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MR. BALFOUR'S OPTIMISM.

A few days ago Mr. Balfour was the guest of the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of London at a dinner given to meet the Masters of the Livery Companies of the City of London. It was one of those agreeable occasions which a wise foresight on the part of our forefathers has set apart for the interchange of good-will and healthy platitude. Like the Saxon *bytt-filling*, at which the administrators were wont "to feed themselves according as they might deem themselves worthy," it is an occasion for retrospection fortified by repelation, an occasion on which one sees the best aspect of things in the rosiest light. Naturally, Mr. Balfour did not discuss politics, in the business sense of the term; but, in replying for the House of Commons, he took exception to the gloomy view that the House is degenerating in its mode of conducting affairs, and in the general character of the individuals who constitute it. He admitted that the difficulty of getting through the business it set before itself had seriously interfered with the hereditary liberty of criticism which the House of Commons ought to possess; and, further, that he saw no immediate solution for the difficulty. He admitted, too, that there were many changes in the personnel of the House of Commons which he would like to see; yet he found there none of the deterioration so often spoken of. And if there were any, it was to be attributed not to the House itself but to the constituencies which returned the inappropriate individuals.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Balfour is right in refusing to be intimidated into Jeremiads. The mere fact, however, that he is bound to admit the existence of evils justifies the pessimism of which he disapproves. The last decade has seen great changes, not only in the composition of Parliament itself, but in the balance of those great forces which are behind Parliament and which condition its character. However, blindly, the nation is striving after some form of Government by merit. Government by reason of privilege, as was the case in the eighteenth century, or by reason of wealth, as was the case during a part of the nineteenth, or by reason of such a combination of the two as may at any time prevail, has grown more and more distasteful to the intelligent voter. He desires to see good ability combined with good principles, but he fears, above all else, the danger that clever brains might exploit him. Consequently, if he is a working man, he has tended to place faith in men of his own class, cognisant of his rights and grievances; but he is finding that these men are capable of class legislation alone, since they have neither training nor knowledge in the more complex branches of statesmanship. There is, therefore, as yet no substitute for the old heterogeneous body drawn from various social, intellectual, and political strata in the general administration of affairs; and, logically, it should not be unlikely that superfluous class representation should automatically diminish, and finally disappear. Were it possible to rely on such a result as inevitable, we would gladly join in Mr. Balfour's optimism. Regrettably enough, however, nations are seldom logical as a mass: it takes them ten times as long to live down one indiscretion as to outlive one achievement.

It is notorious that the British Empire is governed less by Parliament than by the Cabinet. The problem then, is how far a Parliament on a basis of merit (supposing such a thing possible) can assist the Cabinet to govern wisely. The question, though tempting, is unanswerable. There is a merit in silence and a merit in submission, if silence or submission be used at the right moment. Can an assembly based on merit be relied on to be prudent as well as efficient, to yield to opinion, to suffer itself to be marshalled? On the other hand, is a docile assembly, such as party leaders rejoice in, worth the name of a free Parliament? England does not touch either extreme. The implied criticism which Mr. Balfour was attacking was, we have no doubt, the criticism of the social composition of the House. There always have been many Members of Parliament not conspicuous for their wisdom, virtue, or good taste; but the House of Commons has also been for a long time past "the best club in Europe," and when fears are expressed for its future they are prompted by an instinct of caste. It is on caste



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STOP PRESS NEWS.

London, March 4. The Dowager-Empress of Russia arrived here at noon today, and was received at the station by King Edward and Queen Alexandra, and the Prince and Princess of Wales.

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that English institutions have been built, though on a shifting foundation. The English system would have no difficulty in absorbing fifty workingmen in fifty years; it would mould them rapidly into the accepted type of Parliamentarian. When fifty workingmen are placed into the House of Commons, without the possibility of assimilation, there is an unaccountable reversal of conditions from which anything in the world might just as easily ensue as nothing. The English, being a conservative people, do not like to have their institutions menaced until they get to the point where the progressive spirit begins to elbow conservatism out of its path. This is the danger point at which England stands, and it calls for pessimism or optimism according to the temperament of the observer.

QUITE LIKELY.

At Westminster Police Court a father complained that his daughter had become engaged to "an apology of a man." Perhaps the apology was so handsome that she felt bound to accept it.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

HEALTH OF THE PREMIER.

London, March 3. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman passed a quiet day, but still suffers from weakness consequent upon the influenza.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

London, March 3. In the course of the discussion on the Navy Estimates, Mr. Robertson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, denied the statement made some months ago by Mr. C. Belairs (*Lib. Lynn*) that in December, 1906, Germany had more torpedo-boat-destroyers in commission in the North Sea than England. Mr. Robertson proved that during the month in question there were 45 English destroyers, 32 torpedo-boats, and 29 submarines in commission, as against 33 destroyers, 16 torpedo-boats, and one submarine commissioned by Germany. The speaker added that Germany's flotilla at the time mentioned had been augmented owing to tactical exercises which extended over fourteen days. Mr. A. H. Lee (*Unionist, Hants.*) said that it was impossible to learn whether the Government intended to maintain the two-Power standard when the first stage of the foreign naval programmes were completed in 1910.

Several members of the Opposition deplored the insufficient number of destroyers provided for in the Estimates, whereupon Mr. George Lambert, a Civil Lord of the Admiralty, assured the House that the destroyers already building and those to be laid down this year were ample for the needs of England. Mr. Balfour said that if England was to maintain her position of naval supremacy over the other great Powers it would be necessary to lay down a large number of "Dreadnoughts" and armoured cruisers, and those in favour of economy could only count upon an eventual diminution of the Estimates if the Government relinquished their intention of adhering to the two-Power standard.

ANOTHER UNIONIST VICTORY.

London, March 4. The parliamentary by-election at Hastings has resulted in the return of Mr. Du Cros (*Unionist*) by 4,495 votes, as against the 3,477 polled for the Liberal candidate, Mr. Harcourt; the Unionist majority is, therefore, 1,018. At the general election in 1906 the Unionist majority was only 413, so the Party have every reason to congratulate themselves on this latest result.

MAIMED FUNERAL RITES.

Among the broader-minded Churchmen and women in England an earnest movement is on foot to make it possible for full Christian rites to be solemnised at funerals of suicides. The public mind was somewhat disturbed two months ago by the mutilated burial rites which were performed at the interment of an unhappy suicide. Further discussion was caused some two or three weeks ago by a similar shortened service when a misguided girl had put an untimely end to her career; and last week the subject was revived when yet another very similar case recurred.

Commenting upon this question, the *Globe* says: The stalwart and the stoic firmly say that the victims have brought the deprivation of the last sad ceremony on themselves; and that the mutilation is a warning to others. It is the stock answer: we cannot but doubt its truth. In the barbarous Middle Ages they buried a suicide at dead of night at cross-roads, with a stake through the body: we have yet to learn that the practice deterred men from suicide. In times more charitable that degrading spectacle was abolished; at present a few lame words are said over the remains of those "against whom the Everlasting has fixed His Canon." But many are now debating whether it is not possible to go yet further, and to give in commiseration practically the whole of the full Christian rite to the suicide. Who are we of this earth that we should condemn an unfortunate or weak brother in the next? "These, but for the grace of God"—the saying is something musty. If any change is made from the ordinary service, it might perhaps be in the omission of the words "sure and certain" hope; further a sense of our

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