

BRITAIN'S FREE TRADE POOR

The United Kingdom Compelled to Care for 1,317,104 Pauperized Subjects.

VITAL PROBLEM BEFORE HER STATESMEN

Chamberlain Now Advocating a System of Old Age Pensions to Spare Honest and Industrious Citizens the Humiliation of the Workhouse.

BIRMINGHAM, England, Sept. 23.—(Special Correspondence.)—If I should be asked who among contemporary British statesmen has the most political vitality, the answer would undoubtedly be Joseph Chamberlain.

In this answering I do not necessarily endorse Mr. Chamberlain's views, either economically or politically. This series of letters if they are to be of interest and of permanent value must reflect the many views of many European intellects. They must set forth without prejudice and with judicial fairness the tendency of European thought on the great political problem which the minds of those who lead in some cases may find European countries grappling with problems similar to those we are dealing with at home and hence learn much of value in the experiences of other states. To what extent the consideration of popular cures for poverty and schemes for pensioning everyone in old age may appeal to American statesmen is a large question, depends upon how long the folly of the present administration will be permitted to continue. Today in Great Britain and continental Europe these questions seem to take precedence of all other questions in the present of wealth; steady industry in branches; decrease in the army of actual producers; limitation of the markets of the world; lessening of the demand for labor in industry in which England was once supreme; the ever growing army of unemployed and the accumulated vengefulness of latter day competition literally compel the British statesman to turn to the state for aid in the never-ending struggle of the survival of the fittest, for the care of those who get left in the race.

But there is the British poor house. Every English subject has a right to end his days there. At the present time, of the working classes, one in two, if he reaches the age of 60, is almost certain to come upon the poor law for his subsistence. This annual cost of this institution is between \$45,000,000 and \$50,000,000. To the average mind a sum exceeding by \$15,000,000 or \$20,000,000 the annual interest on our national debt would seem to be sufficient for relieving the poor and indigent. Not so. In spite of this enormous outlay the suffering and poverty as old age creeps on is so great in the United Kingdom that the most brilliant and far-seeing statesmen are studying all available data in the hope of finding some additional method of relieving the old and indigent without still further pauperizing the population.

RIGHT HON. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN.

In this endeavor I find Mr. Chamberlain taking an advanced position. During my stay in Birmingham I had an opportunity of discussing this question one afternoon with him in his home at Highbury, and in the course of that conversation I learned much that surprised and interested me. Few people at home realize how seriously British statesmen are discussing state aid for old age. It is practically today the leading new proposition in Mr. Chamberlain's budget. He puts it forward in all his speeches in such a manner that the working classes are greatly attracted and he is rapidly winning back his old following. In Birmingham this remarkable man

is as absolute as in the days when he was looked upon as the natural successor of Mr. Gladstone. Those who are his admirers who do not agree with his opposition to home rule for Ireland say that he sacrificed the premiership for a principle which he believed in. In the United Kingdom they have forgiven him. His tremendous services to the municipality of Birmingham cannot be erased. The Chamberlain memorial is a slight testimonial of his courage, energy and masterfulness in dealing with local affairs. In the United Kingdom Chamberlain gained strength by refusing to follow Mr. Gladstone in his Irish policy. John Bright was an anti-home ruler. He had followers in Birmingham, which Mr. Chamberlain never controlled until his attitude on this question brought them into the fold.

"Have you a volume of Mr. Chamberlain's speeches?" I said of a somewhat demure young woman in the leading book seller's of Birmingham.

In a moment a volume was laid before me, but I at once noticed it ante-dated his political changes.

"This volume," I said, "was published before the Liberal split."

"Before Mr. Chamberlain's reformation, if you please, sir," was the respectful reply.

The old John Bright following Mr. Chamberlain are more strongly attached to Mr. Chamberlain than ever. They laugh at the idea of Joseph Chamberlain having gone over to the conservatives and regard with much indignation the imputation that he would accept a title and a peerage. He is as much the Chamberlain as ever. He may even go into a conservative cabinet, and from what I heard probably will, but in that event he is understood to be a mixed cabinet and not an entirely conservative one.

