

Here is a phenomenon. Here is Mr H. R. Williams, of Oak Lodge, Highgate, who thinks that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have got a conscience. They have lately acquired full control by purchase of leases over the Highgate Woods which should be a spot of wild foliage in the midst of brick and mortar in North London. Of course, they are going to build upon it. Another landlord would keep it in existence to increase and maintain the value of the surrounding property. But the Ecclesiastical Commissioners use *their* powers with no regard for the surrounding circumstances. The wonder is that Mr H. R. Williams should appeal to their sense of justice. They do not possess any. "I may ask," he says, "in all earnestness, whether the public have not some claim upon a great body of landowners like the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, to whom belongs nearly one-third of the parish of Hornsey. Private landowners not infrequently do much to benefit and beautify the neighbourhoods in which their wealth was made, or in which their estates are situated, and why not a great corporation whose wealth will be increased to a fabulous extent by the building operations which must soon be pushed forward on a gigantic scale. Are all sanitary conditions to be set aside for the building of churches and the payment of their ministers, both good things in themselves? Surely the people of Hornsey, in whose midst this great estate is situated, have some claim upon it? The local authorities will, no doubt, be referred to as the parties to deal with the woods, but they are powerless in matters of this kind." So are all representations to the Board of Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It is all up with Highgate woods. Their hour is passed.

THE PRESERVATION OF HIGHGATE WOODS.

ON Wednesday night a crowded and enthusiastic meeting, representing all classes of the inhabitants of the district, was held in Northfield Hall, in support of the movement set on foot by our neighbour, Mr. H. R. Williams, chairman of the Hornsey Local Board, to secure the Highgate Woods as a place of health-giving resort and recreation for the people for ever. Lord George Hamilton, M.P., presided, and was supported by Mr. Daniel Grant, M.P., Mr. J. T. Bedford, a member of the City Court of Common Council, Mr. H. R. Williams, Rev. D. Trinder, M.A., vicar of Highgate, Professor Tomlinson, Dr. Forshall, Mr. Gilbert Robins, churchwarden of Hornsey, Mr. J. Glover, Mr. J. Noble, Mr. Tuckett, Mr. J. Carvell Williams, Mr. Sime, Mr. J. T.

Taylor, Mr. R. Hammond, Captain Thompson, Mr. G. Higgs, secretary of the North London Park League, &c. Letters sympathizing with the object of the meeting were received in the course of the proceedings, from Mr. J. Bryce, M.P., Lord Brabazon, Lord de Vesci, Mr. W. H. James, M.P., Mr. Hollond, M.P., and others.

