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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

DURING the week the German offensive has been resumed with full vigour. The French communique issued on the 2nd instant says the day was marked by a series of powerful German attacks on the whole front between the Oise and the Marne. The Germans assembled in an overwhelming mass of men for capturing the position held by the Allies, and after alternating advances and retreats, the Allies were compelled to give up certain points. All enemy attacks west and south of Soissons to north of Vierzy were fruitless. The battle on both sides of the Fureg was very violent. The situation northwest and north of Rheims is unchanged. A strong enemy attack resulted in the temporary seizure of Pompelle Fort, but a prompt counter-move restored the position to the Allies.

THE creation of a separate Pension Ministry in England is a clear indication of the welcome change that is coming over the mind of the English nation as regards the question of the relations between the State and the individual. The State is undoubtedly bound to see that the soldiers who have risked their lives for its protection from foreign domination are rehabilitated and given a fair chance of being useful members of the social organisation. It is its further duty to see that the soldiers who are physically disabled and are thus unable to work for their livelihood are accorded some pecuniary assistance to maintain themselves. The pension charges, on the basis of the present

casualties, will amount to 45 million sterling nearly during the current year, will be 40 million in 1930 and will be reduced to 10 million by 1960. This burden has to be cheerfully borne as it is in the nature of a repayment of a debt which the community owes to its protectors.

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THE *Mahratta* writes in its issue of the 2nd instant: "We are glad that the special session of the I. N. Congress which, on behalf of the whole nation, will have to put the seal of approval or disapproval on the coming reforms, will be held in a central place like Bombay." Does the *Mahratta* belong to the clique of unpatriotic men who are working underground ever since the "day of internment" to get the popular leaders assembled in Congress to record a favourable verdict in respect of the proposals of reform and for this purpose prevent Mr. Tilak from becoming President of the Special Congress? The *Hindu* of Madras, in its search for sensations, has discovered this plot, and Sir S. Subramanya Aiyar's credulous and warm nature has led him to believe in its existence and, with the vehemence in denunciation which has become his characteristic in recent years, pour the vials of his wrath on the supposed authors. We daresay there are many men of good character and genuine patriotism who would prefer the Rajah of Mahmudabad in the Presidential chair, whether the Congress be held in Lucknow, Madras or Bombay. But it is not necessary to attribute dark motives to those that reported the inability of Lucknow to hold the session, to those that promised to arrange for it in Bombay, or to those that express their gladness at the prospect of its coming to Bombay. At the risk of being misunderstood, we take leave to assure the alarmists who have unearthed this conspiracy that, so far as we know, the proposal to change the *venue* of the Congress is no manoeuvre to balk the man of the hour of the privilege of voicing the country's aspirations. So far from this being the case, we endorse the dictum of *New India* that the *special* character of the coming session will justify a departure from the rule debarring men of the province where the Congress meets from the office of President, as it would justify a departure from certain other rules as well.

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THUS the *Tribune* on the special session of the Congress: "It is idle to pretend that a large and miscellaneous body like the Congress can properly

and adequately discuss any question, far less a question of such difficulty and magnitude as the reforms. Any one with the experience of the working of the Congress knows that it does not usually discuss: it only records the result of the discussions of another and a smaller body, the subjects committee. The same or substantially the same procedure will have to be followed in this case. Perhaps the best thing will be to have a series of meetings of the All-India Congress Committee immediately before the session of the Congress and to settle the general lines on which the Congress should proceed. Unfortunately, the All-India Congress Committee, as at present constituted, does not contain some of the oldest and most experienced of our public men, men whose participation in the active deliberations on the subject of reforms may be regarded as more or less essential. For this reason we further suggest that the Secretaries should as a special case, and if necessary with the prior consent of the general body of members, invite a number of such leading men in all parts of the country as are not members of the committee to take part in its deliberations. These co-opted members will, of course, have no right to vote, but in every other way they will be able to influence the decision of the committee."

SIR SUBRAMANIA AIYAR has expressed the opinion that a discussion as to the measures to be adopted in case the reform proposals should fall short of the Congress-League scheme is now premature. The best course according to him is for all to withhold their opinion on the matter, whatever it may be, till the proposals are authentically made known. However that be, are not the younger men who, breaking away from their leaders, are talking of passive resistance led to do so by the pessimistic view about the coming reforms put forward by the very gentlemen who now counsel an abstention from discussion? They had confidently asserted that the proposals would not amount even to an anna in the rupee; little wonder then if some persons set about seriously thinking of the measures to be taken in the contingency so clearly in sight. A discussion about these measures, which Sir Subramaniam deprecates is the direct result of the gloomy forebodings indulged in by certain people. The question of passive resistance having been raised, it is the clear duty of leaders of public opinion, as Mrs. Besant has explained, to point out the dangers of adopting that policy, whatever the reform proposals turn out to be.

