

CURRENT MAGAZINES

The Peers and the Nation:—Lord Sydenham, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

Trades-Union War in England:—The Rt. Hon. C. F. G. Masterman, in the *Atlantic*.

The Religion of America:—Mr. Sidney Dark, in the *Quarterly*.

Ireland; Retrospect and Prospect:—Mr. R. M. Fox, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

The Irish Tragedy:—“Macdara”, in the *Fortnightly*.

LORD Sydenham of Combe would like to see a restoration of the powers of the House of Lords.

He is distressed by the fate which befell the Government's scheme three months ago, and writes in *The Nineteenth Century* about the enormous value of the Second Chamber as a vital force in the constitution. It has been reduced indeed to a shadow of its old self, so that it is now the weakest thing of its kind in the world,—and this, Lord Sydenham points out, at the very time when there is more need than ever before for “powers of revision and delay.” We are reminded of the increasing menace of such measures as might well bankrupt the state, of the serious chance that an energetic and unscrupulous minority might even effect a revolution before the good judgment of the people as a whole had time to be aroused. An elected Senate, such as constitutes a safeguard in some other countries, would have a double defect. It might easily, Lord Sydenham thinks, overshadow the House of Commons, and a conflict between two elected bodies would be dangerous. Again, such an assembly, chosen by popular vote, could have no prestige comparable to that which eight centuries of tradition have conferred upon the House of Lords, and the experiment would be as bad as to substitute for the English judicial bench a set of judges owing their place to the ballot. Another comparison is with the Royal Society, whose wreckage would be certain if its council were popularly elected, and which may be regarded as embodying in its own field that expert wisdom so obvious in the House of Lords as a body designed for the functions of government.

It is natural that a thinker of this type should have many a mordant criticism to pass upon the men and upon the methods that are responsible for the present low level of the Second Chamber.

Lord Sydenham has no respect for either an Asquith or a Lloyd George. He points out that the boasted flexibility of the British constitution has had one serious disadvantage; it lends itself to easy abuse by those who would have been stopped by the safeguards of a constitution which is written. Mr. Asquith, he says, in 1911 "was the first to threaten the use of the royal prerogative to destroy the residual authority which has come down to the House of Lords through centuries of political evolution." I am at a loss to understand how, if this be true, there has been so long prevalent error on the part of historians regarding the method by which the Reform Act of 1832 was achieved. But perhaps Lord Sydenham has some knowledge on this matter which he has not disclosed.

He has some interesting reflections on the special value of the peerage. Following a dictum by Lord Cave, he describes the Upper Chamber as marked by "experience" while the lower is a prey to "emotion", and he contrasts the atmosphere of "calm, courteous and dignified debate" in the one, with those disgraceful scenes of coarse abuse which have latterly characterized the other. The lords, it seems, are men who have never yet proposed to vote themselves salaries and free passes on the railroad system for attendance on parliament. They have long established contact with the countryside, and a knowledge of public needs such as is not possessed by "professional politicians." Just those qualities which a Government in the present strange time most sorely needs are most likely to be found among the descendants of men who have exercised them in the past. In truth, "heredity is the one streak of science in the casual amalgam of our constitution, and the accidents of birth are not so dangerous as the accidents of the ballot."

These general considerations are enforced by a reminder of actual cases in which, according to Lord Sydenham, the superior judgment of the House of Lords was notably exemplified. History is laid under tribute for a long time back, extending to the rejection of Fox's East India bill in 1783, by which the Upper House brought about that appeal to the people which installed Pitt as Prime Minister, to the immense advantage of the country in the perilous years that followed. It was the House of Lords, again, which rejected the "Declaration of London", and thus saved England from those terrible results which would otherwise have ensued in the Great War. Further examples are taken from the resistance made by the peers against the Lloyd George land taxes which so soon disappeared amid general contumely, and from its successful fight against Irish Home Rule.

All this seems to belong to rather distant discussions, the debate so familiar to us all in the period when the Parliament Act was before the House and the country. Coming to the present position of the argument about House of Lords reform, our critic observes that the scheme outlined by Lord Cave last summer was meant as protection against what the next Labour Government would certainly try to carry into law. The "draft programme" already adopted by Labour men includes the abolition of the House of Lords "in case of need", by which one must understand that the Upper Chamber is to be abolished in case of its obdurate resistance to Labour's social legislation! Lord Sumner had pointed out that the draft programme provides for a guarantee of the required creation of peers to effect this suicide of their own order, and insists that there must be such definite assurance before Labour will consent to take office. A pamphlet by Mr. Sidney Webb, dated as far back as 1888, and marked "for private circulation", but unmasked—as Lord Sydenham says—by the Anti-Socialist Union, puts the matter quite definitely in its demand for "abolition or painless extinction of the House of Lords." So, argues our critic, it was time to anticipate the enemy.

