason for Sir William Harcourt's rejection was generally asserted to be the fact that a large majority of railway and other employees were disgusted at the Commons throwing out the Lords' Amendment to the Liability Bill, and interfering with their liberty in the Railway Servants Bill. They therefore sided with the House of Lords in the controversy. This alone would suffice to sweep away his former majority, and there was no alliance between Bung and the parson here.

In South Derbyshire Mr. Gretton had to remove a majority of over 1,200, and his attempt was considered hopeless. I travelled through the hotbed of Radicalism in this division, Swadlincote and Church-Gresley. Here I found the miners in a wretched plight. They were making but two days a week and could hardly keep body and soul together. Trade had left them—some attributed their evil plight to the strikes, some that bad trade had flooded the mines with agricultural labourers driven from the farms. I found but little abuse of the masters; many were spoken of very highly, particularly Hall and Drage. Moving freely amongst them, I received no discourtesy. They seemed to have a distrust of Radical promises made by the friends of Mr. Broad, the sitting member, and which had never been performed. As the bills announced that Sir William Harcourt would address the miners on Gresley-common, I waited to hear him, but at 3 p.m. a landau drove up with the Radical candidate and his wife, followed by a wagonette containing some gentlemen, one of whom informed the crowd that the fatigues of the Derby election had acted upon Sir W. Harcourt, at his advanced age, in such a manner as to compel him to seek repose.

A Nonconformist minister, with others, addressed the meeting. They abused the officers of the Army, the House of Lords, and the Church, but avoided carefully all reference to Home Rule. Unfortunately for them, four gentlemen, sent from Manchester by the Irish Union, appeared and commenced distributing leaflets against Home Rule. This seemed to exasperate the speaker, and, goaded on by his words, the crowd hustled, dragged, and assaulted, not only the four gentlemen, but also Mr. Gretton's local agent, who had to flee for his life and to seek police protection. In only one instance in this division did I hear of any Established Church minister taking active part in the elections, while I attribute the attack above mentioned and a subsequent attack made on Mr. Gretton and myself, when we were stoned and hustled and our meeting broken up at Church Gresley and Swadlincote, entirely to the inflammatory harangues of the Nonconformist minister aforesaid. A lurking distrust of the mining agents (who were all Radicals, and who by advising strikes had driven trade elsewhere), disgust at bad trade, at interference "all over the shop," as one miner graphically put it, was the groundwork upon which a majority of over 1,200 for Mr. Broad was turned into a majority of over 800 for Mr. Gretton. I left Derby before the declaration of the poll, and arrived at Alnwick in the evening. Here a different state of affairs existed. The miners were working full time, and did not appear to have any special grievance.

From what I gathered they were not favourable to the proposed Eight Hours Bill. One said, "It takes us sometimes an hour to get from bank to bank, and when a mine is once started the works can't be shut off in a moment." This eight hours arrangement "won't help us." It seems that where there is a foreign export trade the eight-hour clause is not so popular. It is

only in the inland collieries that the desire for the restriction of labour is prevalent.

Both candidates for the Berwick Division were deservedly popular. Sir E. Grey, the sitting member, does not appear to have actively identified himself with any Radical fads, and the impression was prevalent that he was not much in favour of local option without compensation. Lord Warkworth was an eloquent speaker, but the Conservative organization was so defective that a fair chance was not given him. For instance, we hear of his appearing to speak at a country meeting just half an hour after the bills were posted announcing that meeting, and in consequence no one appeared to listen to him.

It is quite evident that the Conservative and Unionist machinery was out of order, and success could hardly have been expected.

The Church of England, so far as I could gather, took no prominent part in this election, but I was surprised to hear that the country was overrun by itinerant preachers, who visited the different villages and spoke against the "world, the flesh, and the drink," including in that category all the rich, the Established Church, the House of Lords, and every one who was above them. Pull them all down was their cry. At Emblington, as it was Saturday night, many of the crowd were gone in liquor and were howling against local option. "Then you cannot support Sir Edward Grey," I remarked. The answer I received was, "But he will never allow us to be done out of our beer. Hurrah for Sir E. Grey!"

The minute issued by the Liberation Society does not grasp the real facts, as far as my experience goes. There has been no active alliance between "Bung and the parson," but wherever I have gone I have seen a Nonconformist minister promulgating Radical views of a very pronounced character. This active partisanship is somewhat neutralized by the impression conveyed to me by a respectable bystander at one of the meetings (unjust though it may perhaps be) that their activity is to some extent attributable to a desire to share the plunder of the Church.

Mr. Atherley-Jones, in his letter to *The Times* of August 8, seems to have had a different experience, but I can safely say that in the three constituencies coming under my direct observation the Nonconformist ministers took a most active and prominent part, both in speaking and canvassing, for the Separatists, while the clergy were conspicuous by their absence.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

August 9.

E. GARNET MAN.