THE *Bombay Chronicle* of the 4th instant has a few high-toned observations on 'undesirable methods.' They are in connexion with the way in which the *Mahratta* disposes of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's denial in so many words of anything having passed between Maharaja Scindia and himself in their conversation at Delhi on the morning when he refused to sign the paper

containing the Hon'ble Mr. Khaparde's resolution. To an Indian acquainted with the standing and character of the Pandit, his categorical denial ought to finish the matter. But the *Mahratta* says its version of the Delhi happenings contained a mere sequence of events, but no express assertion of cause and effect and bids the Pandit put the cap on if it suits him. When it adds that it is prepared to take the Panditji's word on the point, it adds, as the *Chronicle* indignantly remarks, a cynical acceptance to an offensive repetition of the original insinuation. We likewise associate ourselves with the protest made by the Hon'ble Mr. Jinnah and endorsed by our Bombay contemporary against the impropriety of publishing private conversation and gossip with a bearing, direct or indirect, on the reputation of men who have to play a prominent part in contemporary affairs. Public life would become an intolerable burden if leaders had to talk together and conduct negotiations with the fear oppressing their hearts that every private conversation would be reported by correspondents to party organs, and that report made the basis of damaging criticism.

IN the same issue the *Chronicle* writes in lighter vein of the Birthday Honours. We beg to demur to its remark against Mr. N. M. Joshi of our Society, who receives a silver medal. It says the honour is presumably for his part in the Kaira affair. Does not our contemporary know of the splendid social service work of Mr. Joshi, of which, we venture to think, it does not disapprove, as it does of his share in Kaira inquiry and report? Why not give a man his due, though his politics be not yours? Mr. Devadhar got a similar recognition long before the Kaira affair. Was it also for some similar act of high treason against a popular movement?

WE understand that the Punjab Defence Force Committee have decided to introduce military training as part of the general curriculum in colleges. Such training is to be imparted to the students on college or university grounds outside the hours fixed for study. We cordially welcome this move as we are firmly convinced of the supreme necessity of regular military training for the youth of this country, if their intense patriotism is to bear any tangible fruit. We hope other provinces will not lag behind in introducing such a welcome step which is sure to evoke enthusiasm. Of course, the delay in announcing the contemplated increments in the emoluments of Indians in the military service and the grant of commissions to Indians in the Army is bound to have a chilling effect on the ardour of some young enthusiasts; but the inauguration of a scheme on the lines of the one adumbrated by the Punjab Defence Committee will be very helpful in solving this urgent question.

WE have received a copy of the memorial submitted by some of the clerks in the postal

department to the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs for the betterment of their pay and prospects. The representation contains a comparative statement showing the present emoluments and the future prospects of employees in the post and telegraph departments. If the facts stated in the representation are authentic, we believe that the postal clerks have made out a good case for a thorough and sympathetic consideration of the whole question. The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha at the February meeting of the Imperial Council enquired if any scheme for the improvement of the pay and prospects of postmen and postal clerks was under consideration. The reply of the Hon'ble Sir George Barnes to the interpellation does not appear to be satisfactory. We are inclined to believe that the condition of the postal servants when compared with that of their brethren in the telegraph department is certainly to be pitied. We hope the authorities concerned, looking to the hard times through which the country is passing, will show a more sympathetic attitude towards the requests of the memorialists.

THE *Modern Review* states in its current issue that a deputation representing the Women's Unions of all the provinces of Australia has waited upon the new Governor of Fiji, the Hon'ble Mr. Rodwell, in order to express the strong feeling that exists in Australia concerning the actions of the C. S. R. Company and the planters, especially their neglect of moral conditions in connection with women. At a meeting held in connection with this deputation, which was attended by influential women from every Australian province, a resolution was passed asking

- (a) That a woman matron be appointed to each principal Indian hospital where Indian women attend;
- (b) That separate quarters should be provided for married Indian labourers;
- (c) That older and, if possible, married men should be placed in charge of the Indian women working in the fields.

