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THE LIBERAL CABINET—AN INTER- CEPTED LETTER.

[We have received the following interesting letter from the Fabian Society without any plausible explanation as to how it came into their hands. We publish it with all reserves.—ED. N. R.]

MY DEAR COLLEAGUES,—The request made to me at our first Cabinet—that I should put before you in frank confidence the programme that we are to carry out—is, so far as I know, unprecedented. I cannot imagine what Mr. G. would have said to it, or to the letter that I am now writing. But the circumstances under which we take office are themselves unprecedented. By the amazing chance of Mr. Chamberlain's infatuation, and Mr. Balfour's paradoxical subtlety, our enemies have committed the happy despatch. Our policy of having no policy has made us, if only by our opponents' suicide, victors before the fight. The approaching election is a mere formality—a triumphant ratification. The Central Office tells me that the Conservatives of all shades cannot have more than 245 members to our 340, which gives us anyhow a clear majority, even on the rare occasions when Redmond can get over all his 85 to vote against us. And this majority of the whole House may even be as high as 70. So far our course is clear. We have only to sit tight and say nothing, as copiously as we can. We go into the election on the cry we have found so amazingly successful—"The Principles of Liberalism: rally round the Old Flag." Most earnestly do I beg each of you to utter absolutely no word more definite on any subject whatsoever.

But after the election the position changes. I am, if I may so express myself, by no means such a fool as I look. I realize how hollow is the victory we have won. We are put in, not because the nation hankers after any resuscitation of Early Victorian Liberalism, but merely because the others had to be put out. The 85 Independent Labor candidates look ominous. Even if only twenty-five of them get in, they may easily be sufficient to cancel our majority, if any one has skill enough to line them up with the Irish—and I do

not forget that we have had to leave outside one man who might do it. Moreover, we are only in on probation. All over the country just now Liberalism flows like the Solway—if we do not, in the next two sessions, convince the country that we are in dead earnest it will presently ebb like its tide. Chamberlain will manage to upset us, not because the nation will want his Protective Tariff, but because it will be disgusted at our failure.

Now, our most imminent danger is that we may be taken in by our own platitudes, and come to believe our election cry. We can no more live a couple of sessions on the sonorous recitation of Liberal principles—in which, my dear Morley, your eloquence puts my poor speeches to shame—than my unlucky twelve millions on the verge of starvation can make a meal off Free Trade. It is a poor business for Liberalism to be defending the *status quo*. We must, in fact, have a play with some action in it, or we shall very quickly be hissed off the stage. We can't go to war, because we have got no army. We can't play once more the old trick of extending the franchise, or even take up Balfour's redistribution of seats; at any rate, not until we come near our inevitable dissolution. We can't even do anything dramatic in the reduction of taxation, because I hear from the City that we shall be obliged to reduce the floating debt and increase the Sinking Fund. We must, in fact, whether we like it or not, play Social Reform. Not, I hasten to say, anything in the way of the cheap and nasty Socialism that was foisted on Lord Rosebery in 1892. We come in on Free Trade. Our watchword is Individual Liberty. But that, as I need hardly remind you—in spite of the infatuation of the Cobden Club—means something very different from shutting up custom-houses. What the eternal principles of Liberalism demand is that every individual should be made free—free, as I think your Church Catechism has it, to do his duty in that station of life to which it may please God to call him. I am afraid that four-fifths of the population are at present by no means so free as this.

Our programme must be as you, my dear Morley, have so convincingly put it, to do in each department of government what is necessary to liberate the individual from the fetters of his environment—from all the innumerable impediments, natural and artificial, that now obstruct his free development and healthy growth. This freedom of opportunity is, of course, what we have all along meant by Free Trade.