The chairman, in opening the proceedings, referred to the meeting held last year with regard to the preservation of Alexandra-park from the attempt made by the company that owned it to appropriate the portion dedicated by Act of Parliament to the use and recreation of the people of north London. There was no difficulty there, as the intention only required to be known to be stopped by the force of public opinion. But now they had to consider a much more difficult question. Lord Mansfield and his ancestors had enjoyed a lease of a large amount of land outside Ken Wood. The greater portion of that wood, which surrounded his residence, was his freehold, but he leased a certain portion from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and recently the two owners had made an exchange of their respective rights, the nett result being that Lord Mansfield now owns the whole of Ken Wood and certain other land in fee simple, and had surrendered his lease of the Highgate Woods and other spaces, amounting to six or eight hundred acres. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners were a body specially entrusted by Act of Parliament with certain duties, and as trustees they were naturally anxious to develop their property as far as consideration for the public permitted. He had called at the office, and was told that there was no immediate intention of building over all the ground, in fact that was impossible, but no doubt they were considering what it was best to do. He therefore thought they were justified in meeting to consider what should be done, should the Commissioners propose, though he did not know that they would, to build over or destroy the woods in that immediate neighbourhood. (Applause.) He believed there was an unanimous wish on the part of the inhabitants of Highgate to preserve these spaces—(Applause)—and he had been specially requested by the Baroness and Mr. Burdett Coutts to say that they heartily sympathized with the objects of the meeting—(cheers)—but having devoted their efforts to attempting, in conjunction with several others, to preserve an open space adjoining Hampstead-heath, they were afraid that to join in efforts in another direction would perilously hamper them in this. The proposal which suggested itself as the best to his judgment he would submit to them, and he hoped they would approve it. The north of London was peculiarly situated. On the south side there were a large number of commons and open spaces, on the west they had the Royal parks, and on the east Victoria-park and Epping Forest. But in the North of London they were somewhat differently situated, for with the single exception of Hampstead-heath, there was no common for some miles, nothing nearer than Barnet. A great difficulty was that they had no central public body like the Metropolitan Board of Works, for with the exception of Hampstead their jurisdiction ended with the metropolitan boroughs. There would no doubt be in a year or two a body with the capacity and power to deal with the question of open spaces, and what they had to consider was how they could tide over the interval so that these spaces should not in the meantime be entirely absorbed in building operations. They had at present no body competent to deal with the owners of the land they wished to preserve, as the Hornsey Local Board could not enter on the purchase of so large a space without imposing such a rate as could not be borne. (Hear, hear.) It was perfectly clear, therefore, that unless something was done the spaces would probably be lost, and considering the rapid increase of the population within the jurisdiction of the Hornsey Local Board, which would in the next thirty years probably reach ten times its present number, he asked what would their descendants say if they did not do their utmost to preserve them. There were several other districts that were moving in a similar direction, and he was ready to move in the House of Commons for a Select Committee to see if they could discover some means of effecting the objects aimed at and preserving these open spaces, or at least a considerable portion of them, for the use of the public for ever. (Applause.) He believed the Government would agree to the appointment of such a committee. He was sure all the metropolitan members would be in favour of it, and that Mr. Daniel Grant would co-operate with him. (Applause.) The resolution to be proposed would not pledge them to any particular course of conduct, but would merely create a committee to take action. He had received a private intimation that the City of London might be willing to find a considerable part, if not the whole of the money. (Loud cheers.) They must not of course trust too much to that, as the Corporation could only move by Act of Parliament. The owners of the woods were the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who were entrusted by Parliament with certain duties which they performed with great ability. They were the representatives of the Church of England, and supported a large number of small benefices. There was no doubt many at the meeting who did not belong to that Church—(Hear)—and who disapproved entirely of a State Church. He would ask them, even if they disapproved of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as an appendage of the Church of England, not to make the meeting the occasion of an attack on them. He made the request because they were all unanimous as to the objects of the meeting—(Cheers)—and he wanted to avoid any subject which would lead to division of opinion. If they would nominate a local committee the Select Committee of the House of Commons would if appointed have the necessary local knowledge at hand. (Applause.)

Mr. H. R. Williams then moved the first resolution, "That this meeting, viewing with alarm the steady absorption of open spaces on the North of London, desires to express its emphatic opinion that the enclosure and destruction of the Highgate and other neighbouring woods would prove a lasting and irreparable injury to the northern districts of London." (Hear, hear.) He expressed his approval of the chairman's suggestion, and said they must respect the position of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The names of the members were a guarantee that they would sympathise with every good object, and he was quite certain he should be able to show them excellent reasons for preserving the woods and for making their acquisition for the use of the people as easy as was consistent with their duty. The object of that meeting was to get the greatest good for the greatest number. He believed the woods in question occupied 120 or 130 acres, but he also wished some other land, including Bishop's-wood, to be secured. This was a metropolitan question, though Highgate would be shorn of all its beauty if deprived of these woods, and from the top of the hill they would look upon an army of chimney pots. (Hear, hear.) He believed that if they could only find the ways and means for the purchase of the woods, there would be no difficulty in getting the Corporation of the City of London to undertake the maintenance of them in perpetuity for the people. As indicative of what might be done in this case, Mr. Williams mentioned that West Ham Park was bought by the Corporation for £25,000, towards which Mr. Gurney, the owner, gave £10,000, the Corporation £10,000, and the people in the neighbourhood £5,000. He also stated that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, as lords of the manor of Streatham Common, sold it to the Metropolitan Board of Works for £5, "so after all," he added, "we shall not, perhaps, have so much difficulty with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as some people imagine." (Hear, hear.)

Mr. Daniel Grant, M.P., seconded the resolution. He approved of the chairman's suggestion for a Select Committee of the House of Commons, and, though agreeing with a conciliatory policy, said he wished to impress upon the Ecclesiastical Commissioners the conviction that the land originally and naturally belonged to the people, that the Church was the representative of the people—(cheers and some hisses)—and therefore that the Commissioners should deal with this matter in a generous and free-handed manner, which would be for the good of all concerned. (Applause.)

