

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

MUST THE EMPIRE PASS? DISTURBING INDICATIONS: IDEALISM  
AND SELF-INTEREST: PROHIBITION: TEMPERANCE LEGISLATION:  
EUROPE: BRITISH ELECTIONS.

IS the Bretwalda sceptre falling from the British grasp? Or has it already fallen? These may be unpleasant questions, but they are worth asking seriously and worthy of being carefully considered. Each generation is prone to regard the conditions in which it finds itself as permanent,—as what has been and evermore shall be. But history teaches another lesson,—that empires wax and wane, come and go, and that there is no more stability in them than in man. “Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?” Or the other great empires that preceded them?

A thousand years scarce serve to form a State,  
An hour may lay it in the dust.

Indefinite time went to the formation of the British State, for the race which constituted it had to be evolved by Nature's slow process. But, comparatively, the British Empire is of yesterday. Its beginning was the parliamentary union of England and Scotland in 1707, almost the exact date of the birth of the present writer's great grandfather who came to Nova Scotia as one of its pioneer settlers. The Empire, at the utmost, has therefore existed only during the lives of four actual generations. There is small foundation for the hope of its permanency. More than that, as Lord Chesterfield wrote a few years before the outbreak of the French Revolution,—the necessary changes being made—“In short, all the symptoms which I have ever met with in history, previous to great changes and revolutions, now exist and daily increase in France.”

Are not many of the symptoms recorded in history as presaging the decline and ultimate passing of empires now recognizable with regard to the British Empire? Its grip is relaxing—or appears to be relaxing—at home and abroad. Ireland has been allowed, and even helped, to cut adrift. Egypt is about to go. India is no longer governed, but apparently is being weakly cajoled. Territories acquired through the Great War are proving a burden instead of a strength. Financial and economic sinews have been disastrously strained or wasted. But, as usual, the worst symptoms are observable at the heart-centre of the Empire. As in the case of Greece, undue ex-

pectations are being based on the colonies. As in the case of Rome, when *in extremis*, the women have broken and are continuing to break both political and social bounds. Those trained for governance are being ousted or thrust aside by the unprepared and the unfit. Faith and hope are being replaced by universal scepticism or doubt, followed by the paralysis of courage and the relaxation of energy. *Britannia delenda est* is legibly inscribed on the wall of British fate. Her doom is to be averted only by the aid of Providence through the awakening of her people.

AS to the material signs of decay and coming dissolution, besides the outward yieldings or failings just mentioned, they are numerous enough, and plain enough to be seen. Leadership among the nations has definitely passed from Great Britain to the United States. Britain has openly become the client of America. The hegemony of Europe has gone with scarcely a struggle to France. It is not to be recovered without a military effort, and no military effort is possible in the existing disunion caused by the political and social antagonisms of the people. This may be set down, in large measure, not to the policy, but to the "politics" of Mr. Lloyd George, who fondly imagined that he and Mr. Wilson had only to say "Let there be Peace" in order to make peace and to allay human ambitions. When his *abracadabra* had been duly intoned at Versailles, he returned to England to disband the British army, sell its munitions of war, and scrap a considerable part of the navy. Later, he sent to Washington to abdicate the Rulership of the Waves for Great Britain. France kept her army intact, and ready for immediate battle.

Moreover, she proceeded to build submarines and establish an aeroplane fleet which now rules the Winds as definitely as the British fleet ever ruled the Waves. She established relations on the Continent which bound to her Poland and the Little Entente. Then she undertook to counter and frustrate British policy in the Near East, in such a way and to such a degree that Britain—thanks once again to the ineptitude of Mr. Lloyd George—was brought to the very verge of a fatal rupture with the whole Moslem world. She escaped only by good luck, and the sacrifice not merely of her prestige but of many of her material interests. Since then, France has taken and is holding her own European way, in defiance of proclaimed British wishes, and in calm disregard of British remonstrances.