I begin, my dear Asquith, with the Exchequer, which you have been good enough to undertake. We need not any longer pretend that we can live on economy and retrenchment. By all means squeeze those wasteful devils at the War Office all you can—you won't make the Army any worse than it is, and whatever you save there will be wanted elsewhere. But, after all, it is only the "dem'd total" that matters to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and we all know the "dem'd total" must go up. When I talked about extravagance, of course I really meant only the waste of money by the War Office. We must never forget what Oliver Lodge is so fond of saying, that "what makes a great nation is

private thrift and public expenditure." So don't let the Treasury clerks—who are, after all, not the Cabinet—carp too much at the other departments' estimates. Other things being equal, the larger the proportion of our circulating wealth that flows down public rather than private channels, the greater the product to the community as a whole. However, you must at least contrive to abolish the Sugar Tax and get rid of that silly Coal Duty. You will, therefore, be able to be firm in refusing to take a single penny off the Income Tax—nothing else really gets at the vitals of the South African millionaire. But sit on the heads of your hide-bound officials and insist on graduating the tax. Every other country graduates its Income Tax somehow, and it's all nonsense sticking to the traditions of Mr. G. on that point at any rate. Moreover, even Harcourt had a plan of graduation actually ready in 1895, which you could get hold of from Lulu. Nothing would be so popular as graduation, even if it gave you no more money. Why not make the rate nominally half a crown in the pound, retaining the principle of taxation at the source and continuing all the present abatements up to £700 or even to £1,000; and giving a new abatement of a third on all incomes derived from personal service, and a second new abatement of a third on all incomes under £10,000 a year. This would make the tax on every professional or business man under £10,000 a year even less than he now pays, whilst it would really get at the money-bags.

But your big coup, as we have already agreed, either this year or next, must, of course, be the Taxation of Ground Values. I am glad you have already visualized your plan. Most of the schemes I have seen are only wooden nutmegs. Get something out of it for the Exchequer, and use the rest as a bribe to induce the local authorities to acquiesce in the total repeal of the Goschen local finance, which has turned out so badly. You have converted me about Grants in Aid. We must reform them altogether. At present, as you say, with the exception of the Police Grant, and to some extent the Education Grant, they do nothing to secure efficiency, and as Mr. G. declared, they merely plunder the Exchequer in order to ease the rates. Pray sweep them all away, and substitute, as you suggest, a new and financially more than equivalent system of subventions to local authorities, extending to all the services that we wish to see developed—housing, sanitation, libraries, pensions to the aged, open spaces, and what not—proportionate, not to population or rateable value or area, but to the actual amount spent on each service from time to time; and made payable only conditionally on its efficiency (as with the provincial police) being certified by inspection.

But I must also ask you to do something, in your capacity of virtual head of the Civil Service, to redeem my pledges about making the Government a "Fair House." Twelve years ago I promised the House of Commons—that meddling Fabian Society has sent me the quotation from Hansard—"that the Government should show themselves to be among the best employers of labor in the

country; that they should, if I may use the expression, be in the first flight of employers." I declared that I accepted "in the fullest sense the principle that the terms of Government employment should be beyond reproach. . . . We have ceased to believe in what are known as competition and starvation wages." You will find my words in Hansard for March 6, 1893. The permanent officials then beat me, even in my own department; and Mr. G., of course, wouldn't do anything. But I must not now be put to open shame in my own Government. There are, I am told, plenty of Government workmen, both in London and elsewhere, whose wages are only a guinea a week. I need not remind you that the Treasury has a special responsibility for the Customs and Inland Revenue, the Office of Works, the Stationery Office, and the Woods and Forests, which it directly controls. What can we do to compel all the other departments to give prompt effect to my promise? I hope you will, at any rate, announce the new policy—for it is, I must own, a new policy so far as practice is concerned—in a Treasury circular to all the offices, insisting that the Trade Union rates of wages should be paid, and the Trade Union conditions observed, in every case; that a moral minimum should be laid down—I am told that the London County Council makes it 24s. a week—below which no adult man shall be employed; that every effort must be made to regularize the work, and (by intelligent co-operation among departments) to equalize the seasonal demand for labor; and that proper labor conditions must be put into all contracts. A Treasury circular of this sort would have a splendid moral effect. "We have ceased to believe in competition or starvation wages," is what I seem to have said. How angry Mr. G. was with me for what he called political quackery! However, now that it is my own Government, and I can't plead inability, please see that it is done, my dear Asquith. How would it be to have a committee to ascertain in what terms it should be expressed and to decide what should be the Government's "moral minimum," in London and elsewhere?