MR. C. F. ANDREWS in the current number of the *Modern Review* describes the woeful health condition of Indian settlers in Fiji. What appears to him to be the most disconcerting fact in this country is the almost universal prevalence of venereal diseases contracted in the coolie lines. Syphilis and gonorrhoea are rife among the Indian indentured labourers to an extent that is out of all proportion to what is common among the same class of people in the villages of India. This is directly to be traced to the low proportion, of one to three, of the women to the men in the coolie lines under indenture. In some cases the proportion works out to 3/2 and even 4 men for every one woman. The coolie lines are commonly described in Fiji as 'Kasbi ghar,' literally 'prostitution house,' and the fact answers to that description. As an official medical report says, "When one indentured Indian woman has to serve three indentured men as well as outsiders, the results as regards syphilis and gonorrhoea cannot be in

doubt." Mr. Andrews tells of a certain Lieutenant Governor in the West Pacific who, when asked by the managers of different commercial companies if they could be allowed to indenture for their estates 30 or 40 Polynesian women with every 100 men, replied: "Gentlemen, I am now 59 years old, and I have never kept brothels yet, and I certainly don't mean to begin keeping them at my time of life."

THE revised South African Railway Regulations have now been published. The most objectionable of the clauses, applicable to coloured passengers, that were introduced for the first time in the draft regulations, have been deleted, viz., those forbidding non-Europeans to travel by the mail and passenger trains, and prohibiting them from travelling in compartments not specially set apart for them. The effect of the clauses that have been retained will be, broadly speaking, to set up a statutory colour bar where before things had been arranged by a mutual understanding between the Indian community and the railway authorities. It has always been recognised by Indians, in deference to the wide-spread race prejudice among the Europeans, that it is better to allow separate accommodation to the two communities on the trains, but they naturally take strong exception to giving to the arrangement arrived at as a result of co-operation on the part of Indians the force of law, based as it is on invidious racial distinction. The Railway Administration now takes legal power by the regulations it has promulgated to restrict coloured persons, including British Indians, to the use of specified seats, booking offices, entrances, and refreshment rooms, and such racial legislation is bitterly resented by Indians. There are other clauses in the regulation, which are sure to be worked to the great harassment of Indians.

It is gratifying to learn that Mr. Tilak is among those who have been invited by the Bombay Government to the provincial war conference, which they propose to hold on the 10th instant. His exclusion, as well as that of Mrs. Besant, from the Delhi Conference was rightly held in the country to detract from its representative character, and we feel sincerely glad that the mistake then committed has been rectified, so far as the Bombay Government are concerned. We hope that their good example will be followed by the Madras Government and that an invitation will be extended to Mrs. Besant.

WE are delighted to read that the Kaira struggle will soon end satisfactorily. It is difficult not to wish that Government had adopted this considerate attitude early enough and saved themselves and the people concerned a great deal of worry and anxiety and ill-feeling. In view of the coming war conference such a termination of the episode is a good augury.

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT.

THE resolution of the 16th May last on local self-government bears no marks of having been issued in an epoch when the arrears of decades have to be cleared off and national affairs must move double quick to come within sight of responsible government in the provinces. Of course it has copious paragraphs and contains many mouth-filling sentences; it abounds in amiable sentiments; it summarises the past conscientiously. But you search its pages in vain for one brilliant idea, one bold step of policy, one petty detail in which the emancipation of local bodies is complete. In fact there is hardly any advance indicated in it which a mildly progressive local administration cannot have adopted of its own accord. It would be incredible outside China that the principles of local self-government enunciated in 1881 should still be far-off ideals in 1918, and that a big Government in the British Empire, caught up in the maddening speed of the titanic war of the day and pledged to march up to responsible government in a measurable period, should take evident pride in saying in the fervour of its peroration: "If the local administration is freed in the manner proposed from *undue* official guidance, a vast number of persons should feel themselves *for the first time* placed in effective control of the matters which affect their everyday life and the local bodies will be invested with opportunities *not hitherto enjoyed by them* of improving the conditions of the population entrusted to their charge." The expressions that we have italicised tell a sad tale. If the Indianisation of the services and the constitutional reforms to follow are of like tenour, the people of India may bury their hopes for ever and wish they had no posterity.

In the first place, let us ask why the Government of India and the Secretary of State have been at the pains to consider the supereminently cautious proposals contained in this resolution. There is going to be some increase of power to the local Governments acting with the consent and co-operation of their legislatures: could they not be trusted to amend their Municipal and Local Board Acts and enlarge the sphere of action of these bodies? What we want, as has been often said, is not that our institutions should be improved, but that we should be given the power to improve our institutions. Provincial autonomy, partial though it be contrary to popular expectation, must certainly include control over local bodies. Why has this mighty fuss been made beforehand, unless it be for the purpose of giving an excessively bloated appearance to the coming reforms? We always doubted the wisdom of our leaders asking for extension of local self-government, for compulsory elementary education, for

the separation of judicial and executive functions and for several other progressive measures as parts of the scheme of constitutional reforms. These are things which, however important, we could do for ourselves if we had the main reforms, the autonomy of the legislatures and the subordination of the executive to them. Instead of concentrating on these, we dwelt at the same time on these smaller matters and enabled the Government to build up cheap credit against us by paltry concessions of detail and to make a brave show of multitudinous reform. It is a grievous tactical blunder of the kind to be expected so long as those that know more have to be guided by those that know less.

