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The British Political Situation.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE ST. PAUL'S PORT-NIGHTLY CLUB BY MISS M.D. CLARKE.

Since April last we have heard a great deal about David Lloyd George and the British Budget and as the elections of the last few weeks in Great Britain have been the result of that Budget perhaps it would be well for us to learn who is Lloyd George and what is the Budget.

David Lloyd George is a Welshman who first came to public notice by leading a local popular revolt against the bigotry of a village Anglican clergyman. He was the spokesman of the non-conformist party and even crossed swords with the great Gladstone in a fight over Church discipline.

Then came the Boer war, when a series of tragic disasters lowered the prestige of England all over the world; but on the other hand roused that bull dog tenacity which Englishmen always reveal in a tight place.

Lloyd George spoke time and again deriding the incompetency of the British Generals and their ignorance in not truly estimating the strength of the Boer enemy. For a while he was the most hated man in England, and so it was assumed that he would find himself out of place in the responsibilities of office in a Liberal government, but the side of his character was revealed when his chance came.

That chance was when the Board of Trade was given to his care. For years this department had been in the hands of easy going men, content to let British trade go its own way. Lloyd George began immediately to do things. One was the compelling of foreign manufacturers to allow England to share the benefits of their patents, but his greatest achievement was the prevention of a disastrous strike in the railway world. For some weeks everybody was affrighted by the prospect of a struggle in which commerce and travel would be paralyzed and millions of money would be lost forever. But Lloyd George brought the two parties together and by great efforts an agreement was made honorable to masters and men.

Then came the death of Campbell Bannerman, the Liberal prime minister, the promotion of Asquith to the premiership and the rise of Lloyd George to the office left vacant by Asquith, Chancellor of the Exchequer. But the Board of Trade was a small office compared with the guardianship of the finances of the Empire, and success in the minor part did not necessarily mean success in the greater, and moreover it was a time when the finances of England required a master hand.

Old age pensions had been created by Lloyd George's predecessor, but it was Lloyd George who had to foot the bill. The estimated cost of this scheme was far too low and the sum actually needed proved to be \$35,000,000.

Then the scare created with regard to Germany swept through England like a prairie fire, with the result that the building of new Dreadnaughts became a necessity for any party that did not care to be overwhelmed by public wrath. This compelled Lloyd George, one of the most resolute enemies of war and of war-like expenditure, to provide for the construction first of four and then of eight new Dreadnaughts, each costing \$10,000,000.

The result was that he had to face a deficit of not less than \$80,000,000, and it was

clear that some new method of taxation must be found to fill up this yawning void.

Such was the task which confronted this man, who, a short time before, had been simply a provincial lawyer in small practice. It was not strange, therefore, that when he stood up to propose his first Budget, the crowded audience in the House of Commons was almost dizzy with something of the same feeling as that of a crowd which sees a man swinging from a window sill, 300 feet above the pavement, and momentarily expects him to fall.

Lloyd George's first step was an easy one. He provided for \$15,000,000 of the deficit by partially arresting the redemption of the national debt. But he still had \$95,000,000 to find.

Today in England, there are two different schemes for raising taxation. The Conservative party desires to establish the American system of raising revenue by a tariff, and incidentally protecting English industries thereby.

The Liberal party is in favour of free trade in the most absolute form, and against a tariff in any shape.

What Lloyd George had to do then was to justify the Liberal free trade doctrine, and to prove that additional taxation could be raised without resorting to a tariff. In other words the budget became a battle ground between the free traders and protectionists.

So Lloyd George looked for additional taxation to the liquor traffic, wealth and land.

The Liberal party had long made war upon the liquor sellers seeking to diminish their number and to drive them out of business. The Conservatives, on the other hand, have been their ardent defenders. Two years ago the Liberals brought in a measure that would have compelled the extinction of a large number of saloons. After a stormy passage through the House of Commons the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords.

The Liberals realized that they could effect nothing by legislation against the liquor traffic, and accordingly looked about for some other method of approaching the question. Lloyd George found it in the Budget and established a scale of license duties, which, for the first time, would make the liquor trade pay in proportion to the real value of the monopoly granted it to the state, and also imposed an extra 94c. per gallon on spirits, and an extra 16c. per lb. on unmanufactured tobacco.

The second object Lloyd George attacked in the Budget was the wealth of the very rich. For the first time, he instituted a super-tax, that is to say, an income tax which should become high in proportion to the amount of the income. For the future the rate on earned income above \$10,000 and on all unearned income is to be raised from 5 to 6 cents on the dollar.

A man with an income of \$25,000 was to pay the ordinary tax like every one else; but when his income went beyond that figure he had to pay a higher percentage.

There was also a large increase in the duties payable on property after death. In future an estate over \$25,000 would pay 4%, over \$50,000, 5%; over 100,000, 6%; and so on until estate of over 5,000,000 would pay 15%.

