

MR. ASQUITH AT LIVERPOOL; THE REAL ELECTION ISSUE

It Is the Future of Representative Government—How the Administration Was Frustrated at Every Turn By the Peers—The People's Chamber Must Be Supreme—A Witty and Logical Speech.

Mr. Asquith, M. P., the Prime Minister, was entertained at luncheon on Dec. 23, by the members of the Liverpool Reform Club. Mr. James Moon, chairman of the club, presided over a large attendance, which included Sir Archibald Williamson, Bart., M. P.; Colonel Seely, M. P.; Mr. R. R. Cherry, M. P.; Mr. H. Vivian, M. P.; Mr. A. H. Crossfield, M. P., and Mr. R. D. Holt, M. P.

The chairman proposed the toast of the guest, and referring to the Prime Minister's work, said it was worth a life's struggle to have brought in one measure alone, by which he had gladdened the hearts and brought sun-

shine into the lives of hundreds of thousands of their brothers and sisters, people who but for his statesmanship would at the moment have been spending their lives in intolerable hardship and privation. They were proud of him as a leader who had set a high standard of political controversy.

MR. ASQUITH'S SPEECH.

"The Sky Full of Good Omens." Mr. Asquith, who was enthusiastically greeted, said: "I thank you, sir, for the eloquent and moving terms in which you have been good enough to commend this toast to the members of the Reform Club and you, gentlemen, for coming here in such numbers today, and giving me a welcome which might well touch any man's heart with emotions not only of gratitude, but of pride. (Hear, hear.) But, gentlemen, I recognize in you assembling here today something much more than even the gracious desire to pay a hospitable tribute to a single individual. You have come here because you and I are engaged in the opening stages of

what much be a hard-fought, but, as we believe, is destined to be a victorious campaign. The sky, gentlemen, I read it aright, is full of good omens—(hear, hear)—and among them not the least significant is the introduction day by day on the part of our political opponents of false and fictitious issues. (Hear, hear.) Some of the absurdities which are doing justice for arguments—(laughers)—are too grotesque to deserve even a passing notice. (Hear, hear.)

The Navy and the Army.

What are we to say, for instance, when we find a member of the late cabinet, Lord Cawdor, a gentleman who was actually first lord of the admiralty, trying to shock the nerves of my brother-Yorkshiremen at Leeds by picturing as among the possible—yes, even among the probable—consequences of a Liberal victory at the polls the occupation of Belfast by a German fleet? (Laughter.) This kind of thing—and it is only a sample—makes one inclined to doubt the wisdom as a matter of tactics of letting loose upon the country—(laughter)—a band of peers and pro-consuls, who during the last fortnight have been making the political welkin ring. But, gentlemen, I observe that the legends by which it is sought to divert the attention of the nation from the budget and from the House of Lords—(hear, hear)—centre very largely around the navy. Let me say once for all—and I speak with full deliberation and after careful and prolonged inquiry—that the navy today is able to maintain not only this year, but in the years that lie before us, our supremacy at sea, and should the necessity arise—which God forbid—guarantee the integrity of our shores, the protection of our commerce, the inviolability of our empire. (Loud cheers.)

The sister service, the army, is reaping now in full measure the benefit of the foresight and the constructive power and of the indefatigable energy of my right hon. friend Mr. Haldane. (Cheers.) I do not think that ever since the close of the great war, nearly a century ago, the navy and the army have been better equipped and organized each to perform its own part in the great combined work of national and imperial defence than they are today after four years of Liberal administration. (Cheers.)

"The Real Issue."

But, gentlemen, whatever attempts may be made in that direction, the nation is not going to be diverted from the real issue, which next month it will be called upon to decide. That issue is no more and no less than this—

The chairman has already quoted the words to which I have endeavored to define it, and the words which I repeat today. What is to be the future of this country of representative government? (Hear, hear.) Is it to be made a reality and based on the solid foundation of written law—(Yes, yes)—or is it to remain as it is at present, at the outside an understanding which can be violated at will by one of the parties to it, and may at any time be reduced, as it has been during the last four years, first in the sphere of legislation, finally even in the sphere of finance, to a pretence and a nullity? (Cheers.) Mr. Balfour sees, to use his own words—like sees in the present controversy the culmination of a long drawn conspiracy. The present Government, he says—and this is by far the most definite proposition that I have discovered—(laughers)—in the dramatic and nebulous disquisition which he addressed the other day to the electors of the city of London—the present Government came into office not to work the constitution, but to destroy it. He sees, I will not say in all, but in the great bulk of our legislative and financial proposals, a series of wantonly intended provocations, aimed with the deliberate purpose of tempting the House of Lords to reject them, and so forcing upon the country a long plotted design to set up the supremacy of a single chamber.