As to Foreign Affairs, these, my dear Grey, I gladly leave to you. We stick to Japan; remain friends with France; and co-operate cordially with Roosevelt. Don't let us in for war, even if any Mad Mullah, in Europe or out, gets on your nerves. It would pay us better to reorganize the Consular Service, making it into a really useful commercial agency. Do try to put in people who will not be above making themselves useful in promoting British trade, and I will back you up against the grumbling of the Treasury at your increased estimates. So far from our Consuls having nothing to do with our trade, it ought to be the most important part of their work to find out how to increase it. I wonder whether you pay them by results? At least you might consider giving annually a 10 per cent. bonus on the salaries of the Consular Staff in the three countries to which our exports had increased at the greatest rate.

And now, my dear Gladstone, since you have been good enough to accept the Home Office, I commend to you the need for an early revision of the Factory and Truck Acts. Dundee, to speak only of

what I know, is in an awful state. The poor women in that city, as we have now learnt, are subject to the most terrible bondage to long hours, irregular work, hideous surroundings, dirt and disease, and starvation wages—a slavery none the less real because it is called free competition. You know as well as I do that their fate is only typical of millions of others—in fact of nearly all the women workers that we have hitherto left outside the effective guardianship of the Factory Acts. I know Asquith has never forgiven the Conservatives and the Irish for preventing him in 1895 from freeing the laundry women from their slavery. Bring to these millions of sweated home workers and workshop operatives, laundresses and shop assistants, the freedom that we have long ago given to the Lancashire cotton-weavers. Again, why has the Home Office not yet promulgated the by-laws about the employment of children, which we authorized in Parliament two years ago? But you must come to the rescue of the men too. I don't remember exactly what it is that we have promised the Trade Unions. But we must somehow or another set these on their fighting feet again, now that that wicked old Chancellor is at last gone. Then there is the Workmen's Compensation Act, which even the Tories were going to extend. There are the prisons, too—a ghastly business I fear at present, whited sepulchres in which we cow men's spirits, shatter their nerves, dull their poor wits, and restore them enfeebled to a world in which they can only steal again. Luckily you can put things right there without the interference either of the House of Commons or of the House of Lords. You must look into that yourself, and get some new men: those old Colonels make shocking bad prison governors—all birch and cat-o'-nine-tails, chloride of lime and whitewash. I suppose it is their recollection of pipe-clay. Can't you do something, too, to prevent strikes? I do so hate war, even war among our own people. Seddon's man Reeves—whom we ought, by the bye, to have had in our Cabinet—was pestering me the other day about his confounded Arbitration Act, which has won Seddon his fifth successive general election. If the Colonies can secure peace and prevent sweating—not to say win elections—by their compulsory Arbitration Acts, why can't we? If we made it one of the Factory Act conditions of employment that there should be everywhere a fixed bottom to wages, equal at least to a bare family subsistence, we might safely put masters and men in a position of absolute freedom to fight for the balance. Pray do not overlook this grand extension of real freedom of trade.

India, my dear Morley, we willingly hand over to you. Keep a careful eye on Kitchener, who, like all those "efficient" people, is apt to bolt wildly if not kept tightly in hand. Don't let either him or "the politicals" upset the coach. Never mind Thibet—we have satisfied our curiosity about Lassa; and it will never be a health resort. By the way, ask Gladstone for a model Factory Act for those Bombay mills—seventeen hours a day is too awful—and they will quote your own words in the Life of Cobden against you if you don't.