Coming to the actual proposals of last summer, Lord Sydenham reminds us that they did not include any repeal of the Parliament Act of 1911, except in so far as further measures for changing the status of the House of Lords would be exempted from the scope of that Act's operation. It was proposed that the House should in future be limited to 350 members—as compared with the present 720, of whom no fewer than 156 have never taken their seats, and only about 150 carry on actual legislative work. All peers, except the law lords, were to hold their places for only twelve years, and were to consist (1) of those elected by their hereditary order, (2) of members nominated by the Crown. One-third were to retire every fourth year, but to be eligible for re-election. Most important of all was the proposed change in the method of determining what bill should be accounted a "money bill", and hence withdrawn from modification by the Upper House. This is at present decided by the Speaker of the House of Commons, a party man, whose judgment might be suspected of bias. Under the new scheme it should be settled by a joint committee of Lords and Commons, so that the risk of having controversial legislation "tacked" to a money bill might be avoided.

But the whole scheme has come to nought. Lord Sydenham is utterly disgusted by the epithets applied to it not only in the Liberal and Labour press, but even in *The Observer*. "Diehards'

debauch", "Gadarene disaster", and so forth! It is public knowledge that the suggested reform was dropped under Conservative pressure as impracticable or perilous.

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Plainly then, the House of Lords question is not to be settled as this critic would desire, and his own usual allies felt there would be more chance of profit to "the enemy" than to themselves if the electorate were asked to pronounce upon the recommendations of Lord Cave and Lord Birkenhead. It was, first and foremost, the scheme for limiting the number of peers by statute which caused at once such joy to the Opposition and such dismay to the National Union of Conservative Associations. This appeared in the light of a dodge to deprive a Liberal or a Labour Government of its final weapon for a crisis. The royal prerogative of creating peers without limit was that last resort which had served in many an emergency, and to challenge this was to force the *ultima ratio* between parties.

And yet, there is ground to argue that something must be done. That pledge of the Asquith Government, that a House of Lords reform bill should be introduced to supplement the deficiencies of the Parliament Act, has long remained as it was first described—"a debt of honour." Cynics used to add that the premier who incurred it was so occupied in discharging his debts of dishonour as to allow this to lapse into oblivion. Perhaps one must recognize here just another of those anomalies in the British constitution which, until such time as they have passed into grievances, it is best to leave as they stand. Few indeed desire to see Single Chamber government in England. The powers of delay which are still vested in the House of Lords are quite considerable, and a return to absolute veto is indeed beyond the reach of practical politics. To suggest that the Speaker of the House of Commons might become an accomplice in some trick to smuggle other legislation into effect under cover of a money bill is perhaps what one might expect rather from a Clydeside Socialist orator than from Lord Sydenham. But why might not reference be made of any disputable case to the Courts? The powers of the Supreme Court of the United States, in defining what is and what is not constitutional, might perhaps be vested with advantage in an English judiciary. But for the present it seems that the "kite" flown by Lords Cave and Birkenhead has come down with a flop. The recent decision of the Trades Union Council at Edinburgh, on a majority card vote of two millions, to terminate negotiations with the Russian trade unions, will go far to soothe those alarms which have been

felt regarding British Labour. And it would probably be best to avoid challenging a scrutiny into those acts of the House of Lords in the past which attested its protective value.

For example, the burking of the Irish Home Rule bill! "The judgment of the House of Lords", says Lord Sydenham, "has never been more perfectly justified, and no measure ever had less claim to a mandate from the people than Mr. Asquith's now irreparable breach of the unwritten constitution." In view of what has since happened in Ireland, could any but a very old man—as Lord Sydenham is—have formed that opinion? Lord Morley thought very differently. It is recorded of him that he said he could have wished, in moving the bill which established the Free State, to have asked their lordships whether they did not now repent of their rejection of an Irish settlement so vastly preferable,—“and then to have fallen dead, like Chatham.”