The Meaning of the Election of 1906.

What then, gentlemen, was the meaning of the general election of 1906? (Hear, hear.) What was it that sent Westminster the greatest parliamentary majority that has been known since the days of the reform bill? Was it that the electors, not only kicked its heels in the division lobby, and to shake its fist in the face of the House of Lords? Why did the electors go to the poll in 1906, and why did we go to Whitehall and Westminster? They went to the poll, I agree, partly—I will not quarrel with anyone who says primarily—to express their protest against the régime of insincerity and impotence—(cheers)—to which the very men who are now asking you for your confidence after ten years of unbroken parliamentary power in both Houses of the Legislature had reduced the Government of this country. But the verdict of 1906 was not merely a reprobation of the past. It was an expression of hope and of intent in the future. (Hear, hear.)

The Commission to the Commons.

It meant, gentlemen, that the new House of Commons was to maintain intact and unassailable our system of free trade—(cheers)—as against the retrograde follies and fallacies of what is called tariff reform. It meant that the same House was to set right the injustice under our system of national education created by the act of 1902, and was to secure for every child in this country a legal and available right of access to a school under absolute popular control. (Hear, hear.) I say here, as I have said elsewhere, if that right is secured and guaranteed, and safe-guarded against all possible invasion, there is no reason whatever, there is no disposition in the Liberal party, to deal otherwise than liberally and even generously with the cause of monarchy. In popular areas. (Cheers.) It means, further, that the same House should deal with a new vested right created by the licensing act of 1904—(hear, hear)—as to secure a compulsory diminution in the multiplication of the facilities for the sale of intoxicating liquor, and assert the right of the community to control the right of the most dangerous of all state monopolies. (Cheers.) And let me say here parenthetically that there is no greater folly than to talk, as people often do when they are discussing the re-

lations between the two chambers, as if it was between the power, or, indeed, outside the practice of one House of Commons to deal with the work of another. On the contrary, anyone who studies our history during the last 80 years will see that a large part of the energy of each parliament, when they were not merely marking time, but when they were really trying to do work—a large part of the energy of each of our working parliaments has been given to amending and undoing the mischiefs, or the supposed mischiefs, which have been perpetrated by its predecessors. That was the Liberal majority and the Liberal Government were commissioned to carry out. It was for that purpose that we went to Westminster, and not to pick quarrels with the House of Lords—(hear, hear)—or to conspire in secret—(laughter)—like a set of half-hearted modern Guy Fawkeses, how best to destroy the second chamber. (Laughter.)

"No Single Chamber Plot."

But what happened. From the first moment we found ourselves hampered, frustrated, baffled, defeated in our attempt to give legislative effect to the declared and expressed will of the people. (Cheers.) I need not go over again the fortunes of our legislation in regard to the House of Lords. I need not go over a moment ago—education and licensing. But finally by the unconstitutional exercise—(cheers)—of a legal right admitted to be without precedent, the whole finance of the year was shattered from top to bottom. Why? What does believe in this pretence of referring the thing to the people? It was shattered from top to bottom because, as Mr. Chamberlain plainly said in the advice he gave to the House of Lords so long ago as last September, this budget, if it was carried, would effectively block the way to tariff reform—the very thing which had been condemned by the people at the polls four years ago. (Cheers.) It is this action on the part of the House of Lords, this resolute and continued defiance of the popular will, this persistent claim to override the representative House, which I regard as the real issue. It is this, and no single chamber plot, which has created the present position. (Cheers.)

The Claims of the House of Lords.

