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## THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Mr. Rees, Liberal, Member for North Montgomery, asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether an agreement between the German Bank and the National Bank for Germany in Berlin with the object of mutual financial action in Turkey had been signed and whether a German Bank was to be established in Bagdad with the support of various German financial institutions; further, whether it was contemplated to build a railway with German capital from Bagdad to the Persian frontier, and finally whether the Foreign Secretary would make his influence felt in obtaining concessions for the construction of railways with English capital in those parts of Asia minor, where at present traffic connections were in German hands.

Mr. Runciman replied that Sir E. Grey had no cognizance of the conclusion of any agreement in the sense of the above questions and he also had no information of the contemplated establishment of a German Bank in Bagdad. This was not a matter in which a foreign Government could interfere. In the Bagdad convention of 1903 provision had been made for the construction of a railway from a point in the vicinity of Bagdad to Khanika. He would always be prepared to support claims for railway concessions in Turkey, provided that he was convinced that they were advanced in good faith and that the necessary capital was forthcoming.

In answer to a question relating to British railway concessions in China Mr. Runciman stated that in the matter of two railways, viz. those from Shanghai to Nankin, and from Canton to the Kwangtung frontier, final agreements had been made, while the construction of earlier lines was continuing. With regard to the duration of the British railway concessions and although the negotiations were proceeding somewhat slowly, the British Government could not anticipate that the Chinese Government would in the end decline to fulfil obligations entered into in the matter of the concessions.

Lord Robert Cecil, Conservative, Member for E. Marylebone, then on a question of privilege drew the attention of the House to a letter contributed to the *Morning Post* and other journals by Mr. H. C. Lea, Liberal, Member for E. St. Pancras. The text of the letter in question was as follows.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.  
Sir,—I put a question to the Prime Minister today at Question Time in the House of Commons with reference to a knighthood conferred on a director of a company.

I found that the rules and regulations of the House debarred me from criticising such acts of the Sovereign even when those acts are committed on the recommendation of or at the instigation of either the Prime Minister or members of the Cabinet. I think, therefore, it is only right that the matter should be ventilated through the columns of the Press.

If ever there has been a Government since 1832 which was pledged up to the hilt to strive for ideals held in respect by the democracy of this country it is the present Government, with its vast majority of Liberals and Radicals. A fortnight ago we spent three days in the House of Commons discussing a pious resolution affecting the veto of the House of Lords. In the course of that debate Liberals and Radicals got up and vied with each other in denunciation of the principles of hereditary legislation.

At the time of this debate I put a couple of questions to the Clerks at the Table. These questions were refused. I asked in those questions that the Prime Minister should give the House an assurance that no addition should be made to the Peerage whilst this Government was in power, and, further, that the Prime Minister would in no case recommend to the Sovereign any persons for Baronetcies or other forms of so-called honour. I think this line of conduct would have been consistent on our part; but, sir, there is another and graver aspect to the matter. These honours are bought and sold, the proceeds going principally to the war chest of the party in office at the time these so-called honours are conferred. The party funds are presided over by the Chief Whip. At times of election, if candidates come forward and cannot pay their expenses *in toto*, grants in aid are given. And should the candidate become a member, his vote and support of the Government are looked upon as secure, no matter what the issue or what pledges he may have given his constituents. Should he rebel and vote according to his conscience, to his pledges, or to what he is persuaded his constituents would wish him to do, then he is reproached by the Party Whips for not having held to what they look upon as a bargain. A fund is perhaps

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necessary, and were the fund public no harm would be done. Those who had subscribed would be known, and their intentions could be judged.

Sir, in inditing this protest I sincerely and humbly hope that it may be the means of abolishing one of the hypocrisies of public life.—Yours, &c.,  
HUGH CECIL LEA.

House of Commons, July 11.

Lord Robert Cecil drew particular attention to the statement that peerages and the honour of knighthood were bought and sold and the results paid into the Party funds. It was stated in the letter that those members of Parliament whose election expenses were paid from the Party funds were reproached with a breach of their undertaking by the Party whips in case they did not vote with the Government on every occasion. Lord Robert proposed that a commission should be appointed to enquire into the truth of this latter statement.

Mr. Lea said that he merely desired to preserve the purity of both Houses of Parliament by means of a permanent Court of Law.