VERY different from Lord Sydenham is the next social critic I have to notice. Mr. Masterman, as Carlyle would have said, belongs to “a kirk of the other persuasion.” It is the recent Labour law passed by the Baldwin Government that furnishes him his text in *The Atlantic Monthly*. And a vivacious discussion he has given us. It will irritate extremely on one side, and bring eager plaudits on another, as might be said of almost any significant piece on such a subject. Whether we agree with its contentions or not, it is at least admirably clear.

As an ex-Minister of the first Asquith administration, but now in “the cold shades”, with his former colleagues reduced in number almost to vanishing point, Mr. Masterman sees good reason for delight in the new Trades-Union Act. If it is as he represents it, here is indeed the best thing that has come in the way of his political group for a long time. The Conservative Government, he says, has been steadily decreasing in prestige and popularity, so that this ought to be the very stroke of its doom:

This bill will be found an instrument of the next general election to drive them completely out of all the industrial districts, in such a manner that they will probably not in a generation recover the position which they attained three years ago.

The one fly in such pleasing ointment, however, is the thought that no longer do Liberals constitute the necessary alternative.

This article has throughout a subtly contemptuous ring. Mr. Masterman recalls the events which led to the Trades-Union legislation. Going back to 1925, he reminds his readers how, at the

threat of a general strike, Mr. Baldwin retreated from the stern refusal with which he had first met the demand of the miners for a subsidy to keep wages at their previous level. Within twenty-four hours, there was a change of front by the Cabinet, and the result was that during the following nine months British taxpayers were mulcted in some twenty-three million pounds! There was protest by the Liberals in the House against such bad economics. But in the midst of the general applause the discordant voices of so few "sounded at worst indecent and at best negligible."

During those nine months, our critic proceeds, there was gradual consolidation of forces on both sides for the conflict which must come. At the end of that time, the renewed threat of a general strike was met by point-blank refusal to continue the subsidy; and when the threat was put into execution, the resources of the public proved adequate to win. It was shown that the middle class, which rallied in such numbers to the national defence, could take over the work of the strikers and carry on the essential services with success. Labour had to capitulate, with a completeness like that of the surrender of Germany in the Great War.

After the enforced industrial peace, there was a chance, Mr. Masterman believes, to make such settlement of reasonable demands as might have obviated such a crisis for a long time to come. The defeated and impoverished miners, though they held out with desperate tenacity after their allies had gone back to work, were in a mood with which it would have been easy to negotiate. But the victors lost their heads. Even the advice of ten among the most honoured bishops of the Church of England was received by the Prime Minister with contumely. All the mine-owners could see was that "trades-unionism has been broken", and that "the men have been put into their proper places." Various imbeciles, as Mr. Masterman unkindly puts it, screamed these cries of vindictive triumph on the platform and in the press. They kept repeating that the philanthropists and clergy, who advised other and better measures, were "not business men." What sort of business men have their contemners proved themselves to be? There has been, thanks to the methods adopted, such a glut of coal in England and all over Europe that it could not be sold except at a loss, that pit after pit has been forced to close, that a quarter of a million miners are still living on the dole, and that the mine-owners "with all their quaint cunning and credulity, see nothing before them but financial disaster." The bishops' proposals might have effected nothing better. At all events, they could scarcely have produced worse.

But the hearts of the "employer class" were set on a bill to make trades-unionism futile for all time. Absorbed in garnering the fruits of their victory, the mine-owners lost sight altogether of the prospects of their business. Mr. Masterman explains some leading provisions of that Act which the Liberals fought so hard in the House of Commons, and which Lord Reading riddled with criticism that ought to have been conclusive in the House of Lords. It was designed for three main purposes. The first was to make a general strike definitely and unequivocally illegal. The second was to stop all intimidation by which Labour unions might compel their members to join in a strike against their will. The third was to prevent the use of trades-union funds for political purposes. Most of the clauses, in Mr. Masterman's opinion, might be defended separately. But the total effect was to make almost every kind of strike impracticable, to create a new class of statutory offences defined with such vagueness that no man could be sure when he was offending and when he was not, and so to reduce the Labour party funds that it will be far harder to finance the next political campaign.

