

Australian Notes.

The general public here takes far less interest in the affairs of Australia than those of Canada, or even of South Africa. This is partly due to the enormous distance that separates the Commonwealth from the Imperial metropolis. Partly also, it is due to the far superior and insistent efforts Canada has made to keep her name and her needs to the front. Of late the Federal Government of Australia has shown a keener desire to attract immigrants, and, as you will remember, a great building to house the activities and the representatives of the Commonwealth is going up on one of London's most central sites. But the casual attention paid to the Australian election is a sign that the Commonwealth has not yet attained a familiarly prominent place in the eyes of British folk. The Labour Government appears to have lost its majority in the House of Representatives, and this is bound to have a widespread influence on the immediate future of Australia. For one thing, as I suggested last week, it will affect Australia's position in the money market though, as the Liberal majority is so slender the investing public will probably decide to wait to see if it holds on. Most competent observers think there will be another election in a few months. It is a provision of Australian constitutional law that if the Senate, twice in three months, throws out a measure sent up by the lower house the Governor-General may order a dissolution of both Houses, should they fail to agree in conference. At present the Senate is overwhelmingly Labour and it is too much to suppose, without further information, that it would welcome an appeal to the electorate involving its own return. I mention the point to show that the General Election of May 31 is a long way from being conclusive.

It is inconceivable that the liberal majority in the House of Representatives can carry on the Government of the country for long. In Australia the Liberal members of Parliament are usually business and professional men, pursuing their callings in all parts of the island continent. They would find it impossible to put in a Parliamentary attendance close enough to preserve the necessary voting majority. Think of the "snap divisions" there would be! On the other hand the Labour representatives, who have not the means to travel to and from their homes, as a rule find it necessary to reside in Melbourne and give all their time to their Parliamentary duties. Necessity has made a virtue of their punctuality. Should the Liberals contrive to hold on they would certainly undertake a vigorous policy of immigration, for they represent the classes that constantly demand more labour and more home

customers for their products. More than this it is unnecessary to say at the moment, for Australia's political outlook is altogether too hazy.

We have heard very little at the time of writing of the Bill which Senator Dillingham is said to have introduced into the United States Senate to restrict the number of immigrants annually from any one country to ten per cent of the number of persons of similar nationality resident in the United States. I only refer to the subject here in its relation to emigration; for already we have visions of the United States turning from the prolific human fields of Southern and Western Europe to open emigration offices in the United Kingdom to compete for brawn and brain with the overseas dominions of the British Empire.

Land Reform Laws.

Every week brings added proof of the determination of the British Government to open a bold campaign in favor of land law reform. Last Saturday the Attorney-General (Sir John Simon, now one of our most popular front-rank political orators) devoted a speech at Oxford on the subject, I repeat them here:

It ought to be the essence of the Liberal temper, said Sir John Simon, that it takes more interest in the future than in the past, and the very fact of advance was sure to provoke some resentment; but if they lost an outpost at Newmarket and were repulsed in an attack on Altrincham they must reply by an advance all along the line.

The condition of England, which was the central topic of 1840, has indeed greatly changed in the 70 years which had elapsed. But when all was said and done could it be truly said that the condition of England, judged by the contrast between the comforts of the rich and the anxieties of the poor, was less tragic or more tolerable than it was? If the standard of comfort among the poor had risen, so also had the level of expenditure still true in spite of greatly improved administration that hovels unfit for human habitation could not be closed as the law directed because those who shelter in them have nowhere to go. We still lived under a system of tenure by which the owner of land could rent his tenant on what the tenant had made his premises worth, and under a system of rating which penalized an occupier in proportion as he expended capital and enterprise in increasing the value of his holding. One in every 40 of our agricultural labourers emigrated from England last year, apart from migration to the towns. On national grounds we could not afford to wait, and problems which this review suggested called for bold action, for severe as well as skilful surgery. They had to bring Liberal ideas to the task of raising the economic level of underpaid labour as a whole, and the time to set about this task had surely now arrived.

Further, the official Liberal publications are mentioning the subject. "The Liberal Monthly" for June, for example, opens an article on "The Next Great Question" with the sentence: "Every day that passes shows that one of the most important questions demanding treatment in the immediate future is the question of the workers in the countryside."