

THE BRITISH POLITICAL LEADERS

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Canada is fated to be interested in many elections. With ten possible of our own every four or five years, we are regularly interested in the Presidential elections across the border; and it has been said critically by some that we know more about the politics of the United States than about the affairs of Great Britain. As a simple test of this, not long ago a Canadian gentleman who closely observes the tendencies of things in public life, said to another: "Off-hand, how many of President Taft's cabinet can you name?" "Well, not more than one," was the reply. "And how many of the British cabinet could you set down?" "Easily half a dozen." "Precisely," said the observant one, "you are more interested in British politics than you are in those of the United States. Every Canadian is."

At all events, for the next few weeks Canadians will be more interested in a British election campaign than at any other time. Most of us have never seen Mr. Chamberlain; but we know pretty definitely what his tariff reform scheme means; have never seen Lord Rosebery, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Asquith or Lloyd-George, but we understand where each of them stands in this struggle between the Commons and Lords and between industrial depression and free trade. We have pretty definite notions as to what free trade means to Great Britain and what it would mean to the Empire; have ourselves proved our interest in free trade by uniting people and parties to build up a system

of adequate protection—largely in self-defense against the United States whose industrial life we know better than we do that of the Mother Country. In a sort of way we comprehend the House of Lords for we have a titled aristocracy of our own, a titular Governor-General and a Senate. In a very unmistakable way we understand the unemployed British labourer who seems to be the CASUS BELLI in this election; for we have had him in large numbers in our cities and towns. We know the ethics of preference on colonial grain as an item of tariff reform because we are sending millions of bushels of wheat every year to the consumers of Great Britain and prefer so to do rather than to ship it across the border under a system of reciprocity with the United States.

All these matters we as Canadians understand, not because they are items in British party politics which we comprehend but little, but because they are matters of economic common sense appealing to the life of the people. Now and then we begin to have a glimmering notion of what is a suffragette and what part she intends to play in this election; but that is a stretch of imagination. Taken all in all, we may be said to have as keen an interest in this British election as in almost any election of our own: and that is a more practical test of Imperialism than literature about the flag, or gush about the King, or even our attitude regarding the Imperial navy.—Editorial Note.

THE general election crisis in Great Britain is now engaging the attention of the civilised world.

Never was there an appeal to the English constituencies which so unmistakably attracted the notice of politicians and people generally, not only in the Mother Country and the colonies, but in foreign countries as well.

This arises from the simple yet pregnant reason that one has to look back along the ages for evidence of a clearer and graver issue. The present position of English politics is remarkable indeed. No war-clouds are gathered or are gathering on the horizon; for while all the powers are falling over each other in their desperate eagerness to increase the strength of their armaments, there is apparently no immediate prospect of battleships and regiments being called into action. There is no serious industrial crisis facing the nation; for now England is blessed with legislation that makes strikes almost a thing of the past, and the relations between masters and men are remarkably peaceful. Financial panic and national bankruptcy, whatever harum-scarum platform speakers may say, are certainly not brewing within the bounds of the British Empire.

The present crisis is constitutional; the beginning of what threatens to be a veritable life and death struggle between the two powers in the State apart from the Throne—between Lords and Commons. There is a curious absence of heroics and word-painting in the heralding of this great conflict. Some of the dukes, reading into recent defiant utterances by younger members of the Government deliberate threats against the continued existence of the House of Lords, have hit back vigorously and said things which are, to say the least, unusual in English politics. Generally, however, there is (I am writing on the eve of battle) a calm which may signify a violent storm when the real hostilities commence.

It is not now the Budget that claims the premier consideration; the people have had enough of the Budget, so far as the expounding and denouncing of its provisions go. The declared intention of the vast majority of the Lords to kill this year's Finance



Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill
Under-study to Lloyd-George.

Bill has cleared the way for a much older and wider issue: the right of the Upper Chamber to veto bills which have been approved by a convincing majority in the House of Commons.

