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GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

MR. ASQUITH'S BUDGET SPEECH.

The House of Commons and the galleries were crowded on Thursday afternoon in anticipation of Mr. Asquith's budget speech. His statement was looked forward to with extraordinary interest, as the Government proposal with regard to old age pensions was expected. The right honourable gentleman was loudly cheered on rising. He said that the foreign trade of England had been greater, in volume and in value, in 1907 than in any previous year. That extension was partly due to an international movement, and there were signs everywhere that that movement had begun to ebb at the end of last year. British trade had not, however, suffered any serious blow, and present indications pointed to nothing more than a loss of expansive force. The actual surplus for the past financial year was £4,726,000, which, after certain deductions, would be applied to the diminution of the National Debt. The National Debt had been reduced in the past financial year by nearly 18 millions sterling, and during the current year it would be further diminished by 15 millions sterling; so that on the 31st of March, 1909, its amount would be the same as it was twenty years ago. (Cheers.) If other countries which are supposed to have better financial systems than England are obliged year after year to resort to loans, it was no unsatisfactory reflection for England that in three years she will be in a position to deduct from forty to fifty millions sterling from her national debt. The time had now arrived when a part of the Revenue which had been assigned to decrease the national debt might be devoted to another purpose. The Budget provided for a total estimated expenditure for the financial year 1908/09 of £152,869,000, while the revenue, estimated according to existing principles, would be £157,770,000, which would give a surplus of £4,901,000.

Referring to the old age pensions question, the Prime Minister said a practicable measure must be based on distinctions in respect of age, need, position, and worthiness. The proposal of the Government contemplated a weekly pension of five shillings for persons of 70 years and upwards whose income did not exceed ten shillings a week. He believed the number of such pensioners would not exceed 500,000, and that the cost involved would not be more than 6 millions sterling. The Bill would not come into operation before the 1st of January 1909, and the cost for the current financial year would not, according to the estimate, be over £1,200,000.

The sugar duty, Mr. Asquith announced, would be reduced from four shillings and two pence per hundredweight to one shilling and ten pence. So far as raw and refined sugar were concerned, the reduction would take effect from the 18th of May, and from the 1st of July in respect to confectionery. He had, he said, reduced the duty by that amount in order that the consumer might reap the greatest advantage from the reduction. The loss to the Revenue in consequence of the reduction of the sugar duty would be £3,400,000, and, as the other duties remained almost unaltered, the surplus, after providing for old age pensions, would stand at about £241,000.

According to a later telegram, the Budget was on the whole favourably regarded in parliamentary circles.

FRENCH PRESIDENT'S VISIT.

Orders have been issued for the ships of the Channel Fleet, including the First Cruiser Squadron and the Western Destroyer Group, to welcome the French President on his arrival at Dover on May 25th. The destroyers will put out from Dover to meet the cruiser "Leon Gambetta," in which M. Fallières will cross to England, and will escort her into harbour. The President will travel to London by special train, and will return to France via Dover on May 29th, when parting honours will be rendered by the Channel Fleet.

THE FRENCH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN LONDON.

The French Minister of Commerce, M. Cruppi, was present at the annual banquet of the French Chamber of Commerce in London on Thursday. M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, occupied the chair. Among the guests were the Duke of Argyll, the President of the Anglo-French Exhibition, the President of the London Chamber of Commerce, and many other representatives of British and French commerce. Very cordial toasts were exchanged. M. Cruppi expressed the hope of his Government that the good economic relations existing between Great Britain and France might continually develop; he declared there was no rivalry between the two countries in respect to commerce, and dwelt long on the Anglo-French Exhibition, which would, he said, afford a brilliant proof of the community of interests between both countries, and as to which he could prophecy that it would be visited by a great number of French people.

WINSTON CHURCHILL STILL IN DANGER.