Political reform has been retarded in India by the jealousy of those that enjoy the monopoly of power. But they have rested their case, not of course on this selfish ground, but on certain seemingly unselfish grounds, one of which is the backwardness of our self-governing institutions. History does not show any marked dependence of the one on the other. Too much is made of the fact that Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and some other eminent statesmen began their acquaintance with public affairs in the management of municipal concerns. Logic and *a priori* reasoning have not governed human evolution anywhere, nor will they in India. Local government was corrupt, inefficient, and narrowly oligarchical in England till the middle of the last century; municipal administration is so notoriously bad in the United States that honest citizens will have nothing to do with it; Canada was a perfect stranger to local self-government when Lord Durham recommended that her Ministers should be made responsible to the people's representatives. Why then is this pedantic step-by-step theory invoked in the case of India? Our faith in the honesty and genuineness of the theory would be increased if we found our rulers diligent and conscientious in advancing local self-government as a probation for the higher autonomy. The truth as to the attitude of the governing caste in the matter may be seen in the primitive condition of our rural boards after 35 years' existence, in the comparative figures of elected and nominated seats, in the meticulous and high-handed official control, in the cynical preference of the uneducated over the educated colleague displayed by the official president, which is practically a preference of the man without the civic spirit over the man with the civic spirit, in the extraordinary hesitation with which, after prolonged and persistent agitation, a few non-officials have during the last two or three years been here and there allowed to take charge of district and taluka boards.

In fact, we cannot pardon the authors of this resolution for still holding to the ancient device of

nomination for giving representation to minorities on local bodies. Is it not time to discard this device in the smaller sphere as a preparation for discarding it in the larger sphere of central government? If there are minorities deserving of recognition in that way, why not allow them to elect their own members either separately or by means of a scheme of proportional representation? In no other country in the world does the central Government nominate to a local body. It is highly unflattering to the people of India, just when the prospect of home rule is held out, to be told that they are unique in creation and that principles abandoned elsewhere have to be adopted in their case. We think Government should hasten to rectify the serious error they have perpetrated and give full effect to the original idea of Lord Ripon that the only control over local bodies should be exerted from outside. Nomination, even to a slight extent, introduces internal control, and impairs local responsibility for local affairs. In this connection, our sympathy is with the officials who may hereafter be appointed to these bodies with the duty of giving advice but not the power to vote. At present they are in a position to exercise great influence over local administration; yet we find from the figures of attendance that they compare unfavourably with non-officials. Their sense of responsibility is not likely to become greater by their being deprived of the vote, and membership of local bodies must appear to them an unmitigated burden. For expert advice and experience, these bodies must look in future to their own employees or to the staff maintained for inspection and similar purposes by the Central Board or Committee which it is now proposed to create. The employment of a staff qualified to give the necessary expert advice will require added resources. But what improvement of local self-government is possible without giving municipalities and rural authorities greater revenues than they now enjoy? Liberalising their constitution and giving them more powers will be largely futile, if a redistribution of finance between the central and local authorities be not carried into effect. The resolution before us suffers from a fatal defect in that it does not touch this question at all. It could well have waited till the vital problem of money admitted of a definite and satisfactory solution. One other defect of a material nature may be mentioned in this article. The powers of the Commissioner and the Collector to interfere with the decisions of local bodies are alien to the spirit of the time. Non-official presidents must be recognised as being officially of co-ordinate status with district officers, and members who are chosen by large electorates should not be liable to the criticism of executive officers who exercise magisterial and income-tax and similar powers in the localities. The Central

Local Government Board or Standing Committee would appear a more suitable agency for exercising the higher and more stringent control that will be necessary when the internal control of Government is totally eliminated.

THE RESOLUTION ON LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT.—I.

THE resolution on local self-government issued by the Government of India starts with a reference to the momentous declaration of His Majesty's Government of 20th August 1917 in regard to the establishment of responsible government in India, and in view of this declaration it proceeds to state that the object of the present resolution is to indicate the manner in which the Government of India desires to initiate progress in the sphere of local self-government. It is unfortunate that the Government of India should have made up their mind in regard to the many vital questions relating to local self-government, before the scheme of constitutional reforms is published. The Government of India could not have been oblivious to the interdependence of the one scheme on the other. It is obvious that the resolution proceeds on the assumption that the constitution of local Governments even after the reforms would remain substantially the same as now and that there would be no structural changes therein, affecting the present relations of the local Governments with the local bodies in their respective areas.