The Prime Minister denied that any pressure or influence was brought to bear on members by reason of their having been afforded financial support and said that the charges in the letter were unworthy, improper and unseemly. It would be inconsistent with the dignity of the House to pay too much attention to them and he moved, therefore, that the House should proceed to the Order of the Day. Mr. Balfour supported the Prime Minister's motion which was carried by 235 votes to 20.

The House then debated the vote of Censure moved by the Opposition on the Government on account of their attitude in the matter of preferential treatment of the Colonies. The vote of Censure was rejected by a majority of 301, and a counter resolution accepted declaring that the unity of the Empire would not be assured by a system of preferential treatment based on protection.

## THE BELFAST COAL STRIKE.

About 500 colliers in Belfast have refused to resume work under the conditions offered by the employers. The latter have, accordingly, unanimously decided to close their works for one week, in order to give the workmen an opportunity to consider the matter. The coal business is, in consequence, almost entirely at a standstill. Although a large number of ships are lying in the harbour with cargoes of coal, unloading is proceeding for one firm only, which declined to sign the employers' manifesto.

## NEWS FROM AMERICA.

### THE U. S. AND JAPAN.

The two Japanese arrested in California on suspicion of espionage, have been set at liberty, as no punishable offence can be proved against them.

### ACCIDENT ON A BATTLESHIP.

During the squadron's gunnery trials off the coast of Massachusetts, an 8-inch gun in the turret of the battleship "Georgia" burst, 17 men being wounded, 8 of them dangerously, among them a lieutenant and two Cadets. The "Georgia" which was only commissioned 10 months ago has been sent to Boston, whence comes the news that 5 men lost their lives in the accident.

### THE ANTI-GREEK RIOTS IN VIRGINIA.

Protection from the mob has been claimed from the Greek Consul-General by 150 Greeks in Roanoke. The Consul-General has applied to the Secretary of State in the matter.

### THE WEATHER ON THE CONTINENT.

From all parts of Central Europe come reports of floods caused by the tropical rain of Saturday and Sunday. The Neisse has overflowed its banks at Glatz and the water is several feet deep in the streets and all traffic has to be carried on by means of boats. The harvest is completely destroyed.

Similar news comes from the Riesengebirge. The village of Straupitz near Hirschberg is completely cut off and the country round presents the appearance of a vast lake.

The heavy rains have caused widespread inundations at the source of the Oder and tributary streams, the water having risen far above its normal point at Ratibor.

A perfect hurricane raged in Vienna and the neighbourhood on Sunday, accompanied by heavy rain resembling a cloudburst. Enormous damage was done to houses and gardens, many trees being uprooted.

The Danube has overflowed near Stadtlau and the country near Nussdorf and Klosterneuburg is inundated. In the Semmering and Rax districts fresh snow has fallen. The funicular railway on the Schneeberg had to cease running owing to the storm.

Storms accompanied by violent rain prevail throughout Bohemia, and the rivers are very high, many wooden bridges having been swept away.

Similar reports come from Silesia, but as far as is known, no lives have been lost.

## AN UNTIMELY DEATH.

A workman out of employment, by name Paul Straus, died while committing a burglary in Berlin on Sunday. When a resident in a house in the Münchner Strasse returned home late at night, he found the door of his apartments in the left wing of the house forced open. On striking a light, to his horror he found the corpse of a man lying in his room. The police were sent for; no sign of violence was found on the man and he is believed to have died from alcoholic poisoning.

## NEWS FROM RUSSIA.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT.

The S. S. "Sophie" bound from Odessa to Khorly, when 16 miles out from Odessa, was attacked by armed robbers on Monday. At 11 p. m. three young armed men appeared on the upper deck where the captain and passengers were dining, and held them in check, while two others secured the person of the man at the wheel and compelled him by threats to steer towards Odessa. They then repaired to the first-class saloon and took possession of the iron safe belonging to the cashier of the Russian Bank for foreign trade, containing 50,000 roubles, as well as a further sum of 1,000 roubles belonging to the passengers; they then threw the coal supply overboard, made the engines useless, shut off steam and left the vessel in two of her boats after destroying a third boat. They threatened to return and blow up the ship if any distress signals were made within two hours; the police have failed to find any trace of the robbers.

A political prisoner in a prison in the Viborg district of St. Petersburg insulted a soldier, refused to obey orders and was shot. His death caused a riot and the warders were forced to shoot. Another prisoner was wounded, but a quarter of an hour elapsed ere order was restored.