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To Have Facts Rather Than Views

LORD BRYCE, O.M., makes a strong plea for full information about foreign affairs in the International Review:—

"The longer one lives," he says, "the more anxious does one become to have facts rather than views. But facts, of course, require to be explained and elucidated, and when they are elucidated in a philosophically impartial spirit, a great service is rendered to readers who have not the leisure to think out conclusions for themselves.

The Sort of Facts

"What I mean may be illustrated by mentioning the sort of facts which we ought to know regarding the countries of Continental Europe, where new States are beginning their lives and will soon be trying many a political experiment. We shall need to know what are the social, ecclesiastical, and political conditions in the Balkan countries, and the Baltic countries, in Asia Minor, Georgia, Armenia, and Syria. The closest attention and the fullest information regarding parties in Germany and the new forces at work there will be essential. The working of the new institutions that must be created in all these countries, and especially those of a Republican Germany, will be a subject of the highest possible interest.

"Two new facts present themselves to-day which make it desirable, and indeed necessary, that the British people should be furnished with fuller and more precise information than they have hitherto been receiving regarding the politics of foreign countries," adds Viscount Bryce.

Our Foreign Relations

"First.—The attention of the whole nation has been called as it never was before to our Foreign relations. By the force of events we have been as belligerents, and now as victors in a world-embracing war, called upon to join in a large number of grave and intricate questions in various parts of Europe and Asia. That we were doing this in concert with our Allies does not lessen our responsibility for the exercise of British power and influence. This settlement will, for good or for evil, affect for centuries to come the fortunes of other nations, and especially those republics which are now coming into being. However prudent and however well-informed may be the statesmen who will represent us and other countries in the approaching Peace Conference, the determination of these questions ought not to be left to their unaided and unguided discretion.

"There ought to be a public opinion of our people to watch, and to direct, their course, and even to check their course if it should seem to depart from the general principles which animate the nation as a whole. After the Conference is over, whether its work has been done well or ill, many new questions must emerge, and on these questions the British people must form an opinion, because action by their Government may from time to time be required. But no public opinion will have any value unless it rests upon adequate knowledge, and the means by which the requisite knowledge may be obtained and turned to good account are not at present sufficient.

Who Does Know?

"Secondly.—A general demand has arisen of late years for getting rid of what is called the Old Diplomacy. It is said that the people ought to be told much more about what its Foreign Office is doing from month to month as well as from year to year, and that Parliament ought to exercise a more constant and direct control over the management of our foreign relations and be enabled to do so by being kept regularly informed what negotiations are being carried on, so that it may not find itself suddenly confronted with a fait accompli. Obviously, if the control of public opinion and of Parliament is to be well exercised and to have due effect, those who are to apply it must be possessed of a great many facts which are now unknown except to those few persons who have travelled widely abroad or given prolonged study to the politics of other countries.

"How many persons can any of us name in the two Houses who possess this indispensable equipment? Some of those who sat in the last House of Commons say that there were but few there—perhaps fewer than forty years ago. And this is hardly to be wondered at, for domestic questions have been exciting and monopolized most men's thoughts; nor can anyone say that either here or in any other country has the intellectual level of politicians risen in proportion to the number and difficulty of the questions they have to deal with.

To Understand the Paper

"A real and useful democratic control of foreign policy cannot be secured unless those through whom it is to be exercised, such as members of both Houses of Parliament, leaders of local public opinion, and those who write for the press, are able to give a pretty close and steady attention to the