In illustration of this aspect of the resolution, I will refer only to two topics: take the question of central control. The Government of India suggest for the consideration of provincial Governments the constitution of the central body which should co-ordinate the experiences of the local bodies and provide improved control and guidance. They state that such a central body should be in direct touch with the Government and might fitly be presided over by a member of the executive council, where such a one exists. They proceed to state: "It should be further considered whether in place of a formal board there might not be a standing committee for local and municipal affairs in direct contact with Government, to be largely drawn from the elected members of the legislative councils." These suggestions as regards central control of local bodies by local Governments are obviously premature. The constitution and functions of the local Governments in a scheme for the establishment of responsible government are yet to be known and the suggestion, therefore, for a standing committee for local and municipal affairs to be drawn from the elected members of the legislative councils is putting the cart before the horse. Even under the scheme of compartmental autonomy, which has so often been discussed, there is no suggestion of a standing advisory committee

to be presided over by a member of the executive council, and it is, therefore, a matter for surprise that the Government of India should have proceeded to make a pronouncement on this subject without a consideration of its bearing on the general framework of local Governments in the coming scheme of reforms. I am by no means opposed to the constitution of a Local Government Board, as suggested by the Government of India, for I was a strenuous advocate in the Madras Council for its establishment; but if responsible government is to be established at least in some spheres of work now under the control of local Governments, it can not be on the lines proposed by the Government of India.

The second point which illustrates the shortcomings of the present resolution is in regard to finance. Even here, it will be clear that in the coming scheme for the reconstruction of provincial Governments, the thorny subject of provincial finance and local finance which has been pending solution for years is bound to be thoroughly overhauled. At the last budget discussion of the Madras Legislative Council, the Finance Member, Sir Alexander Cardew, referred to the problem of local finance in its relation to and bearing on provincial finance and stated that the whole subject would be examined from an entirely different standpoint than had hitherto prevailed. It is understood that some of the local Governments have pressed not only for a better system of provincial finance, but also for a more satisfactory settlement of local finance. In this respect also, the resolution is very disappointing. If it is not possible, at this juncture, in this resolution to deal with the important problem of local finance, the Government of India should have withheld its publication. It is unthinkable that any success could be achieved in this sphere of local self-government without a proper scheme of local finance such as that prevailing in the western countries. Several suggestions have been made before the Decentralisation Commission and afterwards as well. A scheme of fixed financial settlements between local bodies and provincial Governments was suggested before the Decentralisation Commission and quite recently the committee appointed by the Bombay Government on local self-government have put forward proposals based upon the systems of local finance in vogue in England and on the continent. These systems are essentially based upon a classification of the services performed by local bodies and on giving compensation to them from the central exchequer for such of the services performed by local bodies as are regarded either as national or semi-national in character. The report of the Royal Commission on local taxation appointed in 1914 will show the elaborate examination that has been made in regard to the services performed by local bodies in England, the growth of expenditure on those services, and the extent to which there should be reimbursement by the central Government. The Government of India have

missed a great opportunity. Before issuing a resolution of this character, they should have prepared the way by the appointment of a commission of inquiry for settling the incidence of taxation between the local bodies and the central Governments and the proportion at which this should be fixed and what services should be financed by the central Government and what by the local bodies. In fact, the whole of the existing scheme of local self-government should have been viewed from an entirely new angle of vision with special reference to settling the financial burdens. Even in this matter, the resolution is most disappointing. There is not a single word on the subject of local finance in this resolution, and the Government of India could not have forgotten the discussion on the resources of local bodies in the Imperial Council in 1912, where the whole ground was fully traversed. Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson assured Mr. Gokhale then, that the subject would receive consideration; and yet in the resolution of 1915, and in the present one also the Government have entirely ignored the contentions then put forward. In neither of these two resolutions do we find any reference to this vital problem. The whole subject of local finance has been disposed of in a few sentences. The resolution says, "If the Government give a grant for a particular object, the money must, of course, be applied thereto." But the Government of India endorse the Commission's recommendation that the grants-in-aid should normally take the form of a lump grant or a percentage contribution towards specified services rather than be more definitely earmarked. This is all that one can find in the resolution on the subject of local finance. If better results in local self-government are to be secured, it certainly cannot be under the present system of doles to local bodies whenever the central Government is pleased to help them. The evolution of local finance must proceed in this country more or less on the same lines as in England, where at one time the system of Exchequer grants prevailed, which was subsequently replaced by a definite system of grants-in-aid and later by the assignment of a definite share of Imperial taxation to local bodies. The Government of India should have initiated an enquiry into this subject before issuing the present resolution and one does not feel that the domain of urban and rural self-government will be the better in any way for a mere extension of the franchise without adequate financial resources. In fact, one is inclined to think that the position will be rendered much worse. A mere improvement of the machinery without adequate finances to run it properly will do no good.

