

MR. BRYCE, INTERVIEWER.

Thirty Minutes' Chat.

The Ways of the Diplomat.

[By our Special Reporter.]

On Thursday morning at Government House I was interviewed by the Right Hon. James Bryce, British Ambassador at Washington. Of course I had gone there to question him. Instead of that he questioned me! It was a rare experience to have been catechised on public affairs by the distinguished diplomat. He did it with such subtle charm, such mock sincerity, too. I felt like a nervous witness under the penetrating cross-examination of an adroit King's Counsel. There was no escape, no loophole of argument. It was the story over again of the man who tried to give a horse pills through a peashooter. The horse blew first! What Mr. Bryce did was to stand with his back to the fire and shoot enquiries at the three pressmen in turn. At the end of 30 minutes it was found that the trio had not had the privilege of getting more than two or three insignificant cartridges in the magazine. That is the way of the Ambassador. He is a diplomat.

—Courteous, but—!

And yet Mr. Bryce seemed to be just in the humour for a first-rate interview. He was cheerful as the lark. His temperament was musical with overflowing geniality. His face was as bright as a flower garden. As a rule this means copy. With Mr. Bryce it stood, from a newspaper point of view, for absolutely nothing. The only advantage we enjoyed—and it was an enjoyment that will always be radiant in retrospect—was that we had had the honour of having a famous statesman all to ourselves for half an hour. That was something we really felt proud about. Mr. Bryce was so delightfully courteous, and his personality so sparkling that we all had a good laugh at the way he had turned the tables. He gripped us each by the hand and chuckled when we told him he had once more succeeded in interviewing the interviewers! Still it was true. I have a blank note book to prove it. The first suspicious movement was when the Ambassador gave us seats and stood up himself. He was going to be the man of action. Mr. Bryce had his overcoat on, although the room was cosy and the fire a golden glow.

—Topsy-turvy Topics.—

Then he began to chat about the weather. Was it exceptionally cold for this time of the year? We said Adelaide always had crisp sunshine after a frosty night. Well, when was the spring? Oh, that came along towards September. Mr. Bryce proceeded to contrast the feeble winter sun of Canada and the glitter of Adelaide's wet season, incidentally remarked that it was bracing in the hills, where he had motored the previous day, and caught up the drought theme in a perfect whirlwind of observations. "You do not seem to have had so much of the drought as—"

—The Beautiful Hills.—

Quick as lightning we put in a cartridge and fired. "Did the scenery of the hills impress you?" There! It was orthodox but diplomatic. The probability was Mr. Bryce's rambling for information might, at any rate, be partly disciplined. "You are lucky to have such beautiful hills," he said. "You can wander about all day and get into some most picturesque spots. The air is bracing and fresh." That was all! Mr. Bryce turned interviewer again. Under what system was the tramways administration? A municipal trust. Oh! Then the people got the benefit of the scheme. And what about gas and electric light and water? Mr. Bryce was told all he could reasonably expect about them.

"What are your impressions?" No. The diplomat checkmated the question. He desired to be informed who was building the railway to Western Australia. The reporters informed him. Perhaps it would be better to have a map. There was one on the table, and five minutes was devoted to tracing the proposed route of the line. Was it absolutely desert country? The interviewers remarked to their interviewer that Australia was wiping the word "desert" right off the map, because the Saharas of the Commonwealth were blossoming almost as the rose.

—As in Canada.—

"Yes, yes," commented Mr. Bryce—fancy, not a question this time!—"they have found something similar in Canada. The wheat belt is advancing further and further north into areas once considered to be absolutely hopeless. These localities have proved to be some of the most fertile parts of Canada. No one really knows how far north the available land goes. They have published an atlas in Canada which is most interesting and illuminating. It gives all the important data about climate, rainfall, and so on. The time has come to have a similar atlas in Australia."

—Time Limited.—

"But your impressions of Australia, Mr. Bryce. What are they?"—"Well how can I possibly give them? I have seen only Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. My impressions would not have any value. They are too general. I am not in a position yet to get the right focus. I want to see Tasmania, and run out into the back country of New South Wales and Queensland. Unfortunately my time is limited. I have not nearly the opportunities for travel in Australia I would wish."

—Off the Track Again.—

"When are you returning to Washington?" Just when the interview was swinging along at some pace, Mr. Bryce heaped up obstacles of questions again. By-the-way, how did they propose to build the railway to the Northern Territory? From Oodnadatta straight north or, or, or—why, the diplomat seemed to know as many routes as a Federal politician. The pressmen got the overland line out of the way only to find their interviewer asking for the name of the most authoritative book on Australia! Mr. Bryce was recommended to study the Commonwealth Yearbook. There he would find a sound foundation upon which he could rear his own superstructure. "They tell me a Dr. Schachner has published a very good book on Australia," Mr. Bryce remarked. "Have you seen it?" The reporters had not. Ah, then probably it had not been printed in English.

