

DO THE GOVERNMENT MEAN BUSINESS?

NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET.

AS IT MIGHT BE.

BY ARTHUR WITHEY.

"Do the Government mean business? Do they intend to redeem their pledges? Or are they merely fooling the people, and playing off one advanced wing of their supporters against the other?" are questions which have undoubtedly suggested themselves with more or less persistence to every Liberal and to every Radical who does his own thinking, instead of putting it out to be done for him as he does his washing. And it is no use blinking the fact that the manner in which the Ministry has conducted the business of the country has caused many stalwarts to recognise, however unwillingly, that the Government do not mean business, that they do not intend to redeem their pledges, and that they are fooling the democracy, and are betraying their trust.

Lord Rosebery's recent coquetting with the idea of a Second Chamber, and his perfunctory reply to the deputation that waited upon him with regard to the payment of members, have by no means tended to weaken that conviction. With regard to the first, a Second Chamber must either agree with or oppose the will of the people. In the one case it would be about as useful as a fifth wheel to a coach, and in the other it would be not only useless, but dangerous. No man, therefore, who trusts the democracy will advocate a Second Chamber; and Lord Rosebery must be sanguine indeed if he expects the people to continue their confidence in those who practically state in so many words that they do not trust the people. It is also mere bunkum to state that it would be unconstitutional to introduce payment of members by a clause in the Budget. Was the Constitution made for the people, or were the people made for the Constitution? And what is the Constitution, anyway, that it should be allowed to stand in the way of much-needed reforms? If the Constitution does stand in the way, so much the worse for the Constitution. Does Lord Rosebery, or does any sane man, for one moment imagine that any Constitution, however old it may be, and however many of the mistakes of our ancestors it may embody, will be allowed to stand for ever between the people and their rights? The fact is that the refusal of the Government to include payment of members in the Budget will inevitably be attributed to a desire that the House of Lords may have a chance of rejecting the measure, so that the Ministry may turn round and say, "Oh, yes, we were perfectly willing to give you payment of members, good people; but (aside, "Heaven be praised") the House of Lords has thrown out the bill."

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Radicals were much annoyed at the failure of the Government during the past two sessions to suppress mere idle and unblushingly obstructive verbosity, and also at the fact that the measures, even as drafted by the Government, were nothing like so radical as the people, trusting to their election pledges, had a right to expect; and it is absolutely certain that unless the Ministry show much better form during the forthcoming session they may as well not take the trouble to go to the poll at the next election.

Now, the Budget is obviously their only hope. Next year's Budget is the touchstone which will decide once for all whether the Government mean business, and whether their pledges were given in good faith. Other measures can be foiled by the House of Lords, and thus it is always open to "our friends the enemy" to say that the Government thanks Heaven that there is a Second Chamber to reject bills which they introduce merely as a means of gulling the public and securing their hold on the Treasury Bench, but with no wish that they shall become law. To the Budget, however, the Lords can only say "Yea" or "Nay"; and say "Nay" they dare not, for were they to reject a really Radical Budget they would thereby seal their own fate.

Now, with regard to the Budget, the Government stands pledged to four great reforms—the payment of members, the payment of election expenses, the abolition of the breakfast-table duties, and the taxation of the land values. Judged by this test, Sir William Harcourt's two previous Budgets are miserable failures, and no valid excuse is open to him. The Budget of 1892—"the penny-in-the-slot Budget," as it was called—merely put an extra penny on the income tax, and that of 1893 simply put an extra 6d on beer and spirits; and while professing to readjust the discrepancy between the taxation of realty and personalty, Sir William Harcourt, instead of taxing land values, actually reduced the proportion of taxation payable by ground landlords. In the House of Commons the Chancellor of the Exchequer, after pointing out that his Budget relieved landlords, under Schedule A of the Income Tax, to the extent of £600,000 per annum, said, referring to the death duties, that "£350,000 or £400,000 per annum is the sum asked from the landed interests of Great Britain and Ireland as their contribution to the defence of the country, and to place their taxation upon an equality with that of other classes and interests."

It is not too much to say that another such Budget will absolutely kill the Government's chances at the next election, whereas a good straight Budget, with a clear issue against the Lords and no nonsensical shilly-shally about a Second Chamber, will as certainly secure their triumphant return to power.