And now, my dear Haldane, we come to the War Office, which you are public-spirited enough to throw away a bigger income than

my own to undertake for us. No doubt the Army has gone to the dogs in the ten years since I commanded it. His Majesty thinks, as we can't have Esher, that you are the man to put it on what he calls "the pathway to reality." Whatever that means, I expect he knows what he is about. I never could remember myself how to return the salute of the sentry I had to go by in Pall Mall. But settle the Army how you like, provided you cut down the cost. Asquith must really get a couple of millions off the total. Don't upset the Volunteers, and don't bring in conscription. But, if it suited you to give up all the old-fashioned nonsense about living in barracks, and the necessity of the soldier being drilled into a mere machine and outlawed in the name of discipline, instead of being as free as a policeman or a signalman, you might easily get compulsory military training all round, as a mere development of Free Trade. It is really quite simple. You have in the past taken a great part in freeing the children from factory labor—indeed, I remember how effective your help was in making it possible to fix the age for half-time at fourteen. That was a great stroke for freedom. Why should you not now extend the half-time clauses in the Factory Act, so that no boy under twenty-one finds himself compelled to work for more than thirty hours a week. Rescue these young hooligans from the tyranny of the streets, and the obsession of the music-hall gallery. Save our industry from its increasing fatal dependence on boy labor. Put the boy, in the half-time that you have rescued from the workshop and the Mile End Road, through a well-planned seven-years' course of organized outdoor games and physical exercises, real technical education of all sorts, and finally drill and the use of the rifle—and you will have set up again the sadly degenerate physique of the race, found a substitute for apprenticeship, delighted the Trade Unions by making boy labor irksome to the employer, and trained every male adult to the defence of his country—all without a single day's intermission of industrial employment or a single night of the demoralizing barrack life. By heavens, what a coup! I almost wish I could go back to the War Office myself just to see what faces those old *militaires* would pull. But you are the very man for it, with your Factory Legislation knowledge. Only you mustn't let the War Office run the seven years' training—better give it to the Education Committees of the County Councils, with a grant in aid.

I cordially agree to your making the War Office a model employer on its civil side—replacing the present sweating in Army, Militia, and Volunteer uniforms by a great expansion of the Army Clothing Department, so that it may make all, instead of some, of the suits that they need; setting up a similar factory for saddlery, accoutrements and boots somewhere in the Midlands, altogether clearing out the rat-shop contractors from the list. So, too, about the quarterly issue of pensions and reserve pay, so often complained of, which now tempts so many men to drink away their whole quarter in one rapturous bout, and then go into the workhouse for the rest of the time. Make these payments weekly, as you suggest, and I will sup-

port you with the Treasury. There seems to be nothing against it except some red-tape difficulty about the men proving each week that they are still alive. But you can get over that. Why not ask Buxton to let you pay their money week by week into accounts opened for them in the Post Office Savings Bank, leaving them to draw out weekly what they need. He was telling me the other day how well it worked with all the 9,000 scholars of the London County Council.

The Navy, my dear Tweedmouth, will be safe in your hands. You will be able to satisfy Scotland that we really are going on with the Rosyth base, but you must be content to do with the present money—not a penny more. Stick to the present method of choosing boys for officers, which Acland tells me is excellent; and don't allow the Admirals to scare you off completing the amalgamation of the engineers and marine officers with the aristocratic gentlemen who wear the executive curl. In the name of common sense and humanity, put a stop to the stupid flogging that Swift McNeill exposed last session. Don't let us have to prevaricate, like Pretymann, about mere barbarism that makes us sick; and don't let it be always said that humane reforms are left to the Irish. And pray remember the low wages at the Deptford Victualling Yard; we must, at any rate, introduce the County Council's minimum of 24s. a week, instead of the present scandalous 21s. for grown men.

You, my dear Elgin, will, I am sure, inspire with confidence our not too-obedient children at the Antipodes. As to Chinese labor in the Transvaal, the principles of Liberalism of course compel us to leave it to be settled one way or the other by the first elected local legislature, which you must make as democratic as you can, and the meeting of which had better be accelerated. Your main business must, of course, be to "dish" Chamberlain by showing him there is a better way of building up the Empire than a preferential tariff. Don't let it be said that we fall behind him in our development of the resources of the Crown Colonies. As to the others, I always did think that Haldane's very characteristic idea of getting to Imperial Federation by way of education and the law courts had something in it. If you can induce the Colonies to join in building up a great Imperial University, drawing post-graduate students from all over the Empire, and transform that dowdy and dilatory Judicial Committee of the Privy Council into an adequate Imperial Supreme Court, you might let their governments off their twopenny-halfpenny contributions to the Navy, which only hamper our fleet.