—Australian Dialect.—

Talk swerved to an Australian dialect, and the Ambassador observed that he could not say that there was one. "Generally speaking, I don't think so, but my opportunity for study is very limited. I should say English is spoken very well indeed in Australia. The American accent, you know, is by no means universal. Have you Australians been enriching your English by colloquial expressions? George Ade has written some very entertaining things about American idiosyncrasies in 'Fable and Slang.' Of course, you must have read them. Have any of you gentlemen been to Canada? There is some magnificent scenery along the route of the Canadian-Pacific Railway route." Probably there was, but would Mr. Bryce really say something about his travels in Australia. Interviews begin at home! The position was getting desperate. Twenty-five minutes gone and no interview worth speaking of!

—"Short Views of Life."

"Is it true that you are writing a book on 'Democracy' and about 'Australia'?" Mr. Bryce laughed at that question. Then he fenced it. Like this:—"I am obliged now to take short views of life at my age."

and I don't know yet what I shall do. Who do you think ought to write a book about Australia?"

"Mr. James Bryce, British Ambassador at Washington, would give it a most illuminating touch," we humbly suggested.

"No, no," he protested. "Tell me an Australian." Probably Sir George Reid if he had the time—and the inclination! "But he is a very busy man," said Mr. Bryce: "a very interesting man, too. We welcomed him very heartily when he came to England."

—No Holiday.—

"Are you on a holiday, Mr. Bryce?" Obviously that was a foolish question to a man who has hardly ever known what idleness is, but we simply had to resume the attack somewhere.

"Call it a holiday, do you?" he replied, half-indignantly, half-jocularly. "Why I have not had a minute to myself since I landed. I shall leave about the middle of August, and I shall not have time to visit Western Australia. I must be back in the United States in September. No. Not Washington. It is too hot there then. All the leading officials are away then."

—The Parting Shot.—

Mr. Bryce, with a graceful hint, came over to shake hands. We fired the parting shot all together, a perfect broadside! "Who is going to be the new President of the United States?" The diplomat laughed louder than he had done during the whole time we had been interviewed by him.

"Now if I did know," he answered in tones of deliberate irony. "if I did know that is just the very subject I could not talk to you about."

The Ambassador walked towards the door. "Wait a moment, Mr. Bryce," we exclaimed. "We want to ask you a few questions."

"Oh, dear me," he said. "We've had an excellent chat. Excellent!"

And that ended the interview which the Right Hon. James Bryce, British Ambassador at Washington, had with the Adelaide interviewers on that sunny morning in July.

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"ADELAIDE DESERVES ALL THAT IS SAID OF IT."

In an address remarkable alike for its impressiveness and the speaker's grace of diction, the Right Hon. James Bryce held the rapt attention of a big audience at the Elder Hall, Adelaide University, last night. He referred in complimentary terms to South Australia and the hospitality of its citizens. Alluding to the situation of the Adelaide University, he said it was a beautiful site in a beautiful city. Adelaide thoroughly deserved all, and more than all, that travellers had said of its beauties and charms. It stood upon a rich, fertile plain, like his own beloved Oxford, and reminded him much of that place. Oxford, however, did not possess the lovely mountain range holding in its recesses such a beautiful variety of entrancing scenery. What a pleasure it must be to have those hills so close at hand, and to be able to commune with Nature in her inmost secrets. What delight it must be to be able to view from the summit those exquisite lights and colors stretching down to the blue expanse of ocean in the distance. Adelaide people were, indeed, fortunate in the situation of their city.

STUDYING DEAD LANGUAGES.

In his address last night at the Elder Hall, Mr. Bryce said there was a tendency to decry the study of ancient classics. There was nothing more necessary in modern times than that people should know of the ancient times, and that they should cherish the masterpieces of ancient history. Civilisation was becoming extremely complex, and they were moving farther and farther from the simple man as he had been. They could have no knowledge of the modern world unless they had some idea of the ancient world. Who was there that could understand Christianity who did not know what sort of world it was, and to which Christ was born, and who had no knowledge of the time of Augustus and Tiberius, and when Pontius Pilate was procurator? Who could understand the democracy of modern times who did not know something of the democracy of ancient times—the popular government of Greece and Rome—which had died out and reappeared later among the recesses of the Alps? They would better understand the problems of to-day if they knew something of the problems of the earlier world.

IMPERIAL AND DOMINION GOVERNMENTS.

In a statesmanlike utterance on Friday, when responding to the toast of his health at the Ministerial luncheon, the Right Hon. James Bryce, British Ambassador to the United States, sounded a note of warning to Australian politicians. After referring to the practically unlimited powers of self-government granted to the Dominion by the Imperial Government, he said a vital matter in Imperial relations was that no British party should ever try to identify itself with any party in a Dominion, and no party in a Dominion should ever try to identify itself with any British party. Parties there must be in each country. But they in England did not want to know anything of Australian parties. They only wanted to know Australia as a whole. It would be a great misfortune if any party in this country should ever think that any party in England was more friendly or less friendly towards Australia than any other party. It would not be true. If it were it would be most unfortunate. They in England did not want to know anything about differences between the different States of the Dominions, and they did not want to be identified in any way with Dominion party differences. Safety lay in that direction.