A third reason that should have influenced the Government of India to postpone the publication of the resolution is that many of the questions dealt with in it are such as can be adequately examined only by the reconstructed provincial Governments. To what extent the policy in regard to local self-government should be in

hands of the Government of India hereafter is a question on which strong opinions have been held. If autonomy is to be conceded to the provinces, how is it the duty of the Government of India to lay down any general policy as to the constitution of village panchayats, the control of budgets of local bodies or the powers of taxation of municipalities or the extent to which the privilege of electing the chairman is to be granted, or as to whether officials should be eligible for election and the various other topics relating to the development of the local bodies? Obviously, provincial autonomy will be but a name if legislation relating to local self-government should still continue to be subject to the administrative approval and control of the Government of India. If the provincial legislatures are not to be entirely freed at least here, one cannot see how the coming reforms could be an improvement on the existing position. Looking at the resolution from these three points of view, I feel that its publication is premature and its terms are unsatisfactory. In spite of this criticism, I admit that the resolution advocates certain welcome departures from the existing state of things. I shall deal with these favourable features in a subsequent article.

M. RAMACHANDRA RAO.

DRINK IN THE BOMBAY PRESIDENCY.

THE excise report of the Bombay Presidency for the year 1916-17 and the Government resolution thereon were published a week ago and we have had now the first opportunity to pass our remarks upon them. The information given in the report is at least fourteen months old, and the new measures taken by the excise department in the matter of combating the drink evil, for the first time made known to the public, have been in operation for over a year. The figures are stale and have lost much of their interest, and it is of no advantage to discuss arrangements which have already been in force for so long a time. The standing order of Government is that such reports and their reviews by Government should be in the hands of the public before the next calendar year begins, but rules and orders are, it seems, meant for people other than Government officials. Besides it may also be stated here that if Government wish to know what the public think about certain measures which they take in the management of their departments they ought to offer them for public criticism before they are actually adopted and not when they have grown too stiff for any suggestions or amendments, however useful the latter might be in their own way. The present method clearly shows the utter disregard of the Government for helpful discussion of matters of vital public interest. But be they stale or fresh, we shall not be doing our duty if we ignore them altogether.

The potent weapon of Government to reduce consumption of drink is admittedly an enhancement of duty on that article. Maximum of revenue from minimum of consumption is the principle on which they avowedly act. They no doubt succeed in realising larger revenue every year; but how far, by so doing, they check the vice of drink is a matter of everybody's knowledge. The principal drinkers are the artisan classes, and the chief drink they use is the spirit distilled from *mhowra* flowers. In the year under report the revenue from the country spirit alone increased by 25,52,621 rupees over that of the preceding year. The layman who has faith in Government's abkari policy and their measures would naturally expect a corresponding decrease in the consumption of drink, from which this increasing revenue is derived. But he must know that the desire is too strong even for the omnipotent British Government, their policy and their high still-head duties. In the last year the sales advanced by 3,30,086 gallons over those of the previous year. The tall talk of raising the still-head duty with a view to reduce consumption has proved utterly hollow this year as in all the preceding years, taken as a whole; and the words of the late Mr. Gokhale that to raise a tax upon liquor is to add the misery of famine to the moral and physical degradation caused by drink will ever prove true. The illiterate consumer when once he acquires the deadly habit will stick to it sacrificing all his necessities, not to say his other luxuries. Increase of taxation in his case means not diminution of vice, but the creation of two evils instead of one. The year under review is an apt illustration of what we say. In spite of the increase in duty all over the districts, the consumption has abnormally increased and given a direct lie to the policy pursued by Government all these years. Whenever there is an increase in consumption in any particular district, Government officials recommend increase in taxation apparently with a view to check the increase of consumption. But as a matter of fact the consumption has nowhere been permanently checked, through the impoverishment of the people has everywhere increased on account of higher taxation. The taxation per gallon of spirit was, when the department was first established in 1879, we know, less than a rupee all over the district. But on the plea of diminishing the consumption it has been increased by a few annas, as suitable opportunity offered, and the result is that the taxation has now gone beyond the imagination of even the most sanguine revenue officers of Government without in the least diminishing consumption. On the contrary, in spite of abnormally high prices the drink evil is increasing apace. The consumption of the year 1916-17 is in excess by 1,17,676 proof gallons over the average of the preceding five years. The real remedy, as Mr. Gokhale had pointed out, lies in making drink more scarce and not in making it more dear. But the Government thought other-