It is as if it may be the great Birmingham leader in the English political arena. He has already made three great speeches during the vacation and more are to follow. These speeches are directed to the British workman and the general idea which pervades them all is parliament has done enough for the Irish tenant and the time has come to help the English. To pass such legislation as the old age pension act and generally to extend state socialism, for that Mr. Chamberlain frankly admits he is a British politician. He argues the government is loaning money on Irish land to help the poor tenant of Ireland against the landlords, why not do the same for the old and pension the victims of low wages and cheap goods. This is logical and to a nation so thoroughly accustomed as England to

the "House" as a final refuge for old age, a thoroughly practical idea. Mr. Chamberlain's scheme, as he was good enough to explain to me, is not as far-reaching as some of the proposals now before the public backed by powerful and able economists and statesmen. It may be said, however, to hold out the prospect of a new method of social reformers have taken up this fascinating economic subject and in the orthodox English fashion a committee of peers and M. P.'s were appointed to investigate and prepare a scheme. There were almost a dozen such committees, but the skillful touch of the radical leader rounded the sharp edges, welded together a plan and drafted the necessary bill.

OLD AGE AND THE WORK HOUSE.

"I find," said Mr. Chamberlain, with great earnestness, "that while the British workman realizes the fact that he may die before the allotted time and that he may meet with an accident, or be laid up by illness, he does not seem to appreciate the fact that he may live beyond the wage-earning period. The working classes insure their lives and pay enormous sums annually into accident and sick fund associations. It is, however, most difficult to get them to provide for old age. As a consequence one out of every five of the industrial population of this kingdom who live to the end of their days in the work house. They deserve a better fate. It is nonsense to suppose that the aged and infirm should be put in the workhouse to die, which I regret to say, under existing circumstances, is inevitably in store for them. To prevent this I propose and shall urge a measure which will provide for a workingman's widow and young children in case of premature death and an annuity or pension in case he lives and is unable to work by reason of old age or infirmity. This measure will be of great benefit to the aged and infirm, and will also be of great benefit to the state, as it will save the cost of maintaining them in the workhouse."

SICK RELIEF SOCIETIES.

On the continent state insurance to provide for sickness and old age has been the headway. In Germany it was an easy matter as the basis on which to build already existed in the compulsory membership of sick relief societies. The law of 1883 provided that a laborer must compulsorily become a member of a local sick fund, a factory sick fund, a building sick fund, or a trade sick fund. The law of 1884-85, Prince Bismarck stating that the state should monopolize the entire scheme of insurance and old age, which was put into operation at the beginning of 1891, and has since been carried out in the whole of the provinces.

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ratio of paupers to population, if on the average it is 45 per cent, will be for those from 10 to 40 (the natural age of the population of life) less than a per cent, but that for those between 40 and 65 the rate will rise to about 10 per cent. Mr. Booth maintains that probably nearly 25 per cent. Mr. Booth maintains that at least 30 per cent of the old who die have pauper relief during the closing years of their lives.

Should Mr. Booth's scheme of universal pension gain ground we may expect to hear the demand for "state pensions" in the kingdom. To be sure, such a luxury will come for England and Wales, £17,000,000 (£12,750,000 for Scotland and £4,250,000 for Ireland over 14,000,000 (£13,450,000). This without reckoning in working expenses, but calculating on the supposition that all aged persons who live to the end of their lives will draw their pension. A total of nearly £20,000,000 for old age pensions will seem even to our American statesmen a good round sum to add forever, as it were, to the national budget. A sum which may increase, but, unlike our pensions for union soldiers, cannot well diminish.

Such seem to be the social necessities of the times in England. You hear leadingly in the States of the man of the party who solved the question of old age, maintained his family, has been a good citizen, from going in his old age to the workhouse, deserves more glory than by winning battles on the field.

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