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The Daily Record

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LIGHTING THE FUSE.

Last week we had occasion to comment in these columns on the ominous outlook in the Balkans, and the manifest desire of Bulgaria to try a fall with her powerful neighbour and foster parent Turkey. We drew attention to the undoubted fact that the armed forces of the Principality were in a high state of perfection, both as regards training and equipment, and that every member of the army, from general officer to drummer boy, was eagerly expecting the signal which would herald an advance through the Shipka Pass. The news to hand on Monday from Tirnovo may or may not be this signal; but in any case it presages a period of extreme tension in all the European cabinets. From a moral standpoint and a legal, the Bulgarian declaration of independence cannot be condoned. It is a direct infringement of the treaty of Berlin, under the terms of which the Porte exercises a suzerainty over the Principality. But it must not be forgotten that the Bulgars are an ambitious, high-spirited people, who have for many years been chafing under the restraint put upon them by one great Power after another. The conditions that existed in Turkey prior to the downfall of Hamidian autocracy rendered it impossible for Prince Ferdinand and his advisers to openly declare that independence which they mentally assumed. The slightest move in such a direction would, they well knew, have precipitated combat with a united Turkey, with probably disastrous results. Moreover, the attitude of Austria in such a contingency was an unknown quantity, since she certainly could not afford to view with complete equanimity a huge increase of Bulgarian power and prestige in view of geographical and other conditions. Thus Prince Ferdinand and the very able diplomats who form his counsel patiently bided their time, confident that the march of events would sooner or later usher in the long hoped for opportunity. This opportunity duly arrived with the successful coup of the Young Turkish element and the natural confusion prevailing in the Ottoman Empire consequent upon the complete revolution of its home politics. It now only remained to sound Austria's pulse, and it was obviously with this purpose that Prince Ferdinand paid his recent round of visits in the dual monarchy, where he was accorded a reception that must have created unbounded optimism in the heart of every one of his subjects. Was Austrian policy on this occasion dictated by future eventualities, or was the Prince's reception merely an act of good-natured hospitality to a near neighbour? Be the answer what it may, Austria has hopelessly compromised herself in the eyes of disinterested Powers.

Bulgaria has launched her thunderbolt, and it remains to be seen whether Turkey can afford to suspend the work of putting her house in order while she administers chastisement to her unruly vassal. Unfortunately for Young Turkish hopes, it is highly probable that such a suspension would entail the indefinite postponement of that political regeneration of which the Empire stands in crying need. House cleaning is a difficult process at any time, but it is infinitely more difficult when an armed burglar stands at your garden gate. That is Turkey's position today: she has hardly laid her hand to the plough when an impudent marauder threatens to ravage her outlying estate, yet she is fairly certain that, once her hand leaves the plough handle, the restive horses will bolt. Under these circumstances the Porte must fall back upon the Powers, who are in honour bound to remonstrate with Bulgaria for openly violating an instrument to which they set their signatures in Berlin. Austria, however unpalatable the task may be to her, must become a party to this international protest, if only to save her face. Germany has widespread interests in the Near East, but these could not fail to be detrimentally affected by an outbreak of war, and she will therefore not withhold her support to the protest. Great Britain and France are among the most disinterested spectators, who will make it their business to see that Turkey obtains fair play in her present hour of need. Russia, too, would have nothing to gain if Turkey and Bulgaria were at each other's throats. It would therefore appear that no serious obstacles stand in the way of concerted action on the part of the Powers to end the existing situation of perilous tension in the Balkans. Delay in matters of this kind is always dangerous, particularly so in this case. The firebrands in Sofia are liable to get

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the bit between their teeth at any moment, and the curb must be promptly applied in the shape of a firmly worded Note, warning them that a trespass on Turkish territory will be regarded as an act of defiance to the European Concert. There is, of course, another side to the question. There is a very strong probability that a powerful, well-governed, independent Bulgaria would do more to settle the vexed Balkan problem than a century of the half-hearted diplomacy which has so frequently brought Europe to the verge of war over this same question. Certain it is that Bulgaria has given the world good evidence of her ability to take care of herself, and it is not unlikely that Turkey, making the best of a bad job, will signify her willingness to abide by Prince Ferdinand's declaration of independence,—at least until more settled home affairs leave her hands free to settle outstanding claims.

GENERAL NEWS.

NEWS FROM ENGLAND.

A MAMMOTH PROTEST.

(From our London correspondent.)

To Mr. Asquith, still smarting under the blow of the Newcastle election, the vast demonstration against the Licensing Bill, for which he is mainly responsible, held in London last Sunday week, must have been anything but palatable. The Radical journals make much capital out of the fact that the fares of most of the demonstrators were paid for them, but it was impossible not to be struck by the unanimity of the vast crowds that surged round the numerous platforms erected in Hyde Park.