What has Britain done? What can she do? She has no army for effective warfare. She dare not set her fleet against French

aircraft and submarines. Her people would not tolerate renewed preparations for war for causes other than a direct assault on their own homes. She is not far from being as powerless in Europe for present action as is Spain, or as is China in Asia. What does all this tell but the old, old story of permanent decline to an inferior national status? Can anyone fancy that Rome felt herself falling when at the height of her power she began to decline, or that Spain realized her descent to second-rate nationhood until it was an accomplished fact? National standing is to be maintained only by military strength. The French have realized this; the British have not. They must awake to their error, or accept the consequences.

These may seem unjustifiably gloomy views; but it is better to examine with care even possibly deceptive appearances, much more to face facts however disagreeable. No harm can possibly come from the perception that our great Empire is not necessarily immortal, and that its longevity depends upon ourselves. The fiction that it is strong because of its colonial nationalities, and that it will be stayed by them, is not worthy of dependence in present conditions. The overseas nations of the so-called Commonwealth are, in many respects—so far as the heart of the Empire is concerned—stranger nations. Their help, except in the event of actual war, is negligible. When, and for what cause is Great Britain likely to engage in war again? In peace time her trade is to a large extent shut out of the markets of her "sister nations" by high tariff walls. Under a protective system of her own they could not but be considerably hampered in her markets. Where is evidence to be found of that union, much less of that unanimity, which guarantees real national strength and permanence?

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**M**UCH chatter has been heard concerning Lord Birkenhead's Rectorial Address at Glasgow University. What his lordship appears actually to have said was that idealism is impracticable in international affairs. His words have been not only misunderstood and misinterpreted, but grossly misquoted. In a recent electioneering speech Mr. Ramsay Macdonald—the Labour leader—charged Lord Birkenhead with saying that self-interest was, must be, and ought to be the mainspring of human conduct. This, Mr. Macdonald characterized as "a devilish pronouncement." As becomes his calling, the Labour leader is naturally very confident in speech; but can he be quite as sure in mind, while so indifferently as to what he ascribes to others? Can he even give satisfactory reasons for his own implied belief that self-interest is not,

must not, and ought not to be the mainspring of human conduct? If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love one whom he hath not seen? How much the less, if one serve not first himself, whose requirements he comprehends, can he advance the interests of others of whom he knows little or nothing?

What progress would society have been likely to make, if from the beginning each of its units had gone fussing about others, instead of following its own path? What would become of it now if its human atoms were to enter upon an altruistic sun-dance for the supposed benefit of all, each in forgetfulness of itself? Even the Christian religion teaches, and teaches emphatically, that the first duty of the individual is to himself, to work out *his own salvation* with fear and trembling. Only after saving oneself spiritually can one render spiritual help to another. Only by establishing oneself economically can one afford material assistance to one's neighbour. So, self-interest not only is but must be the main-spring of human conduct, however much applause a political "spell-binder" or a sentimental idealist may arouse by maintaining the opposite.

But Lord Birkenhead did not utter the statement attributed to him. He merely affirmed what all should know and understand—all but ex-President Wilson and congenital Socialists—that idealism *in national affairs* is impracticable. It may be positively wrong and pernicious in both theory and practice. A nation, no matter how persistently it may be personified by poets or politicians, is not and never can be a person or a personality. It is merely a mob of individuals, reduced to order and subjected to government. Those who govern, whatever the form of government under which they operate, are simply the trustees of the nation. Neither idealism nor sentimentality is, or safely can be permitted to serve as an actuating motive or an excuse for trustees. The sole duty of such persons is to perform or administer in accordance with law the trusts committed to them. Be he ever so generous personally, no trustee can legally or morally expend any of the funds of an estate in his keeping for charitable purposes other than those declared by the terms of his trust. Be he ever so tender-hearted, he must not neglect to collect from all who are able to pay—or can be made to pay—debts due to the estate he is administering. What the private trustee or administrator is required by law to do or not to do, the national trustee or administrator—in other words, the Government of a country—is compelled by his public trust or office to do or not to do with regard to the affairs of the nation. Where then is the justification, much less the requirement, of idealism

in either national or international affairs? And what is the use of talking nonsense about or misrepresenting one who states the fact openly and plainly? If the preservation of a nation's honour in dealing with other nations, and the fulfilment of its internal and international undertakings are "idealistic," by all means let us have such idealism. But such are usually regarded as principles of common honesty, and as nothing more sublimated. Before either praise or blame can be properly measured out to one who denies or affirms a place for "idealism" in national or international business, a strict definition of the word "idealism" must be forthcoming. It is surely not idealistic to be honest. Quite as certainly it is not honest to be idealistic to the extent of sacrificing that which is not one's own, but is merely held in trust for others, be the others individuals or nations.