I said that the principle of representative Government was at stake. If you want to see what are the claims that are really put forward on behalf of the House of Lords, you should not, as Mr. Balfour has carefully shrouded, peruse the "Commons man"—you must look to the utterances of the peers themselves. I spoke of the pro-consuls who have been of late so much in evidence. If I permit me, I will come for a moment to the most copious of them, Lord Curzon—(laughter)—and I earnestly trust that our friends of the Liberal publication department will not hesitate to give the widest possible circulation to the salient points in his recent speeches. (Hear, hear.) To say, I am quoting now—"to say," said Lord Curzon, "that the House of Lords has no right to touch finance at all is to say that which is inconsistent with the most definite proposition that I have discovered—(laughers)—in the dramatic and nebulous disquisition which he addressed the other day to the electors of the city of London—the present Government came into office not to work the constitution, but to destroy it. He sees, I will not say in all, but in the great bulk of our legislative and financial proposals, a series of wantonly intended provocations, aimed with the deliberate purpose of tempting the House of Lords to reject them, and so forcing upon the country a long plotted design to set up the supremacy of a single chamber."

Well, but then Lord Curzon goes on to claim for the House of Lords that it is the really representative body in the state. (Laughter.) He tells you—and I will quote his words—with exquisite and condescending simplicity, that while the House of Commons is subject to constant changes, swings of the pendulum, and gusts of passion, and so forth, the House of Lords represents the stable and permanent sentiment and temper of the British people, and it is enabled to perform those useful, and, indeed, indispensable func-

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MR. CHURCHILL AND LORD CURZON

The Former Replies to His Lordship's Defence of the Peers—The Claim For Aristocracies—Who Are the Real Originators of Great Ideas?—Brilliant Speech Bristling With Wit.

In the course of an address to a great audience at Burnley, Eng., the other night, Mr. Churchill said:

When I began my campaign in Lancashire I challenged any speaker to come down and say why the House of Lords, composed as the present House of Lords is, should have the right to rule over us, and why the children of that House of Lords should have the right to rule over our children. (Cheers.) My challenge has been taken up with great courage—(laughter)—by Lord Curzon. (Grooms.) No, the House of Lords could not have found any more able and I will add, any more arrogant defender, and at Oldham—(laughter)—you have heard of Oldham—(laughter)—so have I. (Laughter.) Well, at Oldham Lord Curzon treated a great public meeting to what I can only call a prize essay upon the House of Lords. (Laughter.) I do not say it was a very eloquent speech. It was a beautiful speech. I read it with the most intense pleasure, with feelings of artistic pleasure, and also a sense of satisfaction, because I would like Lord Curzon to make that speech in every town and city throughout our country. I would ask nothing better than that he should have an opportunity of putting these views forward with all his ability and address to a great audience throughout the country. I am sure it would save some of us a lot of trouble. (Laughter.)

Let us look at one or two of the arguments on which Lord Curzon relied. He began with a defence of the hereditary legislators. That is a very plucky thing to do. (Laughter.) He said, "Look at the monarchy." But the sovereign is not a hereditary legislator. In this country the sovereign reigns but does not govern. The King acts on the advice of ministers. The crown in England has not had for hundreds of years the power of making laws, and for two or three centuries has not had the power of stopping laws when they have been passed. It is a very wise thing in every state that the supreme office should be removed beyond the reach of private ambition and change of party warfare. It is as a constitutional monarchy that we reverence and honor the British crown. I do not think the people of England would be prepared for one moment to agree to the sovereign of these realms exercising the power which the Tsar of Russia exercises. (Hear, hear.) Lord Curzon could scarcely have chosen a more inaccurate "fact" upon which to rely.

Then he told us that Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox and Grenville in days gone by exercised great dominance in the House of Commons, and that forty years after all their sons were also in great offices and playing a very important part. He went on to say that something like that had happened in the House of Lords, though on a smaller scale. Whereas some years ago you had Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Robert Cecil (afterwards Lord Salisbury) in the House of Commons, so now you saw their sons distinguished. Then he asked us to consider the hereditary legislators. But what defence is all this of a House of hereditary legislators? Because my father was member for Woodstock, I do not suggest that I should be permanently member for Woodstock, irrespective of what the people of Woodstock may think of me. It is quite true that some instances can be cited of men who have succeeded distinguished fathers and have attained equal and even greater distinction themselves. But how many cases can be shown of the contrary? (Laughter.) You can almost find the hereditary legislators on your fingers. In fact, Lord Curzon did not cite as many instances as there are fingers on his hands. But only consider the enormous number of contrary instances which have been velle in a decent and merciful obscurity. (Laughter.) If the electors of a particular constituency like to let old associations count—if they choose to say, "We will vote for this young man because we knew his father"—what derogation is it from their free right of choice; in what way is their full power to choose their own representative affected in any degree? (Laughter.) If Lord Curzon proves anything, it proves that if there is anything in the doctrine of heredity that doctrine will receive consideration under the representative system wherever it descends.

