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POLITICAL PROSPECTS.

The recent triumph of the Unionist party at Peckham has aptly been described as a miniature general election. From all accounts it would appear that the fight was thickest not around questions of purely local interest—as is so often the case in by-elections and even during general elections—but around the numerous issues of national importance which the Government have long raised theoretically and have now begun to formulate in legislative proposals. More than ever has it become clear to Unionists that the time is ripe for an appeal to the country. A by-election does not in every case carry sufficient authority to reverse political judgment elsewhere; but in this instance the majority gained by the Unionist candidate has been so overwhelming, the contest has been so keen, and the circumstances under which it was conducted have been so unusual that there attaches to it a more than ordinary degree of importance. It is not the only victory of the last few months; it is the crowning achievement of some half-dozen successful by-elections. Further, it is not a provincial but a metropolitan victory and, therefore, one likely to have an influence beyond the immediate sphere in which it was obtained. The most ingenious arguments cannot disguise the fact that the Government is losing favour day by day. There was a time when people quarrelled with Liberalism, such as it now is, for not fulfilling what it promised; we are beginning to realize that unfulfilled promises are, after all, better than abortive, partial, or mischievous legislation. If reform is to mean fussiness it is preferable a hundred times that doctrinaire wrangling should impede its fulfilment rather than that hasty legislation claiming to be comprehensive should hurry the nation from one indiscretion into another.

The supporters of the Government are not content with landing achievements, repugnant, as we maintain, to a rapidly growing section of the electorate; they insist on holding up the constant menace of an impotent House of Lords. It is a courageous, not to say an audacious, manoeuvre. The Government are not yet aware, and cannot be aware until after the manoeuvre has been all but carried through, whether the mass of the people would accept that policy as a supreme piece of statesmanship or a foolish bogey. On the chance of making it acceptable to the nation they would force their scheme to the forefront of party controversy, knowing well enough that failure would entail the loss of power. They are deferring the issue until other issues have been settled in some measure; otherwise, what could justify the foolhardiness of proposals such as the Education and Licensing Bills from a tactical standpoint? They are proposals which must be supported by a mere minority in the country; they are not proposals that could in any sense be termed popular. Yet they are also proposals which, without being altogether vital to the fate of the Administration, are capable of stirring up much turmoil and dissatisfaction. Is it not obvious that the Government are taking risks to hold the attention of the country at any price until they are able to put before it the truly vital issue; and that it is crowning the ingenious piece of bluff by dangling before its opponents the menace of its final trump in the emasculation of the House of Lords?

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These proceedings are so reckless that we would almost think the Government desperate of its own life. The mandate which put them into power was the fruit of a period of reaction: certainly, it cannot bear one half of the measures for which the Government would wish to be responsible. The result of the Peckham election indicates with unmistakable clearness that the country is recognizing how far its wishes have been overruled, and that the danger which Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's House of Lords resolution overlooks is being exemplified in the very assembly where the resolution was introduced. The present House of Commons has ceased to represent the wishes of the nation, and the time is near when those who read the tokens on the political horizon may begin to make their forecasts with some assurance.

STOP PRESS NEWS.

DUTCH LOSSES IN JAVA.

A telegram published by the Amsterdam *Handelsblad* from Batavia reports that 80 Achehese attacked a Dutch detachment near Rantau, Gedong, and Atehin. Six native soldiers were killed, and a captain and 12 native soldiers wounded.

PLOT AGAINST GREEK CONSULS.

According to a telegram from Athens, a conspiracy has been discovered at Monastir on the part of a Bulgarian band. The plot aimed at the assassination of the Greek Consul and his staff. Great excitement prevails in Monastir at the discovery of the conspiracy, the ultimate execution of which appears very probable in view of the recent murder of the dragoman attached to the Greek Consulate-General in Salonica. The authorities have been advised of the conspirators' designs.

THE JUDICIAL DAY.

The tendency to treat Saturday as a *dies non* in the courts, says the *Law Journal*, continues to increase. But this is not the only direction in which the judges have shown a disposition to curtail their sittings. It has become the custom in recent years for the judges to begin work at eleven o'clock instead of half-past ten on Mondays, and every one of the eight judges who sat in the King's Bench Courts last Monday observed it.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

At question time on Tuesday, Mr. Ashley (*Conserv.*, Lancashire) asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether one of the Powers who signed the Treaty of Paris in 1856 had proposed to amend it. Sir Edward Grey replied that the Government had not been engaged in any negotiation for amending the Treaty of Paris, and he had no knowledge that any such negotiation was in progress. In replying to further questions, the Secretary of State added that the treaty was signed by seven Powers; he could only speak for the action of the British Government, which had made no proposals.

Mr. Haddock (*U. Lancashire*) asked whether Germany or any other foreign Power had made representations with regard to the new British Patent law. Sir Edward Grey replied that representations had been made by Germany and by the United States with regard to certain provisions of the new Patent law that referred exclusively to patents effected abroad.

Later in the sitting Mr. Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, brought in a Bill for the establishment of two new Universities in Ireland: one of the two, in Belfast, to be formed from the present Queen's College there; the other, in Dublin, to be formed from the Queen's Colleges at Cork and Galway. In the new Universities neither the Professors nor the students would be subject to any religious test: the money of the State would not be used for theological purposes; the head of the new University in Dublin would be a Roman Catholic layman. The position of Trinity College, Dublin, would remain as it was. The Treasury would contribute £80,000 a year, divided between the two new Universities; and would also make a considerable grant towards the cost of the buildings. Mr. Birrell said that institutions for higher education were urgently required in Ireland.

Mr. Balfour, on behalf of the Opposition, and Mr. Dillon, for the Irish Nationalists, assented to the introduction of the Bill.

BRITISH FINANCIAL STATISTICS.

The State revenue of Great Britain and Ireland in the fiscal year 1907/8 shows an increase of £1,501,204 over the preceding fiscal year.

A MODERN NOAH'S ARK.

The Transatlantic transport "Minnehaha" is now carrying from America to England as living cargo the biggest and finest collection of wild beasts that ever crossed the deep seas since prehistoric days. This great collection of the world's most striking animal life is under the sole control and organisation of Mr. Frank C. Bostock (universally known as "The Animal King"), and has left New York, London bound for Tilbury Docks. By special trains from Tilbury the imposing cargo goes to the very doorstep of Earl's Court, where throughout the Hungarian Exhibition, opening early in May, it will be on view to the public in the "Jungle and Arena" of the Empress Hall. There are included lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, wolves, hyenas, sloths, jaguars, pumas, mennocks (Polar bears), camels, cougars, bears (including the one that "shook" with President Roosevelt), panthers,

(Continued on page 2.)

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