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## OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

Between the theory and practice of legislation there is one of those acknowledged breaches which are to be bridged only by the exchange of criticism. The discussion of a legislative want is like the preamble to a Bill in preparing one for the fact, and in both there is the same rigid distinction in scope and intention between the one part and the other. The question of old-age pensions in England has for more than a few years been in the preliminary stages; and it has been tossed about a good deal on election platforms and at political meetings of the more heterodox parties. But one is no nearer a solution than when the Government came into power, partly because the problem is a terribly difficult one, and partly because it has been made the excuse for much party shuffling and too effective wire-pulling. On account of its vastness and its real importance the legislature tends to fight shy of a solution, although it is expected that Mr. Asquith will sooner or later introduce a measure into the House of Commons on the subject. It is not yet known what line the Government propose to adopt, but in preparation for the event a letter has been published in the *Times* over the signatures of six gentlemen, including that of Sir William Anson, whose views must be regarded as expert and authoritative. The letter makes no specific proposals as to a workable scheme; in obedience to the natural distinction between discussion and legislation it lays down certain principles which appear to the signatories to be the right ones, and attempts to dispose of certain fallacies. A copy of the letter has been sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who will possibly draw upon the recognized merit of these advisers in order to strengthen whatever scheme he has in hand.

The letter makes it clear at the outset that out of the multitude of opinions on Old-Age Pensions there seems to be agreement only on two points—namely that, in the first place, the Poor Law is inadequate in relieving old-age of its poverty; and, secondly, that a scheme of contributory pensions is equally unsatisfactory as a solution of the whole problem. After showing the reasons why, as against these negative views, there are no positive views on the question, or any sound constructive suggestions, and stigmatizing the superficial attitude of politicians and the public on the point, the letter proceeds to deal with the principles which lie behind the proposal of the Labour Party for universal old-age pensions. It recalls the already twenty-year-old suggestion of Mr. Booth, which is similar in result but quite different in principle. Mr. Booth's scheme shirked a difficult problem; it cut through all the difficulties of discrimination simply because they were difficulties; it was, as the signatories put it, "a confession of administrative weakness." The Labour Party, however, maintain that old-age pensions are a civil right due to the worker in return for his services to society while he was fully capable of work. The letter continues by examining the arguments by which this principle is supported, and finds them unsatisfactory. It is not the case that the majority of workers are unable to meet a contributory scheme, which works well in Belgium, France and elsewhere; nor, on the assumption that a pension is due because the worker is inadequately remunerated by his employers, would the burden of a non-contributory pension fall upon the guilty shoulders. The suggestion that even if non-contributory pensions were introduced a large section of the workers would not avail themselves of it is very properly scouted, since this is urged as an argument to prove that the scheme would thus be financially workable. In language not so plain perhaps, but sufficiently emphatic, the signatories declare it either fertile, or else dishonest.

A closely argued paragraph proceeds to dispel the misconception that any proposed non-contributory scheme differs in kind from the existing system of Poor Law relief; there would only be a difference in degree and perhaps in fixity. "The pension relief," it states, "will differ from Poor Law relief only in the source from which it is derived, in the certainty of the relief when once granted, and in the absence of the civil disabilities attendant on Poor Law relief."

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## STOP PRESS NEWS.

### THE U. S. EMBASSY IN BERLIN.

According to our latest advices there appears to be no foundation whatever for the rumour that Dr. Hill had become *persona ingrata* for the American Ambassadorship in Berlin. All reports as to his having met with but little favour during Prince Henry of Prussia's visit to the United States are likewise nothing but idle gossip. Dr. Hill, on the contrary, received high recognition for the services he rendered in connexion with Prince Henry's trip. In Washington, however, the belief is still prevalent that Germany has made a belated protest against the appointment of Dr. Hill, and feeling is consequently running high. This rumour may safely be denounced as society chatter, perhaps not altogether free from malice; and an official announcement of some sort would be welcomed by all parties.

