

## THE MAN AND THE TOWN.

SIR CHARLES M. PALMER, BART., M.P., AND JARROW-ON-TYNE.

By FREDERICK DOLMAN.

TO the student of the Victorian era the story of Sir Charles Palmer's enterprise at modern Jarrow will be fully as interesting as is that of the Venerable Bede's labour at its ancient monastery to the student of the early Church. That the man of business should have created a town in the course of his career is in its way as historically significant as that the man of learning should have given his life to the writing of an ecclesiastical history. Jarrow is at once one of the newest and oldest of places. When Charles Mark Palmer was born some seventy years since it was a colliery village of about a thousand inhabitants, known beyond the borders of Durham as the "Venerable Bede's" place of residence. Before he was fifty it was known throughout the world as the place of "Palmer's" yards and workshops. The reputation of eleven centuries had been eclipsed; for one who associates Jarrow with Bede and the ancient learning, there are a hundred to whom it spells Palmer and modern commerce.

When I asked Sir Charles Palmer how it had been done he pointed to an engraving on the wall, a picture of the ss. *John Bowes*, and said:—"It was the building of that ship which made Jarrow." The *John Bowes* was the first steam vessel to carry coal between the Tyne and the Thames. Until 1852 it was never supposed that it would be profitable to convey coal by steamers to London, although Wales and South Yorkshire, favoured by their geographical position, were getting the best of the metropolitan trade into their hands. The daring idea occurred to Charles Palmer, then in partnership with colliery proprietors, and in conjunction with his brother George he established a small ship-building yard at Jarrow, for the express purpose of carry-

ing it out. Here the first steam collier, christened the *John Bowes* in compliment to one of his partners, was built at a cost of £10,000. Experts ridiculed the experiment, but her first voyage justified the young man's judgment. In four days she had loaded 650 tons of coal at Newcastle, and discharged it in London, thus accomplishing what would have taken any other collier afloat about two months. The effect was to revolutionise the Tyne coal trade. In ten years the export of coal to the Thames rose from 9,483 tons to 929,825. Orders for vessels of the type of the *John Bowes* poured into the Jarrow yard, and at one stroke, so to speak, Sir Charles Palmer had made a fortune and a town.

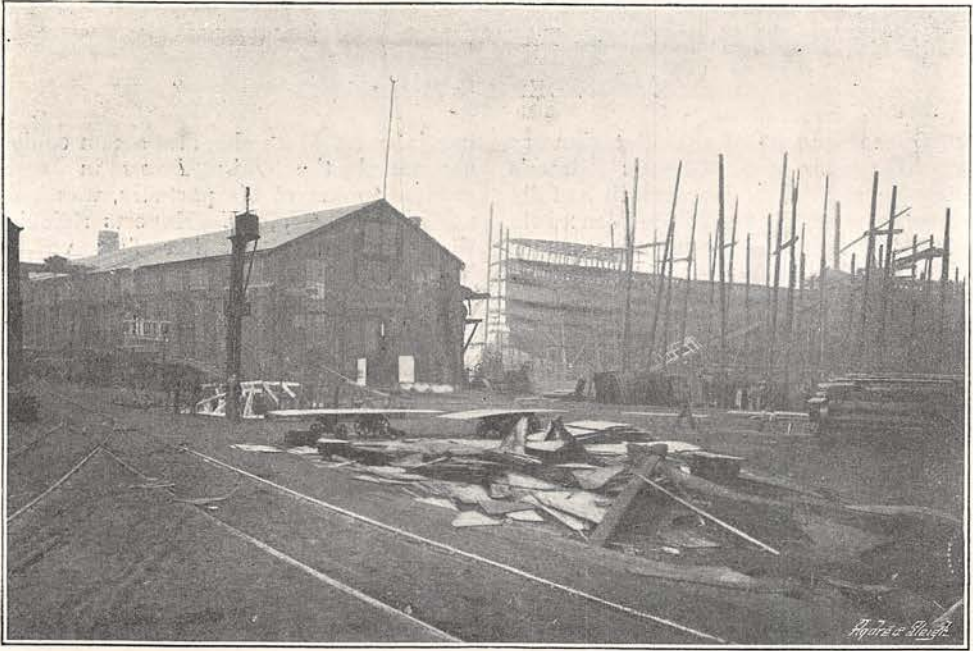
In less than two years after the launching of the *John Bowes* thirteen colliers, besides other steam-ships, had been built by Messrs. Palmer Brothers. The success of the firm attracted the attention of the Government, by whom it was entrusted with the building of an iron-cased floating battery. This ship, which received the name of *The Terror*, was designed for the destruction of the forts at Cronstadt, and Sir Charles Palmer boldly undertook to have her ready in three months. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the workmen there is no doubt the promise would have been kept had not the close of the Crimean war rendered it unnecessary. It was while building this ship that Sir Charles Palmer discovered the superiority of rolled over hammered plates in protecting men-of-war. At first the Admiralty authorities would not listen to the suggestion, and the young firm incurred considerable expense in making experiments before they were convinced. In the result, however, its reputation as builders of war vessels was securely established, and many fine ironclads, including H.M. ships