The third portion of the Budget, the land clauses, is the one next to the liquor clauses, which accounts for the Lords rejection of the bill.

The land clauses are mainly two, the first is a tax of one cent on each five dollars on undeveloped land, this applies to land outside towns which is kept from coming into the market for building purposes in the expectation of a rise in the price.

The second land tax was the one created the most opposition. It meant the entrance into taxation of a great, far reaching, and novel principle, the principle known as the tax on unearned increment. When the land increases in value because the neighborhood becomes more populous or the surrounding properties more valuable by real-estate development, by immigration, by rising birth-rate, that increase is known as unearned increment in land values. The owner is not the creator of these increased values. They are not due to his energy, foresight or perseverance, nor to his labour expended on the land, nor to changes and improvements which he has conducted.

On this unearned increment Lloyd George put a tax to split up the great ancestral landed estates.

The stamp duties on transfer or sale of property, on bond to bearer, and on transactions in shares were increased. Motor cars to be taxed at rates from \$10.50 on a car under six horse power, and the tax on gasoline increased to 6cts per gallon.

The financial resolutions which made up this Budget Bill passed the House of Commons last May and the Bill was sent up to the House of Lords:

The wealthy, hereditary Lords owning 1-5 of the land, the Established Church and the brewers and distillers combined with them, saw how the increased taxation affect them more than the poorer classes of society.

Since then for more than six months there have been momentous discussion in both House of Parliament and throughout the country, which culminated in the rejection of the Budget Bill by the House of Lords with a majority of 275 on the last November.

Convention and tradition forbids the House of Lords to alter a money bill, but in this case when the bill affected them and their interests so strongly, it was thrown out.

The Lords themselves deny that they have rejected the financial measures, holding in the words of Lord Lansdowne, that they were not justified in giving their consent to the budget, until it had been submitted to the judgment of the country.

The British public however declined to make this fine distinction, and their summing up of the situation was, "The Lords have rejected Lloyd George's Budget."

Following this vote in the Upper House the commons debated the Premier's resolution, that the action of the House of Lords in refusing to pass into law the financial promade by this Chamber, for the expenses of the year is a breach of the constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the House of Commons, and concurred in it by a vote of 349 to 134.

Immediately upon the approval of this resolution, Mr. Asquith announced that the government had advised King Edward to dissolve Parliament, and the King had agreed. The Premier added, "If the Liberals are returned to power the first action of the government will be the reenactment of all the taxes for which provisions was made in the Budget rejected by the House of Lords."

On December 3rd, the second parliament of King Edward was prorogued, and early in January dissolution was ordered and the writs issued for the new elections.

At the moment of dissolution the ministerial Liberal majority over all in the House was 332.

The four leading questions on which the British voter had to express his opinion were:

- I. The right of the Lords to modify or interfere with financial legislation.
- II. The specific tax provisions in the present budget.
- III. Higher taxation of property versus tariff reform.
- IV. The expansion of the social reform program of the Liberal party.

The polling began Jan. 15th and the results up to Jan. 23rd were the election of:

- Unionists 264.
- Liberals 264.
- Laborites 39.
- Nationalists 78.

One of the surprising features of the election was the Unionists gain of 124 seats.

So it is seen that the elections have resulted in a very precarious life for the government, which can only live by a combination of Liberals, Laborites and Nationalists.

The Nationalists are opposed to Free trade but because of the Liberal Home Rule policy will stand by the government, and the government will also get the support of the Laborites because of the new National Labor Exchanges which were opened Feb. 1st.

In this way both Nationalists and Laborites recognize that their particular interests are so involved with those of the Liberal party, that much may be sacrificed for the sake of carrying through a common program.

This coalition should have a majority of 120 in the new house, with the London Times admitting that the electorate is not yet strongly enough in favour of Tariff Reform

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The undersigned offers for sale his handsome and convenient residence with freehold property on Victoria street, containing 17 rooms and heated by hot water, set tubs. The house is lighted by electricity and has all modern improvements. For further particulars apply to DR. I. W. N. BAKER, Woodstock, N. B.

to make legislation along those lines desirable, and the Westminster Gazette, on its side, confessing that there has been no popular mandate to justify riding rough-shod over the privileges of the House of Lords, a way out is hard to find.

The situation is difficult, but the British people have managed their own affairs for some centuries, and we may hope, when Parliament meets on the 21st of Feb. that they have not lost the art of solving difficulties.

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Dressed pigs and hogs, any weight, fat cattle and veal, fat sheep, lambs, ducks, geese, chickens, butter and turkeys. Imperial Packing Co., Limited, Woodstock, N. B.

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Tenders will be received up to and including 31st January for 12 cords of Four Foot Green Hard Wood to be delivered at the County Jail by the 20th February 1910. Tenders marked "Tenders for Wood" will be received by the undersigned.

HENRY A. PHILLIPS, Woodstock. Jan. 15th 1910. 2i.

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