wise and has been persistently following the same course to the utter ruin of the backward classes whose interests they say they have so much at heart. The excise revenue, when the department was established, was about 33 lakhs of rupees; it has now reached the stupendous figure of 170 lakhs of rupees, with all the excellent prospects of a still further enormous increase. The auction system has once again been restored. It was in force before, and was very lately spurned by the Bombay Government itself in spite of the demand of the Government of India. But times have changed and with them the Government also have quietly shifted their views. The auction system will surely give thousands in the place of hundreds, lakhs in the place of thousands; why then should they not grasp at it even at the cost of their good name and professions of humanity? The present enormously high prices will no doubt reduce consumption; but the only question is how long?

The total consumption of country spirit in the Presidency proper in the year under report is 25,17,473 proof gallons. The causes that are given in Government reports for an increase of consumption are perpetually the same. The total number is fixed. As many of them appear to be called into requisition as would suffice colourably to account for the degree of increased consumption. Busy marriage season, favourable crops, growing prosperity, prevalence of plague, suppression of illicit distillation are among those that are often in demand. The peculiar feature of any one of these causes is that even though the cause disappears, the effect remains. One cause was found to account for increase and as well for decrease of consumption. The infectious nature of the drink disease is however nowhere acknowledged.

The Government seem to be going back to the policy of selling weak in the place of strong liquor. It is good in itself; but it has one aspect which has not yet attracted sufficient attention. At present there are shops for weak liquor and there are others for strong one. The increase in the consumption of weak liquor has been 27.4 per cent.; while that in the consumption of strong one is 8 per cent. Had there been sold only weak liquor instead of strong one we should have rejoiced. But the placing of strong liquor side by side with weak one for sale appears to be very dangerous. The cheap weak liquor brings in fresh recruits who in course of time qualify themselves for doses of stronger liquors. Consumption of weak liquor is itself paving the way for the acceptance of strong one. The danger must be avoided; and in order to do it in reality and not merely in appearance, strong liquor must be at once and altogether done away with.

The real remedy to lessen the drink evil is materially to curtail the existing number of liquor shops. But the Government have never done it and it is hard to say if they would do it at all, in time to come. They no doubt abolish some shops

every year but what kind of shops do they generally close? Only such as are *superfluous*, or have no custom. And in exchange for them they plant new shops in places where, in their opinion, it is likely to get custom. What would this system lead to? Undoubtedly to larger consumption. We therefore request the Government to make no show of reducing a certain number of shops. Their present method is none else. The Government of India lays down that any two liquor shops must be at inconvenient distances and drinkers should have generally no choice between them. But the rule is usually observed in the breach. There is no city in the whole Presidency, where the rule is observed. This evidently shows the intentions of Government in the carrying on of the department.

The Advisory Committees are again a big farce. They are after all advisory and are to be convened at the pleasure of the Collector, who is sometimes not pleased to call them (we can quote instances) even once in a year. When they meet the officials preponderate and record decisions in the people's name but against their cherished opinions. Under these circumstances, when the whole Government patronage and influence tend to support increase in consumption it is not strange that individual temperance workers should get disheartened and leave the business for good. The cases of drunkenness in the year under report are 6,075. But it should be noted that only in 3 of them were licensees taken to task for supplying to their customers an undue quantity of liquor. The law forbids them to do so, but apparently the abkari officers do not.

S. G. LAVATE.

A LETTER FROM LONDON.

THE WAR SITUATION.

THE German offensive in the West, so long promised, has at last burst upon us in all its intensity. The Germans are beyond doubt challenging a decision this year. The situation in Germany is desperate, the military strength of the enemy, as regards ourselves, will never be greater than it is to-day, America is still a long way from being able to give effective help in the fighting line, and the main burden of resisting the attack is resting upon the British Army. It is true that the French are a valiant second; but the Germans know that, unless they can smash the British, either by a breakthrough or by a disruption of the Allied line at the point of the junction of the Franco-British forces, a German victory is beyond all hopes of possibility. The first onset has been held, at the cost of great sacrifices of men and material. We have the authority of the British Commander-in-Chief that these are nothing like so great as the Germans claim them to be, but they are sufficiently great to cause grave anxiety. The new onset that has commenced within the last few days has still to reach its climax. What its result will be cannot yet be known with certainty. The Germans are aiming at Calais. In other words, they are hoping not merely for tactical gains of ground, but for such a strategic success as will enable them to roll up the British Armies against an unfavourable coast-line, and so separate them from the French forces. Whether they can succeed in their tremendous attempt remains to be seen. We believe that they will not; but no one cares positively to prophesy, knowing the uncertain-