The bill as it passed into law was indeed markedly different from the bill as at first presented. In its earliest form, and presumably as drafted to meet the view of the "employer class" which Mr. Masterman so suspects, it had some extraordinary provisions. It forbade not only the general strike, but all strikes which are not limited to a single trade. It forbade not only intimidation by threat to injure physically or materially, but also whatever can "cause apprehension in any man's mind of ridicule, hatred, or contempt." Formulae so wide and also so elastic were amended, amid much hilarity, as the bill passed through its stages in the House. And yet, in Mr. Masterman's view, the final effect is to have inaugurated a "class-war." As such it has been received by Labour, cutting a deep cleavage between Conservatism and the working classes of the country. The hopes of the men who framed the bill have been, it seems, "somewhat subdued" by the succession of by-elections which followed it. Here is the considered summary of the matter by Lord Reading:

When I take the bill as a whole, and look through it as I have done with great care, consider it clause by clause, I say without hesitation that it is a bill which in the language it uses is more vague, more indefinite, more lacking in precision in respect of the crimes which it indicates and the penalties which follow upon them, than any bill I have ever had to construe either as a law officer or as a judge.

Those are not the words of a Clydeside Bolshevik. They come from one who has been successively head of the English Bar, Lord Chief Justice of England, British Ambassador to Washington, and Viceroy of India. That, as the French say, "gives one furiously to think."

A COLLECTION of books recently written by Americans about the religious life of the United States has come under the notice of Mr. Sidney Dark, and he takes them as the basis of an article on "The Religion of America." It is the sort of article which may well do a great deal of harm, in so far as it appears to assume that the hideous features discernible here and there over a country of one hundred and forty million inhabitants furnish a key to the national *ethos*. The author quotes with warm approval a remark by Mr. Hugh Walpole, that Englishmen and Americans are not alike in politics, in literature, in art, in daily life, but that "everything is different, even language." If the pictures which follow are supposed to illustrate this, one must remember Burke's refusal to draw an indictment against a whole nation, and deplore the mood of one who at such a time as the present would add to the sources of international annoyance which are already too numerous.

But the article has a value quite unconnected with the subject which its unfortunate title would suggest. Not in the United States alone might one say that "the teaching of religion would seem to have given place to a determination somehow or other to attract people into church, and to make religion a going concern." If the cases Mr. Dark has used to exemplify so regrettable a change are taken from books about life in America, this is no doubt partly because these are the most outspoken and uncompromising expressions of a spirit which elsewhere is given to disguise itself, more reticent without being more wholesome. After all, there is something to refresh the reader in this willingness to go all lengths with however ignoble a theory that is sincerely held. And it is the extreme case which reveals the essence of everything.

The specimens Mr. Dark has to quote from current preaching and current ecclesiastical policy are very varied. It need not shock even a sensitive ear to have Joseph described as the first life-insurance agent, because he provided during the seven years of plenty for the coming seven years whose leanness he foresaw. But to infer that this shows the writing of life-insurance to be next in importance to preaching the gospel is rather strained. If it be true that a "Bible Marathon" was held in Colorado, when the whole New Testament was read aloud at a continuous sitting

(presumably with intervals for refreshment) lasting one Sunday from six o'clock in the morning until eleven-thirty in the evening, one could wish that the participators had paused in its course to reflect on St. Paul's advice about a zeal according to knowledge. The cleaning company in Florida which opened its new premises with a religious service, the church in Maine which has a spotlight playing on the pulpit at sermon time, and the worshippers who are lured to divine service somewhere in Michigan by the promise that a popular magazine will be given free of cost to all on leaving, may be thought to have learned too well and to have applied inappropriately the maxim that "it pays to advertise."

Cases of this character, collected by Mr. Dark from such books as Mr. Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*, Mr. Herbert Asbury's *Up from Methodism*, and Mr. H. L. Mencken's *Americana*, give point to a satiric article about the "institutional church." The critic is exasperated, too, by what he calls "Rotarian civilization, with its 'yells', its slogans, its buttons, its prosperity, and its narrow-vised self-satisfaction." His temper is subjected to a twofold strain by the twin objects of his dislike acting simultaneously, when he reads that if Moses had been a Rotarian, the children of Israel would have reached the Promised Land in forty days instead of forty years. On the other hand, one remembers how Mr. Bernard Shaw has of late given Rotary his blessing as a public benefit,—and Mr. Shaw as a satirist can outweigh a multitude.

This *Quarterly Review* article is written by one who is very different in disposition from those whose books have furnished him with material. It is not with a chuckle of delight, rather with a mingled anger and distress, that he notes these tokens of degenerate evangelism. But his article is of great interest because it draws attention to the contemporary trend of satiric books about the Church. It is no longer the extravagances of doctrine, or even the grosser forms of "religiosity", that the mocking novelist now seeks to present. Attention has shifted to the vulgarization of things sacred, by methods borrowed from modern commercialism. One remembers how Dickens and Thackeray used to depict the narrow Evangelicals of their time,—such figures as Sam Weller in *Pickwick*, making his unseemly jests about Regeneration, or Miss Murdstone in *David Copperfield* rolling her eyes with glee over the mention of "miserable sinners", or Miss Miggs in *Barnaby Rudge* hating and despising herself as every good Christian should, or Lady Emily in *Vanity Fair* sending tracts about "the Frying Pan and the Fire" to the servants' hall. But that kind of thing has become somewhat demodé. In these days it is the organization rather

than the doctrine of the Church that has aroused satiric wit, and it must be confessed that there is often cause.

