

**THE VERDICT: A TRACT ON THE
POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF
THE REPORT OF THE PARNELL
COMMISSION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649728787

The Verdict: A Tract on the Political Significance of the Report of the Parnell Commission by A. V. Dicey

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A. V. DICEY

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COMMISSION**

THE VERDICT:

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ON

*The Political Significance of the Report of
the Parnell Commission.*



BY

A. V. DICEY, Q.C.,

VINERIAN PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LAW IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE, AUTHOR OF "ENGLAND'S
CASE AGAINST HOME RULE," "AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE LAW OF THE CONSTITUTION," ETC.

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CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:

LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE.

1890.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I.	
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INQUIRY	10
CHAPTER II.	
THE FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION	21
A. Not Guilty	23
B. Not Proven	28
C. Guilty	34
CHAPTER III.	
THE GLADSTONIAN APOLOGY	78
Irrelevant Arguments	80
i. Attack on Judges	80
ii. Attack on <i>Times</i>	82
iii. Conservative condonation of Parnellism	84
iv. Conspiracy sometimes trifles	85
Relevant Arguments	89
i. Argument from history of agrarian crime in Ireland	89
ii. Argument from universal prevalence of boycotting	103

	PAGE
iii. Argument from the nature of political crime	117
iv. Argument from the nature of political movements	126
v. Argument from the Union of hearts	136

CHAPTER IV.

POLITICAL RESULTS	148
Parnellites	155
Gladstonians	160
Unionists	169

APPENDIX.

I. Commissioners' Findings	189
II. Names of the Respondents affected by the Report	193

PREFACE.

My purpose in writing this tract is to bring home to Englishmen the full meaning, as yet not completely understood—and the immense political significance, as yet hardly if at all realised—of the Report made to the Crown on the 13th of February, 1890, by the Commissioners appointed under the Special Commission Act, 1888.

This tract, therefore, consists of two portions. It contains in the first place, an explanation of the "Verdict," as I have ventured to term it, delivered by the Commissioners; this comment or explanation will, I trust, help readers untrained in the interpretation of legal documents to grasp the full meaning of the conclusions arrived at by the Commissioners. It contains in the second place, a body of argument which aims at showing that the Verdict vitally affects the position of every Party in the State, and also adds strength to all the grounds on which Unionists have offered uncompromising opposition to the policy of the Parnellites and their allies. My whole argument, be it remarked, is based upon the Report. The "brief," however, if so it may be called, on which my reasoning is founded, differs from any brief handed to counsel in a court of law; for it is a statement of facts prepared not by the astuteness or partiality of a lawyer seeking to make out

a case for his client, but by the trained sagacity and rigid equity of judges who have proposed to themselves no object but the eliciting and the statement of the truth.

This preface affords the proper opportunity for expressing my deliberate conviction, based on an elaborate study of the Report, and on careful observation of every stage in the conflict between the *Times* and the Land League, that the proprietors of the *Times* have rendered a signal service to the State for which they have as yet received, even from Unionists, nothing like due gratitude. The owners of the *Times* have, it is true, in the bitter contest with foes whose wrong-doing is now established, fallen into many errors and faults. The most signal and least excusable of these mistakes has brought deep and not undeserved discredit on the management of the *Times*, and has for the moment damaged the prestige of the Unionist cause, which the *Times* intended to serve. But if the owners of the *Times* have been guilty of errors for which they have paid the due and heavy, but the adequate penalty, they have also by their exposure of Parnellism conferred a lasting benefit on the country. They have displayed high civic virtues; they have denounced, they have resisted, they have exposed, they have checked, lawless oppression; they have carried through, at their private cost (a cost which must be reckoned up by thousands of pounds), something like a public prosecution, and have thereby established against a powerful party the guilt of criminal conspiracy. That the owners of the *Times* should be blamed, and severely blamed, for their faults no one can complain. The legitimate ground for complaint is that while their faults are remembered their public-

spirited action is forgotten. Against this injustice it is a duty to protest not only for the sake of fairness to men whose sacrifices have served the State, but for the sake of the commonwealth itself. It will be an evil day for England if ever the time should arrive when the guides of public opinion are not prepared to risk the loss of wealth and influence for the sake of exposing injustice and criminality. But that time will certainly soon arrive if politicians are not prepared to pay to the public spirit of private individuals the tribute at any rate of gratitude.

Many Unionists and all Gladstonians will hold that my opinion as to the conduct of the *Times* savours of a fanaticism or party spirit which shakes their confidence in the conclusions put forward in this tract. Let me suggest that the right course for any critic who wishes to correct any bias which may against my will influence my statement of the case against the Parnellites, is to study the Report itself. If every censor who questions my fairness will read or re-read the pages of the Report, the object with which this tract is written will be fully attained. The one essential matter is that the Report should be read. The Verdict of the Commission is the condemnation of Parnellism, and when once understood will, in Great Britain at least, destroy all sympathy with Parnellite policy.

A. V. DICEY.

ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD.

June, 1890.