I come now, my dear Burns, to the Local Government Board, where you will find as much scope for your administrative ability as you can desire. The Poor Law we must perforce let alone until this Commission has reported—this is not altogether inconvenient, as it is not easy to see what more we could have done for the unemployed without a lot of trouble with our capitalists in the House. But you must make Long's local relief committees really work wherever they are needed. Insist on their putting the Act in force without delay, and using all the rating powers they possess. If you want a mode-

rate Government subvention—on the pound for pound principle—in order to induce the timid ones to move, pray let me know. It is often a good plan, as my old grandmother used to say, “to put a little water into the pump to make it draw.”

Meanwhile, as I know those officials won't let you do anything important even in the administration of the Poor Law until the Royal Commission has reported—and we could hardly justify in the House any premature new departure—let me commend to you the Public Health Acts, which the Local Government Board makes such a mess of at present. I hear that, with all sorts of powers of compulsion on paper, there is no effective pressure brought to bear on stupid or recalcitrant local authorities. They really seem to think Free Trade somehow implies the freedom of everybody to have typhoid fever whenever he chooses. Pray find some way of enforcing at any rate a National Minimum of Sanitation from one end of the kingdom to the other. You might confer with Asquith as to his projected remodelling of the Grants in Aid with this view. By the way, why not start a Local Government Gazette, like the Board of Trade publications, giving weekly or monthly all the interesting statistics you can get; all your circulars of advice and important decisions, and every new experiment that local authorities are trying? I think you might altogether eclipse the popularity of the *Labour Gazette*, which I never could understand, as I always found it as lively as the *Lancet*. Forgive, too, my reminding you that the Local Government Board actually makes a point of not initiating anything itself, and waiting always until some Town Council or another proposes to do something. As you are not the man to make a virtue of laziness, we look to you to make short work of this tradition. Could you not start municipal reforms yourself, by circulars of suggestion to local governing bodies? There is infant mortality, for instance. My doctor was telling me the other day some gruesome things about a quarter of the babies dying before they are twelve months old. He said that three times as many died in Preston and Blackburn as in a village on the Grampians. But what interested me most was his account of the various steps that are being taken at Battersea, Liverpool, and Huddersfield, I think he said, to get the mortality down. Why should not the Local Government Board make known these various experiments by a circular to every sanitary authority, and ask them all what they are doing? I wonder how it would do to institute a sort of competition among local authorities as to which could make the most progress each year in sanitary and other improvements—giving a Shield of Honor to the best six, and a place in your published black-list to the worst six? If you want to accompany the award in the very best case by a knighthood to the Mayor and a C.B. to the Town Clerk, I shall be glad to recommend it. We want to encourage as much as we can the growth of municipal capital. I can't think where Avebury's wits are in groaning over what he persists in calling municipal indebtedness. I should have thought he had enough business experience to know how glad a railway or a bank is when its growth

demands an addition to its capital, and the consequent issue of new debentures. I wish all our railways and banks were as profitable in service to the community as our municipalities are. So long as these are honest, and do what the people want, the larger the proportion of our savings thus invested in the public service the better. But they tell me there is a difficulty about what is the proper unit of area for different Local Government services, and about the great diversity now existing. Why not appoint a departmental committee to consider it?

Education, my dear Birrell, you will find a thorny subject, but the Nonconformists, I am told, have a touching belief in your soundness. We must, of course, have a Bill as soon as possible, but, thank heaven, they can't expect one in this first broken session, so we shall have time to think about it. You will have access to new information, and, anyhow, we are none of us bound by *obiter dicta*. One thing I beg—don't commit us to a conflict with the Roman Catholic Church. Even Bismarck had at last to go to Canossa, and you and I are not Bismarcks—at least, I am not. After all, it is only a question of supply and demand. Why can't we adopt the Scotch system—repeal the Cowper Temple clause, and let each local authority provide whatever kind of schools and whatever religious teaching there is a demand for? If the Noncons. won't have that, how about letting each ratepayer allocate his rate to Church, Roman Catholic or Undenominational schools, as he prefers? They tell me this works all right in Canada; and it is undeniably fair. But settle it how you can, provided you don't stop the schools and the scholarships. Yours is the easiest set of estimates to get through the House—not that any one there really believes in education, but no one dares to cavil at the ever-rising totals. By the way, is it economical to let thousands of children be day by day in your expensive schools in a half-starved state? Would you not get more for your money if you put a new subject in the Code—twelve to one, Table Manners and Scientific Mastication (materials provided)?