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Finally, the letter lays down certain lines on which it considers a solution possible. It accepts as its guiding principle the words of Lord Rothschild's Committee, that the State is only justified in according relief in old age to any person so far as his circumstances have not rendered it possible for him to make provision for himself. On this basis, it is maintained, no non-contributory scheme will be satisfactory unless it is also accompanied by a parallel scheme of assisted assurance, under which the pension obtainable would be higher than the normal amount of pension relief granted under the non-contributory scheme. In any case, it would be ill-advised for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to attempt to yield to the pressure from many quarters by introducing some partial, hasty measure. The letter, having the air of impartiality and soundness, should exercise a certain restrictive influence, even if it does not become a deciding factor.

## GENERAL NEWS.

### NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

#### THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

The Scottish Land Bill, which passed the House of Commons by a great majority, was read for the second time in the Upper House. The leader of the Opposition stated, however, that there were still important amendments to be introduced.

#### THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

In the House of Commons Mr. Wilfred Ashley (U. N. Lanca.) asked whether it was true that a foreign Power had made representations to the British Government with a view to the abrogation or amendment of the Algeiras Acts. Sir Edward Grey returned a negative answer.

#### HORRIBLE STORY FROM AUSTRALASIA.

The steamer "Sigismund" has arrived at Sydney (N. S. W.) and reported that four natives of the Admiralty Islands, while purchasing provisions, were massacred and devoured by savages. An expedition set out from Dutch New Guinea to punish the murderers.

### NEWS FROM AMERICA.

#### THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN BERLIN.

Considerable consternation has been caused by a report from Washington to the effect that the *agrément* of the appointment of Dr. David J. Hill—at present U. S. Ambassador at the Hague—to the Embassy in Berlin has not been obtained from the German Government. It had been generally understood that Mr. Charlemagne Tower was to retire from his present post in the Autumn, and that his successor had been definitely appointed in the person of Dr. Hill. It now appears, however, that Mr. Tower's formal resignation has not yet been tendered; and that when State Secretary Root cabled to him inquiring as to the probable date of his retirement, Mr. Tower answered "next Summer". To all appearances Mr. Tower is desirous of remaining at the Embassy for some time yet.

Later information renders it likely that the alleged withholdment of the German Government's *agrément* to Dr. Hill's appointment is a myth, since upon informal inquiry at the Berlin Court the U. S. Government was informally assured that Dr. Hill's personality was perfectly agreeable to the Court.

The real facts of the case are not yet to be discerned, but in the interests of all concerned it is to be hoped that we will soon be in a position to inform our readers as to the future of the American Embassy in Berlin.

#### ALLEGED "GRAFT" BY RAILROAD MAGNATES.

At Thursday's meeting of the Union Pacific Railroad, says a New York cable, the directorate refused to accept a motion brought forward by various Connecticut shareholders to prefer charges against the directors Messrs. Harriman, Stillman and Rogers, of having sold Illinois Central and other railroad shares to the Union Pacific Company, thereby making an illicit profit for themselves. An official announcement by the directorate states that the interest in these shares by the accused gentlemen was obvious to the directorate before the conclusion of the purchase. Messrs. Harriman, Stillman and Rogers had received the unanimous authorisation of the other directorate members in regard to the transaction, and had abstained from voting during the proceedings respecting the purchase.

#### "HOOSIER" DEMOCRATS DECLARE FOR BRYAN.

An Indianapolis cable reports that the Democratic party in the State of Indiana has decided to support the Presidential candidature of Mr. Bryan.

#### THE CRITICS OF THE FLEET.

The partisans of reform in the construction of United States battleships, says a Washington despatch, are congratulating themselves over Admiral Evans' latest report, which expounds the views of a number of officers and naval engineers now serving with the Atlantic Fleet. These are of the opinion that the defensive qualities of the battle-

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