*Defiance, Surprise, Alacrity, Orlando, Undaunted*, and—about eighteen months ago—the *Revenge* and the *Resolution*, have since been floated at Jarrow.

It was from the first Sir Charles Palmer's ambition to be able to take in iron ore at Jarrow and turn it out again converted into ships. With this view

the whole of this district of England, and I may also add to the nation, that such a gigantic concern should be placed upon a broader basis than dependency upon one individual." But of course Sir Charles Palmer took the position of chairman of directors, and retained it until a year or so ago, and it was under his inspiration that



PALMER'S SHIPYARD, JARROW.

blasting furnaces, mills, steel, and marine engine shops were quickly added to the shipbuilding yards, and only two years after the launch of the *John Bowes* ironstone mines were purchased in North Yorkshire. For the conveyance of the ore to Jarrow a fleet of steamers was built, and Port Mulgrave, ten miles north of Whitby, came into existence. Owning his own coal and iron, making his own steel and engines, Sir Charles Palmer thus secured for his enterprise a measure of independence which did much to stimulate its remarkably rapid progress.

In 1862 Mr. George Palmer withdrew from the undertaking, doubtless satisfied with his share of the large fortune which had been so quickly made. Three years later the business became a limited liability company. "I took this step," said Sir Charles Palmer, "because, being alone, as it were, and having such large undertakings on my hands, I felt it a duty not only to myself and my family but to

Jarrow continued to flourish and grow. Its prosperity reached the highest point it has so far attained between 1881 and 1883. In those three years the shipping launched from the Jarrow yards amounted to 171,000 tons. At that time some seven or eight thousand men were working at Jarrow, and if those employed at the collieries, the iron mines, &c., were added, the number under Sir Charles Palmer's control could not have fallen far short of 15,000.

Jarrow has since severely felt the depressing influence of bad times. One realises this keenly on walking through the town from the railway station to the works; the groups of idlers at the street corners and the poverty-stricken appearance of many of the shops and houses clearly tell their own tale. Even now, I am told, however, that of 4,000 houses in the town only about fifty are unoccupied. Inside the works there is no suggestion of shortness of orders, for there are still



some 4,000 or 5,000 men are earning their bread there. The offices are alive with clerks and messengers. On passing into the yards one is at first almost overwhelmed by the noise, and then bewildered by the number and variety of different sounds of which it is made up—the hammering on the ships, the snorting of engines on the railway tracks, the whirr of machinery in the sheds, the shouting of men, &c. Four or five vessels are on the stocks, including three torpedo-catchers, ordered in accordance with the Naval Defence Act, the *Janus*, *Porcupine*, and *Lightning*, and a large merchant ship for a Liverpool line, whilst several are here for repairs. The firm has berths for nine vessels at Jarrow, and for four on the other side of the Tyne at Howden.

A walk through the works is attended with some difficulty and danger. Every bit of available land is covered with a railway track, and apparently in all directions engines are moving and waggons

the Vulcan-like strength of the men who are directing them. That, indeed, is all-sufficient for the time being, and one learns almost with indifference that the blast furnaces can turn out 115,000 tons of pig iron and 50,000 tons of finished iron, and that the steel works would be capable of producing annually 35,000 tons of that metal. The works have a river frontage of more than half a mile and an area of sixty-five acres.

