

# WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH

## The New Ministry.

THE much-desired, long-striven-for, longer-hoped-for fusion of the Liberal party in the Federal Parliament has now been accomplished, and there is an excusable air of jubilation all over that section of the House of Representatives and the Senate, which represents the hopes and aspirations of those electors who are neither in sympathy with the revolutionary principles of the Labour party nor kindly disposed towards the reactionary tendencies of the remnants of old Conservatism.

The Labour party is a growing power. For twenty-five years its growth has been steady and continuous, and to deny the possibility of a continuation of that progress would be crass folly. Mr. Fisher's party, however, is a great fighting party. It wants to fight, and it will fight, and it has the means, and the men, and the money. Consequently there is a struggle before the party as stern as any they have encountered, and the contest must be warmly and earnestly waged if the present success is not to prove merely a flash in the pan.

The weak point of the new Government, as of every previous Federal Government, is the excess of legal talent and the absence of commercial experience. Trade has never received adequate attention in the formation of Ministries. The first Cabinet of Captains was a very qualified success, chiefly because it had only a text-book knowledge of economics and industrial conditions.

The new Ministry is not a gathering of giants. An armada is no stronger than its slowest ship, nor is a Government stronger than its weakest member. Judged from this standpoint, it is better than the Fisher Government, the second Deakin Government, or the Watson Government. But it is not as imposing and effective a combination as the Barton Ministry or the Reid-M'Lean Ministry. Still it is the best the Parliament could produce in the circumstances. Numerically it is the largest on record, and gossips are wondering how the salaries will work out. The Constitution only provides £12,000, and there are nine men to share it, plus the £400 a year they receive as members. The Constitution also stipulates that there shall only be seven Ministers. By implication also the Constitution demands that there shall be only seven paid Ministers. In point of fact, there will be nine, for Mr. Deakin draws the highest salary as Prime Minister, and the Vice-President of the Executive Council also shares in the £12,000.

Take them all, Premier Kidston, of Queensland, is the only Labour leader who has carried on continuous Government for any considerable time, and he has had to cut himself adrift from the Caucus to achieve this. The late Tom Price's party was crumbling to pieces long before his death. Harry Daghlan, the solemn Westralian, soon smashed up, and he also has forsaken the machine. Cris. Watson, the first Federal Labour Prime Minister, is abandoning Parliament for gold dredging, and Andrew Fisher is sitting glumly in Opposition. Altogether it is not a very heartening record.

## Defence.

At last Australia has got its way. The popular voice has been heard, and the Government of the Commonwealth has offered assistance to the Empire. The popular tumult in favour of a Dreadnought has indeed died down. But out of that tumultuous enthusiasm there grew one steadfast resolve—that Australia should show the world and the Empire that she was prepared to

any alternative she pleases. New Zealand, thanks to the churlishness of the Labour Prime Minister, has leg the way; but at last Australia, if tardily, has followed in her footsteps.

While Australians are worrying about naval supremacy, the British Admiralty is quietly protesting Commonwealth interests by strengthening the position of Great Britain in the East. A modest little treaty has been completed with Siam, by which the Admiralty becomes possessed of Lingkane, an island with the only deep water harbour north of Penang. By making this a naval base, Great Britain can close the Straits of Malacca, which shuts up another avenue of attack upon Australia. But the Union still remains open to assault from

in South Australia. Lieutenant Barford, an expert in these matters, thus put the position: Victoria has the Cerberus, arrived in 1871 (out of commission), and five torpedo boats, about 20 years old; New South Wales, no defence vessels of any kind; Queensland, two gunboats and two torpedo boats, all over 20 years old; South Australia, one gunboat and one small torpedo boat, both over 20 years old; West Australia and Tasmania, nil. The richest, best populated continent in the world has no other sea protection than the prestige of the British navy! At the same time, it is going to cost a mint of money to put things straight. The Powerful will be only worth her value as scrap iron in five years' time, while the Admiralty is now offering two battleships, which cost £781,000 and £769,000 respectively only 20 years ago, for sale, because they are little more than floating collars under modern conditions.



"BOBS" WITH HIS HANDS FULL.

General Lord Roberts regrets he cannot visit Australia. He is getting old, he says, and must devote his strength to inducing England to follow Australia's example in training her boys to army.

"Bobs": "Sorry I can't come, Alfred; but I shall have enough to do teaching this stubborn young beggar what you fellows already know."

stand side by side with the old land, ready to shoulder her share of the burden of Empire. New Zealand, at a white heat of enthusiasm, offered one first-class battleship, Australia, having had time to think, has offered a Dreadnought, or whatever else the Imperial navy may need.

Australia can easily afford £2,000,000 for the Empire. She is determined to give help, and in case England does not need any more Dreadnoughts, she has asked the Mother Country to name

the coloured Asiatics in the Far East, and against this menace the only protection is a mighty fleet, Imperial or Australian—or both.

Australian naval defence is in a rather alarming state at present. Machinery has gone wrong with the machinery of the flagship Powerful, and she may have to be taken home to England, thus depriving them of their only good fighting ship. For their 8000 miles of coastline they have only two small gunboats in Queensland, and one gunboat

## The Evil of the Trust.

An additional responsibility has been thrown upon the Australian State Legislatures by the decision of the High Court in the anti-trust cases. Briefly put, the High Court has decided that the Commonwealth Act can only be used against trusts which extend beyond the limits of any one State. The Federal Parliament was expressly deprived of all right to interfere in the internal affairs of the States. It is only when a State matter extends beyond the State, and affects the other partners in the Federation, that the Commonwealth Parliament has power to legislate. All other legislation is ultra vires. No matter how rapacious a trust may be, no matter how defiantly and openly it may infringe the provisions of the Anti-Trust Act, it cannot be dealt with under the Federal law so long as it is contained within one State. All that is worst in the trusts of America can be transplanted into Australia. The abuses of combines may be multiplied upon the American example, but provided that the trusts care to confine themselves to one State at a time, the Commonwealth cannot intervene. They are amenable only to State laws, and so far no State in Australia has attempted to regulate or suppress combines. It is true that the Federal Act gives to the Comptroller-General of Customs an almost unlimited right of inquiry, but the power to ask questions is of no value if the questioned parties are able to reply to suit themselves, well knowing that the only evidence which can bring them within the scope of the Commonwealth law is too well hidden for the Commonwealth Government ever to discover it.

## The Fall of Mann.

Tom Mann's portrait has been removed from the conspicuous position it long occupied in the Barrier Trades' Hall, and placed in an obscure corner out of sight (says "Punch.") How are the mighty fallen. "Mann, proud Mann, dressed in a little brief authority." All too brief. A few weeks ago a population's idol, to-day none too poor to do him reverence; and his pretty picture goes into the dark corner behind the coal scuttle.

When Eve to poor old Adam threw  
That famous crab, quite well  
'Twas known the fall of man was done,  
And Adam promptly fell.  
Yet that was but a mild affair  
In great Creation's plan—  
'Twas really at the Barrier there  
Occurred the fall of Mann!

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