The Government, as I have said before, is pledged to the hilt to the payment of members, the payment of election expenses, the abolition of the breakfast-table duties, and the taxation of land values. Now, there is at present supposed to be a tax of 4s in the £1 on land values, but being levied on the values of 1692—even then under-assessed—instead of upon the values of 1894, the tax brings in, not £32,000,000 or £40,000,000—the rental value of the lands of the United Kingdom is estimated by the Financial Reform Association and other authorities at from £162,000,000 to £200,000,000—but a paltry £1,050,000! No Chancellor of the Exchequer worth his salt would hesitate to make this ghost of a tax a reality at 4s in the £1 on present values, which would mean that he could relieve the labour and capital of the country of an annual burden of from £32,000,000 to £40,000,000 per annum. If, however, Sir William Harcourt has not got the grit necessary for so bold a move, he might, at least, impose a tax of 1s in the £1 on present land values. By so doing he would net a revenue of from £8,000,000 to £10,000,000, and could then readily include in his Budget clauses for the payment of members, the payment of election expenses, and the abolition of the breakfast-table duties, besides going some distance in the direction of old age pensions.

All these reforms would be immensely popular, and the beneficial effect of the taxation of the land values would at once be felt, for the tax being levied on the full annual value of the land, whether the land were put to use or not, the 18,000,000 acres of land now held out of use would be forced into the market, and the agricultural labourers would be able to obtain land for allotments on reasonable terms. The effect of this may be gauged by the returns obtained on Lord Carrington's estates, where it is found that a man renting five acres at the same rate as the farmers can clear from 26s to 30s per week, as against an average wage for agricultural labourers of from 9s to 15s per week. This higher standard would quickly become the minimum wage throughout the country, and the conditions of labour both in town and country would be greatly improved, since no man would work for another for longer hours, for lower wages, or under worse conditions than he need work for himself on the land. Prices also would be lower, for a tax of from £8,000,000 to £10,000,000 would be taken off the cost of production. "Vote for the Liberals; higher wages and lower prices," could not be beaten as an election cry; while as for the Tories, what would be the chances at the next election of any man who dared to vote against such a Budget? The stronger the Budget, the better the Government's chances.

With a tax of 4s in the £1 on land values, instead of one of 1s in the £1, the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be able to give four times the relief to labour and capital, and such a tax would, therefore, be four times more popular; while if the "House of Landlords" dared to throw out the Budget, they themselves would soon afterwards be thrown out.

If the Government mean business, they will introduce some such Budget as I have outlined above. If not, they are no friends of ours.

By the Way.

The Hon. Judge James G. Maguire has been re-elected to the U.S. Congress by 5,400 of a majority—thrice the majority he received when he was first returned two years ago.

Nearly 100,000 copies of his famous speech on the Single Tax in the Congress have been circulated throughout the U.S.

A correspondent in the *Glasgow Echo* wants a Taxation Reform Committee started. The Single Tax Rooms at 45 Montrose Street are always open, where, through it, the only taxation reform worth having keeps pace with excellent organization.

"TOO GOOD TO KEEP."—We glean the following from the private letter of a young lady of Arkansas City, Kan., dated October 10, 1894:—"One of the intelligent Republicans was down here telling how he objected to the stuff that Socialist, Henry George, teaches, etc. Uncle asked the gentleman if he had read Mr. George's books, to which he replied that he had. Uncle then asked what books of Mr. George's he had read, and he said, 'Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea,' which nearly took our breath away. We all had a good laugh, and I said I was going to write that to Mr. S., for it was too good to keep."

A well-known Hamilton Single Taxer, Mr. J. Short, has been elected over three other candidates to the position of miners' agent for Burnbank.

FREEDOM AND SOCIALISM. — "Freedom," writes an English correspondent, "is, in truth, the primal condition of both development and contentment, as it is the one essential of social justice. But it is just this one truth which our Socialist friends—who seem to have as honest an aversion to the full recognition and acceptance of any principle as the most bigoted Tories—will not recognise. Hence their belief in coercion as the royal road to freedom."

In a recent address, which has been published by request, to the Glasgow Central Liberal Association, Mr. James Caldwell, M.P., says the following resolution on the Lords should be moved in Parliament next session:—"That, in the opinion of this House, the existence of the House of Lords as one of the Three Estates of the Realm and Constitution is inconsistent with the principle of equality—that all men ought to be equal in the State and before the Law—and with the maintenance of the supreme power of the people in the State and that the House of Lords ought accordingly to be abolished."

The Scottish Liberal Association have just issued a useful explanatory leaflet on "Parish Councils: What they are, and what they are going to do." Copies and other information re the 1894 Local Government (Scotland) Act can be had at the Offices, 71 Princes Street, Edinburgh; or 56 George Square, Glasgow.

Mr. Norman McLeman, Hon. Secretary of the Scottish Land Restoration Union, is now quite convalescent.

Mr. Arthur Withy has been lecturing the Portsmouth Debating Society on "Individualism v. Socialism." Mr. Withy had a paper worth reading in the November *Westminster Review* on "Pseudo Individualism."

Ask all Candidates for Municipal and Parliamentary Honours this Question—