

which the people should be consulted before their final adoption." Between this position and that asserted by Mr. Asquith, when he said that the "absolute veto" of the Lords must be abolished in order that the road may be cleared for the advent of "a full-grown and unfettered democracy," lies the antithesis upon which the vital thought of the country must be centred.

If the question thus presented were bound up with the House of Lords as at present constituted, there could be little doubt of the result; but it is not on this line that the issue is being joined. Not only from the standpoint of democracy, but from the standpoint of efficacy for its own function of conservatism, the House of Lords has at last reached the point where its inappropriateness and shortcomings are universally recognized as calling for far-reaching reforms. The democratic sentiment of the time will not much longer endure the possession by a purely hereditary body of power so substantial as that which the peers now exercise; and, on the other hand, it is seen that a body whose tenure of power rests on so uncertain a basis, a body so subject to subversive agitation, cannot exercise its function with real independence; except in cases of the most extreme kind, it is ready to sacrifice its judgment rather than run the risk of a collision. In this situation, two proposals of opposite character are presented to the consideration of the people. On the part of the Liberals, the country is asked to leave the composition of the House of Lords—at least for the present—unaltered, but to reduce its power to something approaching insignificance; whereas the Conservatives propose to improve the composition of the body by some as yet undefined method which abandons the unqualified principle of heredity, and thereby to make it a more vigorous and more potent Second Chamber. If this plan should be matured in a wise and far-seeing manner, it will make a strong appeal to the conservative instincts of the people of England. As between a reformed and strengthened House of Lords, exercising the function of a check on the House of Commons without being overwhelmingly representative of the landed interests and of one political party, and a House of Lords unreformed but almost impotent, no one can say how many thoughtful Lib-

erals may choose the former alternative.

To Americans, Mr. Asquith's appeal to the idea of a "full-grown and unfettered democracy" may seem to be essentially a call to England to adopt the system obtaining in our own country. But to give the House of Commons almost unchecked predominance, as Mr. Asquith's resolutions propose, would be to introduce a system profoundly different from that in America. Nor is it the existence of the Senate in which that difference lies, for the Senate is, after all, in the main, only a more slowly moving body of representatives; any strong popular movement, sustained for the space of two or three years, is capable of sweeping the Senate, as well as the House and the Presidency, along with it. It is our written Constitution, with its Supreme Court endowed by the Constitution with unparalleled powers in the annulling of legislation, and with its division of authority between the States and the Federal Government, that stands in this country as the great check upon a "full-grown and unfettered democracy." If, indeed, the House of Lords had in practice the "absolute veto" which it has theoretically, and which Mr. Asquith declares it his purpose to abolish, it would, of course, be a more effective barrier against an unrestrained democracy than is our written Constitution; but the unwritten Constitution of England has long reduced the function of the House of Lords to the staving of legislation until the will of the people has been uttered with what all men feel to be unmistakable authority. That, to be sure, is a very great power; but it is not in any true sense an "absolute veto," and it is in many directions not as substantial a barrier to radical change as is our own Constitution. The example of America cannot, therefore, be cited in favor of the emasculation, though it may be invoked in favor of the better lodgment, of the functions of the Second Chamber.

With so fundamental an issue at stake, it must be deplored by all right-minded men, whatever their standpoint, that the parliamentary system offers no guarantee that the question will come before the people for a clear decision on its merits. An inestimable service would be rendered to the cause of parliamentary government if leaders on both sides were to forego all the other questions between the parties and stake

the coming election on this great question alone. It has no connection whatsoever with that other great question, of free trade against protection, which was probably the leading factor in the recent electoral contest; and as for Irish Home Rule, that will take care of itself, because the Irish will vote virtually as a unit against the House of Lords, whether Home Rule is or is not explicitly brought into the canvass. If an understanding could be established that the new House of Commons would not deal with the free-trade question, and that the verdict of the people, whichever way it went, would not be regarded as signifying any preference on this head, a contest could be carried on whose character was worthy of the great question at issue, and whose result might be looked forward to as the true judgment of the nation.

CORPORATIONS AND CONSCIENCE.

Of the making of many problems nowadays there is no end. And of the magnifying of those problems that we have ready-made there is an abundance. In the leading article of the current number of the *Political Science Quarterly*, Mr. Joseph B. Ross discusses seriously and learnedly "The Attitude of Private Conscience Toward Corporate Right." With the natural instinct of the specialist he endeavors by delving far beneath the surface to find the explanation of certain familiar experiences. "The cause," he tells us, "of the misunderstanding and of the consequent antagonism between the industrial or commercial corporation and the public lies very largely in a failure to realize what the corporation actually is." And again: "It seems rather anomalous and difficult of comprehension that a form of industrial organization which universally commends itself to the business world should yet be visited with marked popular opprobrium." Mr. Ross ascribes to the average man a feeling of mystification due to legal elements in the status of the corporation which he knows to be something in the nature of privilege, but of which he can clearly make out neither the basis nor the nature. Of such elements Mr. Ross enumerates many: for instance, "the State has made it possible for the corporation to repudiate its debts by pleading its limited capital stock and the statutory lia-

bility of its stockholders." And in conclusion he declares that "undoubtedly the causes of the misapprehension and of the deep-seated antagonism between American laymen and the private corporation, its directors and its stockholders, lie in the enigmatical personality of the corporation—a personality certainly existing, but not yet arrived at a maturity of its powers nor aware of its profound social obligations."