The resolution was carried unanimously.

Mr. John T. Bedford, to whose services as a

member of the City Corporation in securing Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches, &c., for the people both the chairman and Mr. H. R. Williams had paid tributes, then moved the appointment of a committee, "To confer with the local and other authorities as to the best means to be employed for the permanent preservation of these woods as health-giving resorts for the use and recreation of the people." (Applause.) He appeared before them in a dual capacity. He was instructed by the Boulevards Society, of which Lord Brabazon was the honoured head, to tell the meeting that everything which the society could do should be done for the object in view. (Applause.) Secondly, he appeared as a member of the Corporation of the City of London, which for the last twelve or thirteen years had associated itself with this question of open spaces with very great and important results, he having begun the work in 1871, and he promised the meeting every possible assistance that they could conceive from the Corporation of London. (Applause.) At the same time they must do all they could, with the assistance of the public Press, which would always help a good cause, and if they were in earnest he prophesied victory. (Applause.) He was in favour of dealing gently with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, but if necessary he should ask how they acquired these lands. (Hear, hear.) He was a member of the Common Council, and his ancestors many years ago had the right of hunting in these woods. He could not believe that any members of the Common Council were ever so mad as to resign that right.

The resolution, which was seconded by Mr. A. G. Harvey and supported by Mr. J. Carvell Williams, was carried unanimously, an influential committee being appointed as the result.

Upon the motion of Mr. Gilbert Robins (who said that the Rev. J. Jeakes, M.A., rector of Hornsey, would have been present but for church duties), seconded by Mr. R. Hammond, a vote of thanks was awarded by acclamation to Lord George Hamilton.

The noble lord, in replying, expressed himself well satisfied with the way he had spent his Wednesday half-holiday from Parliament in presiding at this meeting, and said he felt it his duty to support this movement in the interests of his poorer brethren. He was glad that his proposal had met with the approval of the meeting, and he should move next day, in the House of Commons, for the appointment of a Select Committee, though he feared that nothing definite could be done until next session.

In the House of Commons on Thursday Lord George Hamilton, true to his promise, gave notice that he would call attention to the rapid absorption of open spaces in the North of London, and move for a Select Committee to report on means for their preservation.

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LUNGS FOR LONDON.

The London public will gratefully appreciate the gift bestowed upon them by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Some months have elapsed since a note of alarm was sounded with reference to the fate which threatened the Highgate Woods. It cannot be said that the outcry produced an agitation, so that there is no pretence for detracting from the action of the Commissioners by describing it as a surrender to the pressure of opinion. Nothing could be more considerate or more liberal than their offer as a free gift to the Corporation of London of two parks for the use and benefit of the people. Seventy acres of woodland at Highgate, and 30 acres at Kilburn, represent, it is needless to say, donations of a very substantial character indeed. It is possible that there are persons who may consider their own interests prejudiced by the generosity of the Commissioners. We shall not be surprised, indeed, to hear it contended that the bestowal of the property was in effect a misappropriation. It is to be hoped, however, that liberal sympathy with the public requirements will prevail in this case over more selfish views.

The Commissioners have done as much as could fairly be expected of them in this matter. But it appears that much remains to be secured as yet before it can be said that the public interests have been adequately provided for. The Gravel Wood Pit, at Highgate, which constitutes the gift handed over to the Corporation, falls a fraction short of seventy acres. This area would be little short of doubled by the addition of the Churchyard, Bottom Woods, which it is understood the Ecclesiastical Commissioners would be prepared to sell at a fair price. It remains to be seen whether the suggestion put forward by Mr. H. R. WILLIAMS, that some public-spirited person should come forward and purchase the addition, will produce the effect desired. The philanthropist certainly could not associate his name with a more beneficent action, or indulge his bent in a more becoming direction. It is an old story that London, of all cities, is the least adequately provided with breathing places. The "brick wilderness" spreads year by year into the country, and "eats up everything that is green." Sanitary science fortunately has developed to an extent which will not permit us to regard with indifference a growth which enlarges the metropolis at the expense of light, air, and exercise, three necessities of healthy existence. We are all actively concerned in the extension and increase of what have been fitly termed the lungs of London, and the result of the appeal made to-day in connection with the Highgate Woods will be watched with interest. Is this, however, a matter for private philanthropy? It seems to