

DAWN OF THE DEMOCRACY

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BIG things are happening in the field of British home politics, things which are beyond parallel if we turn to the past, and which will inevitably have their influence in shaping the future into something as much unlike now as now is unlike what was before free-born citizens had any say at all in electing those men who were to govern them.



Premier Asquith

What stands out beyond everything else in 1910 is the change that is coming over the complexion of political parties at Westminster. The change was in the making long since, doubtless before the present generation was entitled to its votes, but the making of it has had a tremendous impulse during the three months that the present Parliament has been sitting. And what a remarkable three months it has been! Of legislation in the ordinary sense there has been none, nor was any of that character foreshadowed in the King's speech

read upon the opening of Parliament.

The nature of the serious departure was indicated also in the King's speech. "His Majesty's faithful Commons" were to consider the relations existing between the two Houses. And they have been doing practically nothing ever since, because the relations existing between the two Houses of Parliament formed the vital business of the 1910 government.

After some skirmishing, during which plenty of "copy" was made out of secret bargainings supposed to be carrying on between the leaders of

the government and the leaders of their Irish and Labour allies, this unique Parliament got to real work. The Prime Minister tabled his now famous veto resolutions, which were the concrete expression of the government's line of action in "considering the relations between the two Houses."

All the essential considering had been done, of course, months, nay years, before. There was no mystery about what was what of the Lords, by the three Democratic parties, Liberals, Nationalists and Labourites. The only new thing to be learnt from the veto resolutions and the debates to follow them was the extent to which Mr. Asquith's government was prepared to go in the fight against the Lords. Well, the Premier was very nervous perhaps at first. It was a big thing he had on hand, and he was hardly sure how far he could rely upon his allies, and especially upon the moderate section of his own party. This moderate section, led by the Foreign Secretary (Sir Edward Grey) and the War Minister (Mr. Haldane), with whose ideas Mr. Asquith had a very large sympathy. This section preferred to try and reform the Upper House, and for a time the government dallied over the idea. But the allies wouldn't have reform at any price; this, they said, was no business of theirs in the Parliament. They were sent to the country because by throwing out the Budget the Lords had trampled upon the rights of the people. The moderate section with their policy of reforming the Lords was overruled by the more thorough, more numerous, and more militant sections, and reform was shelved.

To put it rather crudely, Mr. Asquith came up to scratch and followed the more courageous policy. His final decision was publicly declared on April 14th, in the House of Commons. His statement amounted to this: He declared that if the House of Lords fail to accept the policy embodied in the Veto Resolutions, or decline to consider it when it is formally presented, the government will immediately tender advice to the Crown as to the steps that will have to be taken if that policy is to receive statutory effect in this Parliament. Mr. Asquith added that unless the government are able to give

statutory effect to their policy in this Parliament they will either resign office or recommend a dissolution.

This "advice to the Crown," which will be tendered by the Premier—since it is practically certain that the Lords will reject the Veto Bill—will provide, it is understood, for the creation of about five hundred Peers, supporters of the government of course, to ensure the passing of the Veto Bill, and afterwards, doubtless, to give effect to a scheme of House of Lords reform.

When, late at night, Mr. Asquith brought in the Veto Bill, embodying the resolutions which the Commons had just passed, he had a particularly warm reception from his followers. But the reception was tame to what followed after he had made his statement in a concise ten minutes' speech. Liberals, Labourites, and Nationalists cheered and shouted and waved their hats and handkerchiefs for a matter of three or four minutes, whilst the Conservatives kept a stony silence. The demonstration was repeated with added emphasis when Mr. Asquith left the House after the adjournment of the sitting, and the exultant cries rang down the corridors and out into the almost deserted streets of Westminster, blending gladness with a significant note of menace against the Lords who had dared to attempt again to put their foot upon the necks of the people. It seemed like the eve of a day that would bring revolution—bring not bloodshed but the triumph of democracy.

This will go on record as one of the greatest scenes in the history of British parliaments. There have been great moments before. Sometimes the student of history thinks the really profound things have all happened. But there will be great moments again. Nobody knows, of course, what great parliamentary days are in the making for us, but certainly, whatever happens to eclipse it for a time, April 14, 1910, will be remembered along with them.

Imagination can conjure up plenty of scenes that would be great, if they happened. One of them, not perhaps very far off, is when a Democratic Prime Minister comes back from an appeal to the country on the supreme issue of Peers or People, with a clear hundred majority over the Constitutionalist Party. Another, when the grant of self-government is made by a solid progressive vote to that dependency of Great Britain which is at once the nearest to her in distance and the furthest away from her in prosperity and contentment. And there are lots of other scenes that might be realised.

AN ACCIDENT ON THE HUNTING FIELD



The English Parliamentary Steeplechase is an ancient institution, but it had not been run for three years until this year. Unfortunately the day at Epping was marred by an accident which befell Rt. Hon. James Tomkinson, M.P., a septuagenarian. While leading in a race he was thrown and carried off unconscious. He afterwards died.

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