But, after all is said and done, we do not seem to have got much further than the plain man gets when he harks back to that old dictum of Lord Thurlow's, that a corporation has neither a body to be kicked nor a soul to be damned. And indeed not so far. For, since Lord Thurlow's time, we have advanced a long distance toward the kicking of corporations; and, at the same time, the vast spread of the system over the industrial and commercial world has resulted not in strengthening but in greatly weakening animosity against corporations as such. While there may be a certain mild recognition of the difference in responsibility and responsiveness between a corporation and an individual or a firm, it is doubtful whether one man in a hundred is perceptibly influenced by it either in his sentiment or in his conduct. It is not corporations in general, but two special kinds of corporations against which popular prejudice is arrayed and towards which many individuals feel themselves absolved from the ordinary obligations of conscience. These are public service corporations and corporations which are or are supposed to be of a monopolistic character. And in these cases the reasons for this hostile, or even this unscrupulous, attitude are not far to seek. In the matter of monopoly, the thing speaks for itself; in the case of the public service corporations, we have, in addition to the anti-monopoly sentiment, the feeling, whether well-founded or not, that by illegitimate means they have obtained privileges burdensome to the public. To see how little the idea of the corporation in itself has to do with the matter, one has only to imagine the street railways of New York to have always belonged to Mr. Belmont personally, or the Standard Oil to have been created and owned by Mr. John D. Rockefeller alone. Does any one suppose that public feeling towards either of these establishments would have been more gen-

tle, or that people would harbor any greater sense of obligation to treat them with scrupulous regard for their legal rights?

Of course, the impersonality—partly real and partly apparent—of the corporation does make a great difference in the strictly human side of many relations with it; but this difference is inevitable from the nature of the case, and we shall never, by taking thought get rid of it. It is quite as important to avoid exaggeration of the effect of this circumstance as it is to recognize its existence. Against a corporation as such, a corporation not identified either with the idea of oppressive monopolistic practices or with that of special privileges, the average man neither entertains hatred nor exercises unfairness. Almost every instance of such conduct towards corporations cited by Mr. Ross could easily be matched in parallel cases where the party concerned was an individual and not a corporation. Even such an example as the eager rush for railway passes—in the days before the recent anti-pass legislation—is much more readily explained by a simple weakness of human nature or a defect in common honesty than by any peculiar state of mind arising out of the mysterious nature of the corporate entity. No one ever heard of people being shy about getting theatre passes, even before the days of the Theatre Trust; the automatic instinct for getting, or seeming to get, something for nothing is amusingly illustrated in the rush for ice cream and salads at every social gathering; and as for deception, it is only necessary to ask any unincorporated doctor how many otherwise respectable persons resort to queer devices in order to get medical services for little or nothing.

Finally, as to the necessity that the corporation shall become "aware of its profound social obligations" as a condition precedent to receiving fair and decent treatment from the average man. In regard to all this class of considerations, we are both more and less sanguine than those who constantly hold up to our view these high and distant ideals. It will be long before the recognition of "profound social obligations" becomes the dominant factor in the conduct of either corporations or individuals—unless, indeed, by profound social obligations is meant those profoundest

obligations of all, which are as old as civilized history. The homely but faithful performance of the plain duty not to steal, not to lie, not to cheat; the recognition of the simple claims of human beings to that ordinary consideration which stays the hand of the strong from merciless destruction of the weak—these obligations, indeed, it is the immediate duty of corporations to observe. Many corporations have always observed them; the number of those that do not is, we are sure, destined rapidly to grow less since the public conscience has become awakened. Let us demand of them that simple righteousness which all men recognize as duty, and the absence of which all men recognize as wickedness. Then, for the beautiful state of the future we can afford to wait with patience.

GREAT BRITAIN IN EGYPT.

The protest issued by the Young Egypt Committee at Geneva against Mr. Roosevelt's pro-English address before the students of the University of Cairo fell into serious error. That distinguished traveller was actuated in his remarks by no desire to please his official hosts. It is doing him a wrong to imagine that he would sacrifice his convictions to curry favor with anybody. In the present instance it was almost inevitable that he should have assumed the position he did. He found in Egypt a people on a somewhat backward cultural plane, ruled by a handful of strong white men. He saw there the far-famed efficiency of British administration brought to probably its highest pitch. The British rulers in Egypt are men who do things and get results. Under them the country has made unquestioned material progress. Here, then, was the white man's burden carried along strenuously, successfully, and, on the whole, quietly too, if it were not for the clamor of a few malcontents who would have self-government, and Egypt for the Egyptians, and a good many other wild things. Could these so-called Nationalist agitators promise Egypt as efficient a government as England has given her these last twenty-five years and more? No. Then the question was settled for Mr. Roosevelt. On the same grounds that he lauded the British rule in India when he was still President, he bestowed his approval upon British rule in Egypt.