**F**OR the daring there is no surer present path to applause or contumely than public discussion of Prohibition.\* This fact by itself indicates that such discussion is needed. It is quite unnecessary to define the word Prohibition. It is what it is. Everybody recognizes it. It is quite useless to assert or affect personal impartiality with regard to it. The only important question is as to how many are *real* Prohibitionists and how many are not.

A real Prohibitionist is one who is willing not merely to vote for Prohibition, but to act and work for its enforcement. "He who is not for Me is against Me," said One whose dictum will not be questioned. In the same sense, he who is not for Prohibition on the conditions just stated is against it. May it not also be assumed that if Prohibition is not, or cannot be, practically enforced, it is worse than useless, and bound to work evil instead of good to the community which experiments with it? It is certain that neither it nor any other law which runs directly contrary to age-old social habits and inclinations can or will be enforced, unless an overwhelming majority of real supporters are behind it with all their enthusiasm and strength of heart and mind. Has Prohibition such a majority supporting and trying to enforce it in the United States or in any province of Canada? This is the vital question. If it has, it will succeed and do good. If it has not, it will fail and work evil of many kinds, not the least of which will be the more pernicious misuse of alcohol itself. The wide-spread and ever-extending social demoralization caused and to be caused by the ineffective enforcement or the non-enforcement of a law concerning so important a matter, is so obvious that it cannot be

\*The April issue of this magazine will contain an article presenting another view of Prohibition.  
EDITOR.



overlooked or denied. If Prohibition is failing, it must be doing great harm. Of that there can be no reasonable doubt. If it is succeeding, in any true sense, it is doing good. Of that there can be equally little doubt, because it can signify only that the great mass of the people are not merely intellectually converted to total abstinence as a rule of life for themselves, but think it the best possible means of promoting genuine temperance in the whole community.

**T**HAT a large majority of Canadians were practically converted to total abstinence, before Prohibition, seems highly probable. Was such a majority, or even a bare majority, convinced before Prohibition that this is the best means to the desired temperance end? There would appear to be very little, if any, reliable evidence to that effect. There was and is much testimony, of course; but it came and is coming exclusively from Prohibition sources. As an expression of belief founded on desire, it may be and probably is perfectly honest and sincere. As an assurance of actual fact, it is highly questionable. The north-western provinces seemed at first more strongly in favour of Prohibition than any other part of Canada. Two of them, Manitoba and Alberta, have already voted, by very large majorities, for its repeal. A third, Saskatchewan, is admittedly about to do likewise. The indications all are that Ontario will soon follow their example. Quebec and British Columbia did not adopt Prohibition at all. The probabilities therefore are that within a year all Canada, with the exception of the Maritime Provinces, will—after fair trial—have abolished this law. Is this, or is it not, an indication that anything like a majority of the people are or have been real Prohibitionists,—that is, not only willing to vote for Prohibition on trial, as an abstract theory of legislation—but to act and work for its retention and rigid enforcement?