But there is another side to the story, which writers like Mr. Dark have overlooked, and which writers like those whom he quotes are plainly incapable of appreciating. Amid much that is grotesque and objectionable, even the worst sort of institutional church has a purpose in view that one should respect. It is making an effort to bring the Christian conception of life into closer contact with the everyday interests of mankind, and especially of youth, in our changing and restless world. When one thinks of the aloofness of the old ecclesiasticism, of its studied detachment from the living interests and business and recreations of the time,—in a word, of its “other-worldliness”—one feels that even the most blundering attempt to amend this has a germ of what is good. It is easy to laugh at Fundamentalism in Tennessee, or at that “legislating of society into morals” which Prohibition is supposed to illustrate. But those Fundamentalists who started the crusade against biology, and those temperance men who brought about the Eighteenth Amendment, were at least concerned to make a consistent whole of their religion, their morality, and their politics. To them, at all events, there had not arisen that senseless divorce between those two “different planes” on which thought has been held so to move that there is not even a nodding acquaintance between the scientific and the devotional in the same mind. They had not yet learned, as another publicist has so wittily put it, to avoid spiritual conflict by “letting not the right lobe of the brain know what the left lobe doeth.” What a noble lord lately, in the Upper Chamber, ridiculed as the Nonconformist Conscience—opposed to the betting tax, to Sunday golf, and to other genteel manifestations of the modern temper—has played a part in English life which could have been ill missed. In the Middle Ages there was a real synthesis such as we now lack. It was a synthesis to which we can never return; and yet the notion of a spiritual unity was right, though its concrete expression was so defective. Likewise the crass, blundering, vulgarized unity of these institutional churches is a thing which must be checked, and the pen of the satirist will help to check it. But even there the aim is good. And one could wish that those who render help by ridiculing its follies were not so blind to the virtue that underlies it. As Carlyle so aptly said of Voltaire, they continue in the Temple with a levity which—in any Temple where men worship—can beseem no brother man.

WHAT the wiseacres who write for English reviews will have to say about the Irish Free State, now that the election has told its tale, is hard to conjecture. The predictions they ventured a few weeks ago have been sadly belied. Mr. R. M. Fox, in *The Nineteenth Century*, thought it plain that the De Valera party would not take their seats in the Dail, but they have done so. "Macdara", in the *Fortnightly*, thought the Free State electors would make certain of a large working majority on one side or the other, but this is just what has not been done. However, this sort of occurrence is not unusual in that country where—as has been said—the inevitable so seldom takes place.

Searching for light on the causes of the present chaos, one finds in the recent magazine articles that the Cosgrave Government quarrelled quite needlessly with Labour, and that the late Mr. Kevin O'Higgins was more smart than wise in his electioneering of a few months ago. The recriminations by the Minister of Education made Mr. Johnson furious on the Labour side. And it did seem unfortunate that Mr. O'Higgins, when heckled about the 75 persons he had sent to execution, genially interposed "77, not 75, is the correct number"! But it is past all reasonable hope to seek after the clue in this labyrinth. "Macdara" believes that the entry of the De Valera group into the Dail is the best thing which has happened for Ireland since the Treaty, because these old intractables must now be in a measure responsible for government. One could wish that they had not come in after the fashion they did, with talk about a solemn oath as an "empty formality." But at least it is good to see that in election after election those who would disrupt the Treaty have been overwhelmed with disaster. Forgetting mere politics, Mr. Fox points out that the Shannon electricity scheme is now a clear success, and that by 1929 electric heat, light and power will be available everywhere. From his window as he wrote, he could see a chain of red-painted, square-set, tapering iron standards dotting the fields. At the same time he could mark the "Republicans" putting up memorials to those who had fallen in their cause during the "Civil War." Herein is a parable. Both appeals, as Mr. Fox says, are symbolic. But the electricity from the Shannon will remain available, when the electric discharges of political warfare are but a name. There is hope for the future in that.

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