You, my dear Sinclair, take our beloved Scotland. We must, of course, put through the Scotch Education Bill at once. I wish you would find some way of promoting afforestation under national control, even at the cost of expropriating some of the American lessees of deer forests. But we need not trouble these Southrons about our little differences. Ireland, on the other hand, my dear Bryce, will be a prickly subject. Your undoubted faith in Home Rule will, I calculate, carry you through, if you can only keep those Orangemen quiet. Let MacDonnell have his head and see what happens. I propose that that excellent Horace Plunkett should retain his office, which has really become non-political, so that he may go on with his trade schools and creameries. What a comfort it is to find even one bit of constructive work in Ireland. Asquith shall grease the wheels of the Land Purchase Act. You, I know, will stir things up in Education. We can do no more this time for the distressful country. The fact is, my dear Bryce, we are, about Home Rule, in a cleft stick. We are, above all things, a Protestant Party—that is

how we fight the Church in England. Nonconformity—I beg pardon, I mean the Free Church Council—is really the religious organization of the English laity against Clericalism. What is the matter with Ireland is that the Roman Catholic laity there is prevented from organizing against the priesthood by the need for showing a united front to the common enemy—the Protestant garrison. Until Ireland gets a Roman Catholic lay force corresponding to our Nonconformist conscience—and Home Rule, followed by the virtual establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, would produce that force in a jiffy—we shall never rescue Ireland from the priests or ourselves from the Orangemen. But it is no use pretending that Dr. Clifford is educated up to this yet. When it comes to the point, our Protestant party absolutely refuses to desert the Protestant garrison, even for their common good. So we can only pray that Redmond will find some constitutional way of forcing us to do what Ireland wants.

You, my dear Lloyd George, will have a comparatively easy task at the Board of Trade. As you are not to manipulate tariffs, pray look after the railways. They are far too slow in adopting safety couplings; and the hours of labor, especially on some of the Scotch lines—in which, as I have myself found, the individual shareholder can do nothing—are still atrociously long. Get more workmen's trains, too. There is plenty of law on the subject, only the Board of Trade officials won't work it. Can't you initiate proceedings yourself, as the Home Secretary does under the Factory Acts? These would be nowhere if the Home Office had no more initiative and no more pluck than the Board of Trade. Then there are the canals, which ought to be nationalized; and the port of London, which seems to be going to ruin for lack of a Government Bill. Moreover, don't forget that seamen and fishermen are still left out of the Workmen's Compensation Act, because the Board of Trade pleaded that it ought to be done by an amendment of the Merchant Shipping Acts. Where is that Bill?

There is another matter. We have found it very awkward in the fiscal controversy not to have any official statistics about our home trade, which is, after all, much larger and more important than our exports, or even than our imports. Could you not start a Home Industries Department? Such a department might very usefully collect all the statistics it can about our home trade, bring the terribly obsolete Wage Census up to date, and prepare annual and other reports upon the organization, labor conditions and prospects of our various industries. What gave Chamberlain his chance two years ago was largely the absence of statistics of our home production. We ought not to be caught napping again. We really must have the facts ascertained by your department and put on record, or the reports of the Tariff Commission will hold the field.

Agriculture, my dear Carrington, you do us a favor by undertaking, for what can be done to keep the people on the land, I haven't the faintest idea. But you seem to succeed so well with both small holdings and cottages, without ruining your rent-roll,

that perhaps you can persuade all the other landlords to do the same. This still leaves unsolved the problem of how to induce the farmer to pay the laborer a pound a week—for it is plain you can't honestly advise a young laborer to remain a ploughman for less, if he can get any alternative. How would it do to have County Wages Boards, to fix a legal minimum? The Bill that Dilke brought in on this subject might easily be adopted. Then there is afforestation. We really must do some more planting, and I don't see any guarantee against a wastrel heir one day cutting down the sticks unless it is a Government matter. You ought to consult Munro Ferguson on this point; he has ideas.