A Claim To Be Rejected With Contempt. But the claim of the House of Lords is not that if the electors like the sons of distinguished men may have legislative functions intrusted to them; it is that, whether they like it or not, the sons and the grandsons and the great-grandsons and so on till the end of time, of distinguished men shall have legislative functions intrusted to them. That claim resolves itself into this, that we should maintain in our country a superior class, with law-giving functions inherent in their blood, transmissible by them to their remotest posterity, and that these functions should be exercised irrespective of the character, the intelligence, or the experience of the tenant for the time being—(laughter)—and utterly independent of the public need and the public will. That is a proposition which only needs to be stated before any average British jury to be rejected with instantaneous contempt. (Cheers.) Why has it never been rejected before? In my opinion it has never been rejected, because the House of Lords has never been taken seriously by the democratic electorate, which has been in existence since 1835. They have never been taken seriously because they were believed to be in a comatose and declining condition, upon which death would gradually supervene. Now we see the House of Lords stepping into the front rank of politics; not merely using their veto over any legislation sent up by any majority, however large, from any House of Commons, however newly elected, but also claiming new

powers over the whole of the finances—powers which would make them the main governing centre in the state. (Cheers.) That is why we are forced to examine their pretensions very closely; and when we have examined them, I venture to think there will not be much left of them. (Cheers.)

Peers and "Gusts of Popular Passion."

"Oh, but," says Lord Curzon, going on with his defence of this hereditary chamber, "we don't have to trim our sails to catch passing gusts of popular passion." Well, what are they doing now? Their whole contention is that they consider the budget is a bad budget, that it is wrong and vicious, and that it will do all manner of evil to the country. But they say if at the election the nation, the electors, upon a gust of popular passion, return a majority favorable to the budget, they will immediately pass the budget. (Laughter and cheers.) That may be very prudent of them, and it may be very proper of them, but it certainly is not standing against the gusts of popular passion. (Laughter and cheers.) And what about the trades disputes act? Why, I don't hesitate to say that the House of Lords, or a great majority of that House, regarded that as a thoroughly wicked bill. Lord Halsbury, the ex-lord chancellor, described it as pernicious and wicked, as a bill which contained a section more disgraceful than had appeared in any other statute. But it had what the House of Lords thought was "a gust of popular passion" behind it; they stepped aside, and it passed. (Laughter and cheers.)

Then there were the old age pensions, which were denounced by Lord Lansdowne and by many others in the House of Lords in unmeasured terms as being a system calculated to destroy thrift and to weaken the self-respect of the working classes, which, in the opinion of the House of Lords, can only be maintained by a liberal application of the workhouse. (Laughter and cheers.) So great was the dislike of the House of Lords to the measure that they actually carried an amendment saying that after five or six years the whole system should come up again for review, and would lapse if it were not renewed. But that is where "a gust of popular passion" came in. (Great laughter and cheers.) The bill was passed, though they believed it was going to ruin the country. (Laughter.) I am very glad it was passed. But it is no use for the House of Lords, when the only thing it does is to step out of the way when a measure which it regards as wrong has what it thinks is a popular backing behind it, to come forward and pose as stern, independent arbiters of our destiny who resist any passing movement in the minds of the electorate. (Cheers.) Indeed the gravamen of the charge that I make against the House of Lords is that they are developing a studied habit of caucus decision, standing acquiescent in the passions, they are always endeavoring to play the party game of the Tory party. (Cheers.)