The Dundee by-election, polling for which takes place today (Saturday), promises a most exciting contest. Mr. Winston Churchill, rejected at Manchester, turned his steps towards the North, and it was at first assumed that his election as member for Dundee would be practically uncontested. Sir George Baxter, the Unionist candidate, is putting up a hard fight. The correspondent of a London paper says that these are changed days with the Radical agents in Dundee. At former contests they opened committee-rooms, pasted up bills, laid in a stock of tobacco, and sat down and smoked. Now they are at their wits' end. They don't know what to do next. They are scurrying about like a lot of sheep. Canvassing is being carried on on behalf of their nominee in a manner the Radicals never attempted before, and their reports are not giving the party much heartening. The ladies were turned on to the west end, where it was expected they would have a "soft job." But they have been thunderstruck to discover that electors who were looked upon as a certainty for the Radicals turned them away with a "No, thank you." The ladies could only jerk out, "What! you a 'Tory'!"

The Radical candidate is alive to the danger of the situation. When he opened his campaign he asked the electors to ignore all local issues and fight the contest on the broad lines of party principles. But he never misses an opportunity of attacking Socialism, and by this means makes an indirect attack on the Labour candidate. Broad principles were all very well at the start, but the Radical candidate is now a very "local" candidate.

It is difficult to forecast the result. But one thing is almost sure—the Radical candidate is not to get the record vote the President of the Radical Association asked, and Dundee is not to deal the "smashing blow for Liberalism" which Mr. Churchill called on them to deliver. It would be interesting to know the private opinion of the Pre-

sident of the Board of Trade regarding those who advised him to come north to "Radical Scotland and a safe seat."

UNDESIRABLE IMMIGRANTS.

It was explained at the Alien Immigration Board's meeting on Thursday that foreign agents who shipped aliens to Great Britain generally sent them in batches, and gave them a story written out on a card which they were instructed to learn and adhere to when questioned. They were often sent as families, and generally came under assumed names.

The explanation was made in connection with the consideration of the case of a man who had landed in England as Moses Borowitz, and who, after being interrogated by Mr. Francis, J.P., chairman of the board, was informed that the board considered his story a tissue of lies.

The board decided that the man must be deported.

THE INDIAN FRONTIER SITUATION.

The latest news from the north-west frontier to hand at Simla indicates that the unrest is practically eliminated. Several Afghan mullahs have dissociated themselves from the rebellious movement, a circumstance attributed to the influence of the Ameer.

TRADE STATISTICS FOR APRIL.

The Board of Trade statement issued on Thursday respecting the commercial statistics for April shows, as compared with the corresponding month of last year, a decrease of £9,682,792 in imports, and £3,711,528 in exports.

AMERICAN NEWS.

THE GOULD-SAGAN ROMANCE.

According to a telegram from Rome, it is stated on good authority that the application made by Mme. Anna Gould for the annulment of her marriage with Count Boni de Castellane has been examined by the Congregation of the Council, and has been refused. Mme. Gould is now anxious to obtain a personal audience of the Pope, but it is not believed that she will be received by his Holiness.

THE CURRENCY QUESTION.

A meeting of Republican members of the House of Representatives held in Washington on Thursday passed a resolution in favour of recognising commercial exchanges through the Clearing-House Unions as an orderly security for rectifying the currency in case of need. The meeting further recommended the appointment of a Currency Committee and the introduction of an exchange Bill in the next session of Congress. The Republican party leaders regard the passing of these resolutions by the meeting as a guarantee for the adoption of measures which will not differ essentially from those provided by the Aldrich Bill, excepting that the Clearing-House certificates should in case of need be looked upon as supplementary security for currency.

THE ABRUZZI MARRIAGE.

According to a dispatch from Rome to the Paris *Figaro*, the Duke of the Abruzzi will be promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in September, and will resign the command of the warship "Regina Elena" and receive a port command. His marriage with Miss Elkins will then take place. The union will meet with no difficulty, it is understood, either at the Quirinal or at the Vatican. Miss Elkins has abjured Protestantism, and has been a Roman Catholic for over a month. After a year's service ashore the Duke will go to sea in command of a division of the Mediterranean Fleet.

(Continued on page 2.)