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Special Articles

The British Labor Programme.

By J. W. Macmillan.

Liquidation of Grain Credits Causes Contraction of Dominion Note Issues.

By H. M. P. Eckardt.

Conditions in the West.

By E. Cora Hind.

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Ulster and Customs

THE anticipation that the Irish question would thrust itself into the foreground even in the presence of the critical situation on the battlefields in France and Flanders has been quickly realized. Mr. Lloyd George's Government, in carrying its new "man power" bill, has included Ireland in it; that is to say, while Ireland has hitherto been exempt from the conscription laws, she is now to have them applied to her. It is a bold and courageous decision. Whether it is one in which courage is combined with prudence, remains to be seen. To make the conscription measure less obnoxious to the Irish representatives, Mr. Lloyd George couples with it the declaration that his Government will bring forward a new Home Rule bill. The Irish members have not received the announcement with any satisfaction. They know what conscription means, but, in view of all that has happened, they do not know what kind of a Home Rule measure is to be expected.

The Irish Convention has finished its labors, and made its report. The hope that it might be able to find a basis of agreement between all sections is disappointed. But the Convention has done much to harmonize some of the conflicting elements, and its work will have good results in the settlement which, though it be delayed, must surely come. In former days the whole Home Rule movement was sternly condemned by the Unionists of Ireland, both North and South. It was in the South that the Unionists had the most excuse for their attitude, for they were in the minority in that part of Ireland, and they had more reason to fear the results of Home Rule than the men of the North, who were strong enough to take care of themselves. It is a tribute to Sir Horace Plunkett and those who co-operated with him in the Convention that they were able, in a large degree, to remove the fears of the Unionists of the South and obtain their assent to the principle, at least, of Home Rule.

In the end, two rocks remained on which the Convention split—Ulster and Customs. The Ulster Unionists were indisposed to yield their objections to Home Rule, and unwilling to believe that the modifications of former schemes which the majority of the Convention were inclined to accept would make the measure any more agreeable to the men of the North. They strenuously protested against giving the Irish Legislature control of the Customs. This was a feature which the Nationalists regarded as very important, if not vital. The Southern Unionists were willing to leave this question open for future adjustment, and in the meantime, while retaining Imperial control of Customs taxation, to agree that the proceeds be paid over to the Irish treasury. Perhaps, if this vexed question could have been

settled amicably, other difficulties could have been overcome, and even the Ulster Unionists brought to giving their assent to some form of Home Rule. But the Customs rock could not be removed.

It is urged by Nationalists that as Canada and the other Dominions have the control of their Customs, with liberty to tax even British goods, Ireland should have the same freedom and authority. To those who take no account of geographical conditions this demand of the Nationalists may seem reasonable enough. But geography is an important factor in the case. If Canada were within an hour or two of England, it is certain that she never could have obtained control of her Customs, or indeed any part of her present constitution. It was because Canada was three thousand miles away, at a time when distance was a much greater obstacle to communication than it is now, and the other Dominions were still further away, that conditions amounting to virtual independence were granted to the great colonies. The Irishmen who ignore this fact and ask that the same conditions shall be granted to a country that is right at England's door are not as reasonable as they think they are. For all economic purposes England and Ireland are one. There is no more reason why Ireland should have a separate tariff law than that Scotland or Wales should have one. Home Rule in Irish local affairs is desirable for many reasons. But the Customs question is not a local one. A Home Rule scheme which left to Ireland the right to have separate Customs laws would hardly be consistent with the principle of Imperial unity.

Everybody will await with much interest the production of Mr. Lloyd George's new Home Rule bill. It will, no doubt, include the features upon which the Convention was able to largely agree. But how will Ulster and Customs be treated?

It is possible that if the Home Rule measure be found a very liberal one, granting most of the concessions desired by the Nationalists, the conscription law will receive some sort of acceptance. At the moment, however, there is much danger that the enforcement of conscription will be marked by grave troubles. In some respects the situation is the same as that of Quebec in our recent difficulties. There is, however, one important difference. The leaders of the Quebec opponents of conscription, while they did not change their view as to the principle involved, advised their people, once the law was passed, to respect it and assist in carrying it out. There is no such situation in the case of Ireland. The Irish leaders, so far as they have spoken, have not advised submission to the law. If this attitude be adhered to, conscription in Ireland may easily prove, not a strength to the Empire's cause, but a new burden to be borne at a moment when the load is already heavy.