Jarrow is of course a town of artisans' dwellings. They are well built in wide streets, and in point of healthfulness no doubt pleasantly contrast with the habitations of the working class in the great cities. But the long rows of small, squat houses, all of the same size and pattern, in streets paved with cobble-stones and destitute of a single green leaf, are undeniably depressing. There is only one little oasis of villadom, with small gardens and tree-planted roads. This is in the vicinity of a pretty little park, given to



BEDE'S CHURCH, JARROW-ON-TYNE.

*Photo by Fry, Tynemouth.*

are being shunted. In the shops the crash of machinery or the hammering of molten metal deafens you; the instructions of your guide are quite inaudible, and your way has to be picked through pieces of iron which may be hot from the furnace. One can only obtain an impression of the terrific forces that are at work here, and No. 137. February, 1895.

Jarrow by Lord Northbourne, to whose family most of the land in the district belongs. The most popular part of this open space is evidently the bowling green, and some of Palmer's men have made themselves very skilful at this old English game.

In the way of public buildings, Jarrow



has a mechanics' institute, a hospital, theatre, town hall, and a score or so of churches and chapels. The mechanics' institute, upon which £3,500 was spent in 1864, has a membership of a thousand and a library of 3,000 volumes, and is the scene of a system of technical education carried out by the Durham County Council. The hospital was built by Sir Charles Palmer in 1870 as a memorial of his wife, who died in 1865, having endeared herself to the working people by her kindness in cases of sickness and accident. Until it was built the victims of such accidents as frequently occur in such extensive works had to be conveyed to one of the Newcastle hospitals. The men in the works contribute one penny a week, and the boys one halfpenny for the support of this hospital. They have also, by the way, a large and vigorous branch of the St. John's Ambulance Society, and some of the men are said to show remarkable skill in giving "first aid" to injured comrades.

Without lingering to look at these buildings, however, the few visitors to Jarrow not bent on business at "Palmer's" probably proceed through the town to see old Bede's church. On the way they pass all that is left besides of Jarrow as it was forty years ago—a few white-washed cottages, rather more picturesque if less sanitary than the greater part of the 4,000 houses which Sir Charles Palmer's enterprise has since brought into existence. St. Paul's Church and the ruins of the monastery stand on the brow of a slight hill overlooking Jarrow Slake, an estuary of the Tyne, now largely reclaimed, but at one time covering nearly 500 acres and large enough to accommodate the whole navy of King Egred. The monastic ruin consists only of part of a couple of walls, but it stands out curiously—a relic of Saxon times—in juxtaposition to the tall smoky chimneys of nineteenth century commerce. The church itself was rebuilt in 1783—when every service held in the ruinous structure was at the peril of the worshippers—but some parts of the ancient edifice have been preserved. In the porch are a number of the old stones found by workmen who were excavating at the time of the restoration of the church, with various inscriptions full of antiquarian interest. In the nave, too, are two old oak pews finely carved according to a Norman design, and the Venerable Bede's chair—or what some people believe to be such. The church

register goes back to 1572, and until quite recent times the parish included South Shields.

Jarrow has not been wanting in honour to its creator. When a charter of incorporation was conferred upon the town in 1875, Sir Charles Palmer, who then had a house in the vicinity, was at once chosen as its first mayor. Ten years later, on Jarrow becoming the centre of a county division, he was elected its first member of Parliament, to which he was first returned in 1874 by North Durham. The Conservatives have recognised the peculiar strength of his position by never contesting the seat, but it is significant of the new order of things now beginning that at the last election a "Labour" candidate should have obtained 2,500 votes against over 7,000 recorded for the great employer. In the House of Commons Sir Charles Palmer has not strained party loyalty when he considered commercial interests were at stake, and it was as much owing to him as to any other member that Mr. Chamberlain's Shipping Bill in the '80 Parliament was destroyed. Nevertheless Mr. Gladstone readily gave him a baronetcy on going out of office in 1886.