When you come to a question like the licensing bill, which I am quite ready to admit was not what is called "a temperance measure," but which was an earnest effort to grapple with one of the most awful social evils of our time—when you come to a question like that, when the House of Lords think they can score a petty, cheap point of party popularity with certain sections by rejecting it, then whatever appeals are made to them by the best men in the House of Lords, whatever compromises are offered by the Government, whatever appeals are addressed to them by the churches—by the archbishop, by their own Church of England Temperance Society—and however earnest is the desire that an attempt should be made to grapple with the evil, they brush it out of the way in one moment because they are hoping to get, not a just public passion, but a gust of public-house passion. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

The Claim for Aristocracies. Now I come to the third great argument of Lord Curzon. "All civilization," he said—he was quoting a great French writer, an Agnostic, Renan—"all civilization has been the work of aristocracies." (Laughter.) They lived that in Oldham. (Laughter.) There was not a duke, not an earl, not a marquis, not a viscount in Oldham who did not feel that a compliment had been paid to him. (Loud laughter.) What does Lord Curzon mean by aristocracy? It is quite clear from the argument of his speech that he did not mean Nature's aristocracy, by which I mean the best and gifted beings in each generation in each country, the wisest, the bravest, the most generous, the most skillful, the most beautiful, the strongest and the most active. If he had meant that I think we should properly agree with him. Democracy properly understood means the selection of all through the leadership of the best, but the context of Lord Curzon's quotation and the argument of his speech, which was designed entirely to prove that the House of Lords was a very desirable institution for us to maintain in its present form, clearly shows that by aristocracy he meant the hereditary legislators, the barons, earls, dukes, etc. I do not mean anything disrespectful by the etc.—(laughter)—and their equivalents in other countries. That is what he meant by aristocracy in the argument he employed at Oldham. Well, again I say this has only to be dismissed as absurd. (Cheers.)

The Real Originators of Great Ideas. "All civilization has been the work of aristocracies." Why, it would be much more true to say the upkeep of the aristocracy has been the hard work of civilizations. (Loud cheers and laughter.) Nearly all the great ideas and the energy by which all the great services by which mankind has been benefited have come from the mass of the people. Take the great agent of civilization—religion. The religions of the world have come from the people, the religions of the world have come

from the poor, and most of all is that true of Christianity. Christianity was preached by poor men, humble men in the smallest employments, and preached to the poor, the outcast, the despised and rejected of those hard times—Christianity, which today rules the world, and has contributed to civilization all those precious ideas which keep our modern life clean and healthy. What great picture was ever painted by a duke (laughter). I have heard of a lord who wrote good poetry—Lord Byron, but he did not write the sort of poetry that the House of Lords liked. In science all the great discoveries have been made by men outside this charmed circle which Lord Curzon conceives to embrace all the talents. And in mechanical invention—another great agent of civilization—there again you come right down to the working people of Lancashire. In many cases, for some of the most notable inventions upon which the prosperity of our civilized life has been erected. (Cheers.) Even when you come to war—though you can hardly call war one of the causes of civilization—it certainly has been a very potent agent in the design and development of humanity—well, there have been many great generals who have become peers, but there have been many fewer peers who have become great generals. Lord Curzon reminded us that many lords have filled high offices in the state. He described how they had 41 prime ministers in the House of Lords, and only 18 in the peerage, and all these years by a small, limited and unrepresentative class. (Cheers.) Lord Curzon proceeds to tell us that many distinguished men were proud to join the House of Lords in former times. I think it was only natural that they were eager to put their feet upon such an easy and at times absolutely indispensable road to almost any great employment in the services of the country. "All civilization," Lord Curzon tells us, "is the work of aristocracies." He has his quotation; I will have mine. Mine is not nearly such a elegant or romantic extract as his. You have all heard mine before. Let me say in the words of Robert Burns, "A man's a man for a' that." (Cheers.) I look my horse against his over any course in Lancashire. I will back it over any course in Scotland. (Laughter.)

Mr. Chamberlain's Lament. All these questions might have been allowed to slumber. But they have been raised by the action of the House of Lords; and, as they are raised, are bound to give our answer to them, Mr. Chamberlain, I notice, in his letter to the paper, sorrowfully laments that "Tariff Reform is not going to be the only issue at the election. No, it is not going to be the only issue. I think the Conservative party would have been beaten on either of the issues, but on the two together they will be overwhelmed. (Loud cheers.) Mr. Churchill afterwards delivered a short speech at an overflow meeting.

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