London, on a Sunday, is usually the most desolate of cities. One wonders what has become of its teeming population, so deserted are the main thoroughfares. But on the occasion in question all this was altered. From each of the great railway termini were marching towards Hyde Park long processions of men, eight in a row, accompanied by numerous strident brass bands. From Kilburn, Southwark, Kensington, and Chelsea came other still longer processions formed of Londoners, anxious to join their provincial colleagues in protest against the Bill which is so objectionable to brewers, publicans and, be it admitted, to thousands of other people who have no actual connection with the liquor traffic. It was intended that all the processions should have entered the Park by half-past-four, but, admirable as the arrangements were, the resolutions had been put and carried and numbers were leaving when one of the largest of the processions, formed of demonstrators from the north of England who had been travelling all night, was slowly filing past the Marble Arch on its way to the northern platforms. Mere numbers are always imposing, and while there were 75,000 people

in the processions, at least four times that number went to make up the vast crowd that filled the eastern half of Hyde Park. London is fortunate in having so large an arena for crowds of this sort to collect in, and still more fortunate in that the temper of her crowds is proverbially good. Granted that the vast majority of Sunday's multitude was of the same mind, its cheerful good humour was most striking, and the unusually large number of police on duty had a very easy task, since as far as could be seen there was no rowdyism, and the protestants had at least abstained from practical demonstration of their regard for the liquor traffic. Only at one point was there any "booming." The prohibitionist society speakers, with commendable pluck, had set up their banner in a corner of the Park and were advocating the total prohibition of the sale of alcoholic drinks, the while the manufacturers of these drinks or, as one speaker called them, the "hired varlets of the brewers," were pouring in their thousands into the Park.

It may, perhaps, after all be doubted whether such gatherings as Sunday's protest meeting advance their object much. Certain it is that the Government's large majority in the Lower House will not be scared by such a demonstration, and in deference to the demands of the "Nonconformist conscience," will vote as one man for a Bill that many of them cordially dislike. But it is equally certain that the House of Lords will decline to pass the Bill as drafted, and will not be a consenting party to any Bill in which the time limit is put so low as 14 years; and Sunday's great demonstration may well be cited in defence of their action. Licensing Bills have been fatal ere now to Liberal Governments. It may be, therefore, that history will repeat itself, and Mr. Asquith be forced to appeal to the country after stirring up the opposition of that enormously influential body, the brewers and licensed victuallers. None the less, for these latter the evil day will be only postponed. The blow, less violent, perhaps, but for all that a blow, will fall some day. It is more than expedient, it is essential that the British Government should regain control of the liquor traffic; licenses have been granted in many districts out of all proportion to the population in these districts, and many of these licenses must be extinguished. But to do this without compensating their holders, who invested their capital in the public-house business in all good faith, reads too much like robbery and spoliation to the nation at large. But there is a *via media*, and a Bill providing moderate compensation after a reasonable time limit would commend itself to all fair-minded people, unsatisfactory as it might seem to the extremists, those pecuniarily interested in the liquor traffic and the temperance fanatics.

PRESENT-DAY SMUGGLING.

(From our London correspondent.)

According to the annual report of the Customs Commissioners, the practice of smuggling dutiable goods into the United Kingdom is a real "decaying industry." Last year, to the end of March 1908, the total seizures of all kinds numbered 4,926, against 5,497 in the preceding twelve months. As usual, the majority of the attempts to baffle the vigilance of the lynx-eyed Customs officers were made with tobacco and cigars. The seizures included 661lb., 101lb., and 146lb. of tobacco, and 120lb. of cigars, at Colchester, Dublin, Goole, and Glasgow respectively. Another favourite article with the smuggler is saccharin, on which there is a high duty. There were five seizures of this commodity, amounting in all to 371lb. Evasions of the Merchandise Marks Acts, which also came under the purview of the Customs, were, however, more numerous than in the preceding year. There were 1,631 detentions, against 1,479. Of these 629 consignments were allowed to pass as imported, 804 were delivered on the removal or qualification of the marks, 180 were sent back again, and 18 were detained (as against nine in the previous year). The last-named batch included ten cases of infringement of British trade marks. Among the other instances were felt hats from Italy marked "London manufacture," and spirits in bottle marked "Old Scotch Whisky."

The Customs payments into the Exchequer were £32,490,000, a comparative decrease from the previous year of £625,000, due mainly to the abolition of the coal duty.

(Continued on page 2.)