

## Pointed Paragraphs

SOME few nights ago the writer was awakened by strange sounds. In the impressive quiet of the night that which at other times attracts little notice seems clothed in mystery and endowed for the time with the diabolic property of causing fear in the breast of innocence itself. I could never account for this peculiarity which seems to accompany the most common-place things but on the occasion referred to there may surely be some excuse for uneasiness of mind. Like Æneas aroused in the solemn gloom of the night by a host of gibbering Penates about his bed GELIDUS TOTO MANABAT CORPORE SUDOR but otherwise the two incidents had little in common. They were not altogether discordant were those sounds—indeed it seemed as if the strings of human passion were swept by artful fingers. Now they arose and now they fell and gradually died away, when suddenly a thrill of exultation would issue forth like the first shrill note of the bagpipes. At length they ceased. What could it be? Next morn I arose determined to investigate, when lo! the ubiquitous and meddlesome press robbed me the satisfaction of detailing the harrowing memories of the night. It was Lloyd-George and Winston Churchill simultaneously addressing monarchs of the ballot in distant Albion.

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The House of Lords it appears was the subject of discussion. Lloyd-George was discussing Lords before the borderers of Northumberland and Churchill was dwelling on some of their peculiarities before the cotton-spinners of Lancashire. Whether or not the seen-lightened electors grasped the minute distinctions of

constitutional prerogative thus placed before them I am unable to determine, but they were at least emphatic in their approval. As we go to press however, the venerable pre-budget institution known as the House of Lords still rises from the Thames embankment. The latest cable dispatches also assure us that a few of the more courageous of its late occupants are still above ground though doubtless ere this many have hied them to their well-appointed cyclone cellars in the country. When the ebullitionists of British politics shall have finished their work a lord will be a RARA AVIS.

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But what is this that is ruffling the temper of the usually stolid Englishman? The right of the Lords to reject a budget has not heretofore been questioned, else why the formality of presenting budgets from year to year for their approval? Logically the necessity for consent implies the prerogative of dissent. The approval of the King is also necessary for a finance bill to become law, but what if he should refuse it as he is in conscience bound to do if he deems the measure subversive of social order? Would it be repetition of 1688 or of 1649? The old formula "Be it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty by and with the consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal" will feel somewhat embarrassed in future when it becomes its duty to introduce a measure of this kind. The trouble with the House of Lords seems to be that it is of little use when not in harmony with the House of Commons and of no use when it is.

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The Lord Chancellor speaking some days ago on the resolution of Lord Lansdowne remarked that the Lords in rejecting the budget were act-



ing legally but unconstitutionally. Since every law not formally repealed or at least formally ignored is part of the Constitution we must conclude from this that the historic fount of liberty is in peculiar difficulty. We are assured that every house divided against itself must fall, but we hope this does not apply to Constitutions. Euclid also assures us that the whole is greater than its part but despite this disparity of rank we have always been of the opinion that they were on the friendliest terms.

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The trouble with the Constitution seems to be that it needs definition. In the evolution of society certain constitutional usages necessarily become obsolete and others doubtful, but in England they cannot be said to suffer from "over-classification" in this regard. The British Constitution is a gigantic tree planted ages past and nurtured in its infancy by feudalism. Its roots are ineradicably fixed but its branches need pruning. There should be nothing decayed or rotten about it. But the fact is that many of the unrepealed penal enormities of British legislation can be invoked at any time fanaticism may demand it. A case occurred less than two years ago and what is to prevent a repetition? If the British people did not intend that the Lords should make use of the prerogative of rejecting a budget they should not have left it with them. In England as elsewhere laws and usages that have become obsolete should be labelled.

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But despite the anomalous character of an hereditary legislative body as judged by modern standards we confess that we are not prepared to attack FERRO FLAMMAQUR the heirloom of centuries in the political

system of Old England. It at least commands the respect due to old age and heroic achievement in different times, but if both these reasons were wanting the character and capacity of many of its members invite our respectful consideration. Doubtless the majority of them owe their nobility to circumstances over which they had no control, but the observer who takes note of the attainments of some of those men in arts, science, letters, economies, philosophy, statesmanship, must acknowledge the House of Lords to be a compendium of the brains of Great Britain and Ireland. We have no quarrel with the Commons for seeing to it that the second chamber is deprived of its hereditary character and shorn of its irresponsibility. This may possibly be accompanied by a campaign of class-prejudice but the pyrotechnics just now being shot off by Loyd-George, Churchill, Hardie et al. may work injury to the Constitutional fabric whose inviolability so much concerns them.

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Responsible Government is a term often met with in histories. Whatever idea the term is supposed to convey we are assured that we are in the full enjoyment of that for which it stands, that our ancestors at a more or less remote epoch bartered blood and revolution for it and passed it on entire to their offspring. The newest schoolmaster can speak earnestly and at length on the merits of this costly article and the politician—well, he at least convinces us that we are in a large measure responsible for the kind of government we have. But there is never a doubt as to our actual possession of it. Still responsible government after all must be self-government, or in the concrete a government responsible to the governed for its every act. A legislative system which is elective only in

part is only in part responsible. In this country the Senate cannot be said to be a responsible body. The Senator gets no mandate — on the contrary he is often a repeatedly rejected candidate for a seat in the Commons. And once a Senator always a Senator—dedicated *USQUE AD MORTEM* to divorce suits and holidays. There can be no reason why legislators should not be wholly responsible except on the principle that the people cannot be trusted to govern themselves, or that responsible government is not after all desirable. In England the members of the Second Chamber are for the most part like poets in that they are born not made ; in the United States they are for the most part chosen and controlled by private interests and in Canada they are altogether chosen by the party executive in pursuance of a well established system of pensions for infirm or rejected politicians. If the House of Lords owed its existence to popular choice there would be no Constitutional crisis in the Old Country.