The Budget is the off-spring, of course, of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is second in command to the Liberal Premier, Mr. H. H. Asquith. The rise of Mr. Lloyd-George in British politics is an astonishing record, which puts even that of Disraeli in the shade. Mr. Lloyd-George was born nearly forty-seven years



PREMIER ASQUITH

ago, the son of a struggling Welsh schoolmaster. From his village obscurity he forced himself, like so many of his colleagues, by way of the law, into the people's House of Parliament. He kept himself there by sheer grit, and by his persistence in debate and his natural fund of Celtic oratory, won his way to high office. The Liberal Chancellor may be said to have made his name in Parliament by his dogged opposition to the expressed opinions of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, who is now lying *hors de combat*, a pathetic physical wreck, and compelled to remain a mere spectator in the present struggle. No man, in or out of Parliament, showed greater keenness or used his abilities to more effect in refuting Mr. Chamberlain's policy than did the little Welsh lawyer who now is Mr. Asquith's chief henchman.

Mr. Asquith, the Premier, is himself—calm, cool, deliberative, watchful—the ideal "safe" leader who does not believe in wasting time over showy gifts of speech and policy. At 57 his hair is as white as it can be, but that was not the case before he assumed his high responsibilities. There have been in the past rumours of dissensions in his Cabinet, and certainly he has shown remarkable adroitness and skill in weeding out the "shaky" members who were not prepared to go the whole way with him in the programme that he and his chief supporters marked out.

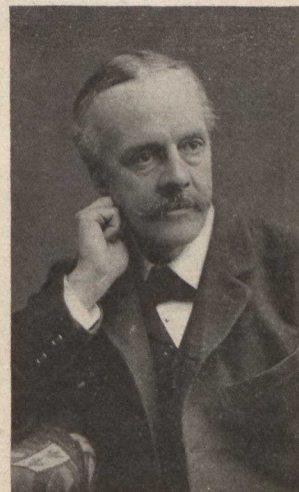
The third men on the Government side—and we have to bracket them as practically equal—who have been most in the limelight recently, are Mr. Winston Churchill, President of the Board of Trade, and Mr. Alexander Ure, Lord Advocate of Scotland. The last-named is the surprise packet of the successful men in the present Parliament. Son of an ex-Lord Provost of Glasgow, and a capable K. C., nobody would have accused Mr. Ure up to a few months ago of possessing out-of-the-ordinary political gifts. He is fifty-six, and has been in the

House of Commons for sixteen years. By what seemed merely patient plodding, added to a thorough grasp of his profession, he was given various legal offices under the Crown, succeeding to his Lord Advocateship, not so long ago, upon the granting of a peerage to Mr. Thomas Shaw. But Mr. Ure had his eye on something higher and better than a legal lordship. His chance came upon the introduction of the Budget, and he has toured the country two or three times over making rousing speeches in support of the Bill. Even then, he might have finished up a long way behind the more-pushing Lloyd-George and Churchill, had it not been for one of those lucky accidents which abound in political history.

In several of his Budget speeches Mr. Ure expressed the opinion that if the Conservatives were returned to power he did not think they would be able to continue the payment of the old-age pensions granted by the Liberal Government. That was a serious statement to make and it had a certain effect upon the electorate. Mr. Balfour took it up, and in a speech which for invective he has never equalled, denounced Mr. Ure as having uttered "a frigid and calculated lie," and said he was a disgrace to his country, his profession, and to the House of which he was a member. The Lord Advocate was given an opportunity in the House of Commons of replying to this strong attack upon his personal character, which he did in a remarkable and historic speech that outshone any in the Budget debates, both for its delivery and its reception. Mr. Ure has been the idol of a considerable section of the public since then, and it is almost certain that the next Cabinet vacancy will be filled by him.

Mr. Winston Churchill, son of Lord Randolph Churchill, and himself a revolter against Conservatism, is now as thorough a Liberal (some of his opponents say radical and even socialist) as any member of the Government party. More than that, he is the close political friend of Mr. Lloyd-George, and many prophets read into this David and Jonathan alliance a significance having a separate and distinct bearing as regards future events. He has been a powerful force on the side of the Budget and against the veto of the House of Lords.

What about the Opposition? Well, Mr. A. J. Balfour was never more firmly seated as leader of the Conservatives, in spite of his somewhat cryptic handling of the Tariff Reform policy of his party. Whether he would have sat as firmly if Mr. Chamberlain were fit and well and ten years younger is a question which can not again be lifted into practical consideration. It is difficult to say who is Mr. Balfour's right-



Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour
Leader Unionist Party

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