We know that Prohibition has never been enforced. Those with the widest experience and knowledge believe that it is not enforceable at the present time, in view of the general attitude with regard to it. They hold that its adoption in Canada was due mainly to advantage taken of an exalted emotional condition of the public mind caused by the war, of which improper use was made, and that popular provincial verdicts were hastily snatched. They recall that Prohibitionists were insignificant as a political party in the United States before the war, and that in Canada they did not even venture to place candidates exclusively

their own in political nomination. Whatever these facts may have signified, it is reasonably certain that the present reaction against Prohibition is deliberate and deep-seated in the popular mind, and that it is neither to be denied nor to be misunderstood. It is regrettable, therefore, to find convinced Prohibitionists, more especially clerical Prohibitionists, denouncing this mental attitude openly, as if it were the work of malignant supernatural agents allied with equally depraved human beings. It is not so long since they were impressively asserting, with reference to Prohibition, that "law is law and must not only be enforced and respected, but cheerfully obeyed by all good citizens." The converse of that proposition should be of equal validity and force. When a law has been repealed, and a new regulation substituted as in Manitoba and Alberta, the new law—it might reasonably be inferred—should be as sacred and as worthy of reverence as the old. Yet a leading Toronto denominational periodical casts all the contempt and odium of which it is capable on the Alberta decision. It asserts that in that province "Prohibition, according to *independent* testimony, had resulted in great moral, social and economic benefits." As intimated above, no "independent testimony" with regard to Prohibition is or has been available. The direct implication of the statement quoted is that the very large majority of the electors, male and female, of Alberta who voted for the repeal of Prohibition, did so in disregard not only of the "moral and social" but of the "economic" interests of the Province. Is not this rather too much for reasonable acceptance? The same denominational organ adds: "The temporary triumph of the *liquor interests* will encourage these sinister forces in their assault on other provinces of the Dominion." As an outlet for petulance over disappointment, this may serve a certain purpose. But it is neither logical nor convincing. What "liquor interests" are there or can there be in any province under Prohibition? The use of the phrase, which is apparently intended to apply to all the great Alberta vote against Prohibition, however thoughtfully or conscientiously individuals may have voted, is more venomous than effective. It certainly is not calculated to convert opponents.

There is this to be said in praise of one of the consequences of Prohibition, although it was no essential part of it,—that it has rid us of the public bar-room. It is to be hoped that all true temperance men and women, whether Prohibitionists or even total abstainers or not, will unite to make sure that there is no re-establishment of it which they can possibly prevent. The specious demand for the special treatment of "beer and light wines" is unmistakably

the thin re-entering edge of the bar-room wedge, for private profit. With it would come renewed, public crowding together, and revived "treating". With it would return the almost undetectable private and unlawful sale of spirituous liquors. There should be no parleying with the proposition. All alcoholic liquors are capable of being put to undesirable uses. While their legitimate use should not be forbidden, they ought to be kept under strict public guard and control. This can be done only through their being dispensed exclusively by the Government, through its carefully selected and responsible paid agents. The aim should be to minimize the evils of intemperance by restricting and keeping under close supervision all liquor sales. No legalized profit from dealing in alcohol, in any way or form, should be permitted to private persons interested in increasing sales. All profits from it should go to public uses, preferably to specified educative or ameliorative public services, and not in any avoidable way to reduce direct taxation.

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**T**H**E**RE is at least one certainty in Europe, that every day in every way things are going from bad to worse. Another, seems to be that the German Reich, or union of States, formerly the German Empire, is disintegrating steadily and not slowly. French policy is succeeding more quickly than was expected. What is there for France but such a policy, and who is there now to gainsay it effectively? We know why France fought the Great War and what she lost by it. She gained neither security nor compensation under the Versailles treaty. The primal law of national nature demanded that she should protect herself. This she could accomplish only by weakening Germany as she has been and is doing. In the process she has been losing financially, for she was obviously depriving Germany of the power—she never had the will—to pay reparations. Germany is now literally bankrupt. France is on the verge of bankruptcy. The British demand for the relief and restoration of Germany is so obviously ill considered that there is little wonder it encounters so much opposition at home. To restore Germany by a foreign loan, could it be done, would be to re-establish her almost at once as the dangerous economic rival of Great Britain, and once more as the military opponent of an impoverished and wasted France. Moreover, it is useless to talk of the financial rehabilitation of Germany while France maintains her present attitude, and she shows no signs of changing. The Americans have made it clear that they will not intervene unless or until there is European agreement. Europe has made it



still more clear that agreement is practically impossible. It is difficult to understand why British statesmen should apparently dread so much the break-up of Germany. It would relieve France of an age-old menace, at least for a time. It could not make her militarily stronger; on the contrary, it would be more likely to weaken her. British trade could be quite as profitably carried on, when trade revives, with a dissolved as with a continuing Reich. France could draw no strength from dismembered Germany, and would still have a possibly hereafter re-united German people as her constant and implacable foes.