The Lord Chancellorship, my dear Reid, is, of course, yours by right, and I hope you will enjoy it as long as your predecessor did. I say nothing about judicial appointments, because Halsbury has taken care to fill up every possible vacancy for the next five years. When, at last, one does come along, you will, I am sure, do the right thing. But there is a little matter to which I would ask your special attention, and that is the nearly sinecure places that still exist about our judicial system—the associateships, clerkships of assize, and such like thousand a year and seven hundred a year billets; and the judges' marshals, not filled by any sort of competitive examination, and, to put it plainly, shockingly jobbed. Can't you put this neglected corner right for the future? It would fit in so well with your somewhat perfervid professions of retrenchment. We can't have many of us retrench; but you can. How about a little committee to inquire which of these places can be abolished or merged on the next vacancy? Then there are the J.P.s. I am already being pestered by people who want to be put in the Commission. But I look to you (and, of course, to Fowler for the Duchy) to see that the old exclusion is brought to an end, and that an adequate proportion both of working men and of Nonconformists is to be found on every Bench.

You, my dear Buxton, place us under a real obligation by consenting to take the Post Office, which is below your deserts, but which was the only way I could fit you in. Henniker Heaton will give you lots to think about in the way of postal reforms. I will therefore only mention the labor difficulty, with which you are just the man to grapple. I have already discussed it with Asquith, and he fully agrees that the Post Office must rid itself of the present suspicion that it is a bad employer. Of course we can't allow ourselves to be bossed by the Postal Trade Unions; but you must take the sting out of their attack by making it plain that you have put the whole service beyond reproach. You know about the London postmen's grievances, and those of the telegraphists. But right up in the Highlands there are bad blots. The old woman who brings the letters to my shooting-box in Ross-shire has to walk sixteen miles a day for fewer than that number of shillings a week. It positively stopped me from using the *Times* Book Club, out of consideration for her load. If you can only combine firmness against insubordination with a strict enforcement throughout the whole

service of standard conditions of wages and hours, you may transform the Post Office from a mere money-getting machine into a real lever of social reform.

Of course, my dear colleagues, there will be lots of other things to think about. We must, for instance, at once find some departmental Bills for the House of Commons to occupy itself with, though it is astonishing what a time we can get filled up with Estimates and Supply if we choose; and there is always that old stager, the Public Health Acts Amendment Bill! But, if we are to get anything actually accomplished, it must, as we all know, be mainly by our Money Bills, on the one hand, which the House of Lords can't emasculate—thank heaven nearly all our reforms can be put in the shape of Money Bills, if we try—and, on the other, by our administration, which, fortunately, neither House can effectively touch. We can't pretend that it is the House of Lords that prevents us graduating the Income Tax or taxing ground values; we can't put the blame on the Tory obstruction in the House of Commons if we don't stop the sweating conditions that still prevail in Government employment. We can't even say there is not money enough to allow us to do all these things, because it is part of our case that the Conservatives have left us a larger revenue than is demanded for the efficient service of the country. So we really must buckle to in our several departments and get the things done.

And now, good-bye for Christmas, and for the fray. When we meet again, I hope there may be no gaps round the historic table in Downing Street, and that you will all have made your Permanent Under-Secretaries realize that we mean business.

Yours fraternally,

C.-B.

P.S.—I need not remind you of our self-denying ordinance about *all of us* giving up all our directorships. But there is another little matter on which I venture to say a word. I am afraid H. G. Wells' ridiculous idea of the Samurai is catching hold of the intellectuals in the middle class. There really is a notion abroad that those who are called to the government of the State must voluntarily subject themselves to a simpler life than that of the common burghess. I am afraid we must reform our dinners. They say we eat and drink too much to be a really strenuous Government. I must send you a charming little book on abstemiousness, by our friend Mrs. Earle.