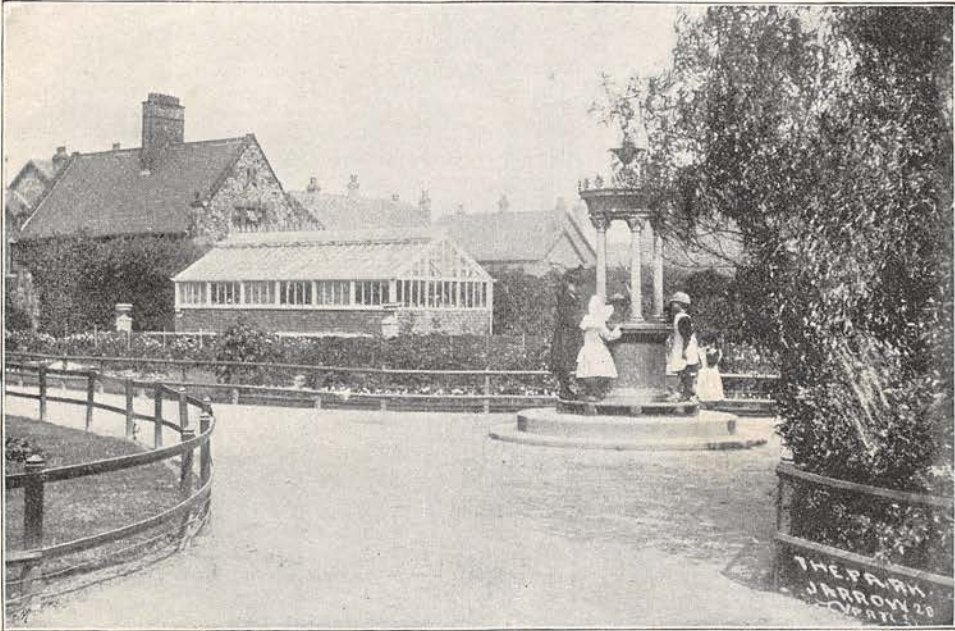
Sir Charles Palmer could make out an even stronger claim upon the gratitude of shipowners in connection with the Suez Canal. When M. de Lesseps came to this country to obtain the support of the principal shipping men for his great project, it was said that Sir Charles Palmer was the only one among them with whom he could converse, and again and again the latter had occasion to thank the wisdom of his father in having sent him, after he had finished his education in Newcastle, for two years' study in Marseilles. Sir Charles ultimately became one of the English directors of the Suez Canal Company; and in that capacity he has been able to do much to protect the interest of his countrymen in the waterway to India and the East. It was largely owing to his energy, I believe, that the widening of the canal and its illumination by electric light at night were brought about, to the great benefit of the commerce of the world.

Sir Charles Palmer is now more often seen in Newcastle than in Jarrow, I am told. He has a house in Jesmond Dene, and the greater part of the time he spends in the north is now given to the affairs of Bowes and Partners. This firm, with fourteen collieries and 6,000 miners in its



employ, is now one of the largest of its kind in the world, and outside its offices on Quayside about noon there is usually one of the most animated mercantile scenes in Newcastle. In the intervals Jarrow and Newcastle have left him, the baronet has built up a big glass-making business at South Shields, his native

his iron mines; it is beautifully situated in a well-timbered park of 200 acres, which contains some fine specimens of the *arbor vite*. Grinkle Park was originally a seat of the Conyers family, of whom there are some memorials in Easington Church. Sir Charles Palmer is now lord of the manor, and is a magistrate for the North



A CORNER IN JARROW PARK.

place. In recognition of his indomitable energy in promoting the industries of Tyneside Newcastle elected him President of its Chamber of Commerce several years ago.

Sir Charles Palmer has a London house in Grosvenor Square, and a country seat in North Yorkshire. The latter, Grinkle Park, Loftus-in-Cleveland, is not far from

Riding. But in his busy life he can have had little time for the pursuits of the country gentleman, and although he has passed the allotted threescore years and ten, the energy of his character, with which his tall, muscular frame is so well in keeping, seemingly banishes from his mind any thought of leisured ease.



*Photo by Van der Weyde, Regent-street.*

SIR CHARLES MARK PALMER, BART., M.P.