

think the 'Times' of February 10 contains, not only the constitution with that proviso, but a very able article calling attention to the progressive method adopted in the proposed new constitution, and generally advocating for England the system of proportional representation.

I have indicated these details because it is important to show that the system of proportional representation is actually being adopted in many of the great British dependencies, upon the same lines as it is proposed by the Proportional Representation Society of England; and it is of some importance, in view of the probable closer relations which are contemplated between the different parts of the empire, that we, too, in view of that movement throughout the empire, should give some consideration to this great electoral reform.

Now, Sir, in England itself, as I stated a moment ago, that is a question of great actuality. I would like to quote to the House the words of the Rt. Hon. H. H. Asquith, the Prime Minister, in receiving a few weeks ago a deputation organized by the Proportional Representation League, the deputation being composed of what I might call the very best men in England. They suggested to Mr. Asquith the immediate necessity, in view of the condition of affairs in England, of instituting an inquiry in regard to that particular phase of electoral reform. These are words of the Prime Minister in response to the delegation:

Lord Courtney and gentlemen, I have received in this room and elsewhere many deputations, but I do not call to mind any one of them which, having regard to its composition—and here I speak not merely of the personal weight of the individuals but of the variety of opinions in the political schools which they represent—which is more entitled to have its appeal listened to with consideration and respect. I do not hesitate to say at the outset of the very few observations which I am going to ask you to listen to, that I am in entire agreement with your main position. I have said in public before now, and am therefore only repeating an opinion which I have never ceased to hold, namely, that there can be no question in the mind of any one familiar with the actual operation of our constitutional system that it permits, and I might almost say that it facilitates—but it certainly permits a minority of voters whether in the country at large or in particular constituencies to determine the representation—the relative representation in the one case of the whole nation, and the actual representation in the other case of the particular constituency, sometimes in defiance of the opinions and wishes of the majority of the electors. The moment you have stated that as a fact which cannot be disputed, and it cannot be contradicted by any one, you have pointed out a flaw of a most serious character, and some might say of an almost fatal character, when your constitutional and parliamentary system appears at the bar of

judgment upon the issue whether or not it does from the democratic point of view really carry out the first principles of representative government. I therefore agree that it is impossible to defend the rough and ready method which has been hitherto adopted as a proper or satisfactory explanation of the representative principle. It is not merely, as more than one speaker has pointed out, that under our existing system a minority in the country may return a majority of the House of Commons, but what more frequently happens, and what I am disposed to agree is equally injurious in its results, is that you have almost always a great disproportion in the relative size of the majority and minority in the House of Commons as compared with their relative sizes in the constituencies. That is the normal condition of our House of Commons. I have had experience of some of the inconveniences which result. I have had experience in both ways.

The Prime Minister goes on to explain what those experiences have been, giving details with which I do not wish to detain the House. But after having said that the inquiry was absolutely necessary, the Prime Minister stated that the only trouble which he encountered was to know in what shape that inquiry should be carried on. He stated that in his experience, royal commissions, through an unfortunate circumstance in the past, had been composed of too many members. But the Prime Minister spoke of immediate consideration, and indeed only a few days ago the British government named a royal commission to examine this question, composed of eight very eminent men, with Lord Frederick Cavendish as chairman, and the Prime Minister promised that no measure of electoral reform, such as has been promised by the present governing power in England, will be presented to the House before the government is in possession of the findings of this important commission.

Now one word as to foreign countries. They have adopted the system of proportional representation in Denmark, what is called the Andre system, slightly different from the classic form of proportional representation advocated long ago by Mr. Hare and defended by John Stuart Mill; that is the system which they have with some variation in Denmark, with excellent results. In Belgium they have a most perfect system, the list system, but not the simple system of one list on which is based the programme of the Proportional Representation League. The list system give play to the parties, being a most excellent system in its results, inasmuch as it affords representation to minorities. That is the system which they have in Belgium. The voter has before him as many lists as there are parties, or an individual, or a very small group of individuals may present a list. One man may present a list. There is a vote for the list and a personal vote as well. It is what the French call 'la con-