Ex-President Wilson would appear to have succeeded in making the European world fairly safe for *autocracy*. Four separate autocrats have arisen within a year. All seem to be contented and prosperous. They are in full control in Spain, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria. Hungary cherishes an admirable imitation of autocracy, called by another name. There is no disguise with regard to Lenin and Trotsky in Russia. How safe is democracy in the rest of Europe?

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THE outcome of the British elections, no one could forecast, because most things to which we have been accustomed in the Old Country are apparently changed, none of them more radically—to all appearance—than the breed of public men. Time was when it was known where British statesmen stood in public affairs, and why they stood just there. Now, seemingly, they do not stand. They wobble or crawl. Only a little over a year ago Mr. Bonar Law, as Prime Minister, said with reference to Protection:—"If I believe—and I do believe—that a change of our fiscal system would be good for us in the long run, I say at the same time, that *at a period like this*, when security and confidence are what is mainly wanted, the advantage you would get from changing the system would not be as great as disadvantages which would come from the disturbance it would cause." Well may the *Sunday Times* remark that, when he uttered these words, "Mr. Bonar Law spoke like a statesman." Better still, his words were words of truth as well as of sobriety, and wisdom. And Mr. Law meant them. He meant also to be guided by them. He was an honest man, and—unlike his successor—did not trade or attempt to trade on his honesty of looks. Mr. Baldwin freely acknowledged himself and his party bound by Mr. Law's utterances. Yet, some weeks ago, in the autumn, he suddenly professed conversion to the necessity for the immediate introduction of a protective tariff as a remedy

for unemployment—prosperity by taxation. In complete disregard of the spirit and intent as well as the letter of Mr. Bonar Law's promise that the electors would be consulted before any important change of fiscal policy was adopted, Mr. Baldwin called an election, at three weeks' notice, to decide this vital public issue—a brazen and undisguised attempt to snatch an unfair victory for himself and his party. The constitution of the United States prevents a conscienceless political *coup* of this kind. Certainly nothing so egregious has ever occurred in Canada. A leading English journal properly characterizes it as "the shabbiest manoeuvre that we can recall in the politics of this generation." Never again will Old Countrymen be able to point superior fingers at the delinquencies of "colonial" politicians. Never again will "colonials" be justified in regarding British public men as models of political rectitude and sportsmanship. It is a sordid episode, and a national humiliation.

But what statesmanship was to be expected from men who cannot rule their own households? Mr. Asquith was made ridiculous by the literary indiscretions and indelicacies of his wife. Mr. Baldwin has been put to open shame by the chatterings of his son in public opposition to him. The Premier had not even the outline of a fiscal policy to submit to the electorate. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George, "rolled in one another's arms," but by no means "silent in a last embrace," had nothing at all to propose except that the nation should trust them more than they could possibly trust each other. The leader of the Labour party had a "perfectly good" policy of a socialistic capital levy, for which he had so profound a regard that he kept it carefully in cold-storage during the contest, lest the electors should fancy it less than did he and his followers. There was not a glimmer of light or good leadership, nor a scintilla of reason or principle in the whole campaign, for which Mr. Lloyd George, after his ignominious deposition because of his post-war performances, and further discredited by his later journalistic "stunts", returned from a barn-storming tour in Canada and the United States to supply the oratorical fireworks which illumined the platform love-drama staged by himself and Mr. Asquith. The whole *mise-en-scene* may have been entertaining to some. Certainly it was not edifying to most. Great Britain must be beginning by now to realize the extent of her deprivation when she lost Bonar Law, her

One still, strong man in a blatant land,  
One who could rule, and dared not lie.

W. E. M.