tion of War. Nevertheless, General Foch, the Generalissimo of the Allied forces in the present crisis, preserves an unbroken optimism, and his views of the situation are deserving of acceptance as he is undoubtedly the most successful and scientific soldier on our side. For the present, then, all the efforts of this country are being directed to prevent a German break-through. If, as a result of united effort, the Allied line can be kept stabilised, even though great losses may have to be suffered, the country will be content until the arrival of the American forces, which is being speeded up as rapidly as possible, when better things are hoped for. Meanwhile, it is beyond question that the German losses have so far been out of all proportion to the gains of territory that they have made. The German military leaders, callous to the horrors to which they have committed the forces under their control, have ordered them to certain slaughter in huge masses. It is one of the most awful and hideous tragedies yet inflicted upon humanity that is now being played out on the bloody fields of Flanders and Picardy. And at the end, no-one can foretell whether peace will come by the sword or by agreement. The War may end this year. It may end next. But it may drag its weary length along still further, until Europe is so exhausted that its civilization will come crashing to the ground through sheer feebleness.

IRISH HOME RULE.

You will readily understand that all England is gazing with anxious eyes upon the kaleidoscope of the Western Front and the Prime Minister has made an appeal to the country to throw all its man-power into the balance. Men up to 51 and doctors up to 55 are liable to military service. The country's industries will be yet more dislocated than they have already been. And with the expressed determination to extend conscription to Ireland, and the labour unrest that is bound to be generated by the withdrawal of practically all occupational exemptions, the position of the Government will be most difficult. That there will be serious trouble in Ireland is beyond doubt. As against this, the Government have decided to introduce legislation conceding a limited measure of Home Rule immediately. The Nationalist members have threatened the utmost obstruction in the Commons, and have told the Government that they need not proceed with their Bill, which is to be based upon the records of the Convention that has just presented its report. Whether there is more froth than substance in these proceedings remains to be seen. But we are certainly suffering most painfully from our appalling mistakes of the past and of a past that is not so remote either.

PROSPECTS OF REFORMS.

The Labour Party, that was about to inaugurate a campaign throughout the country on behalf of its programme, has decided, in view of the seriousness of the military situation, not to do so for the present. But it is doing a good deal of quiet work, so as to educate the constituencies for the forthcoming general election. This will, unless something unforeseen happens, take place some time in August or September. A new Parliament will come into being in the autumn, and it will probably be preponderantly Radical-Labour in complexion. The influences of reaction will be in a relatively small minority. But they will not submit tamely to defeat, for they have far too much at stake in the way of privilege and profit. Meanwhile, however, all schemes of reform are in abeyance. Mr. Fisher's Education Bill, which has already been postponed, has been once again put back because of the Man-Power Bill that will be fought resolutely through all its stages. Mr. Montagu, it is believed, had hopes that his recommendations would be dealt with immediately upon his return here by the War Cabinet, and put before the country some time in May. He will be a very lucky man indeed if he can induce his colleagues or the country to interest themselves in anything to remote as the affairs of India this side of the recess, and it is quite probable that his proposals will not see the light

before the autumn at the earliest, in the new Parliament. All this, of course, assuming that he remains a Minister of the Crown. India must remember that people here are not going to divert themselves from the war and its immediate prospects. The months of crisis will continue for some time, so Mr. Lloyd George tells us. During this period, and in spite of the Prime Minister's appeal to India to redouble her efforts in the Allied cause, no-one here will be inclined to give ear to the grievances of India. This will be a period of marking time, and it would be wise not to display impatience on that account. It would only alienate public sympathy here. So long as Englishmen feel that the whole course of the Empire's history may be altered by the military success of Germany, they will be impatient at any attempt to interest them in what may prove after all to be an academic question. The German threat to India, through the Middle East, is being seriously considered here. That partly accounts for the tenour of the Prime Minister's appeal to India. What is very certain, if the War ends in stalemate, or no settlement upon a basis of mutual disarmament is reached, is that India will have to organise her own means of self-defence, with British assistance, and in that event, another Army Commission will proceed to India, presided over probably by an English nobleman who has already gained a great reputation for Army organization.

EMBARGO ON MR. TILAK.

News has just reached here of the cancellation of the passports issued to Mr. Tilak and his party. No reasons are known for this action, the responsibility for which is attributed to the Home Government. But it is believed to be associated with a speech that he is reported to have delivered recently, and of which a summary was telegraphed here by the Simla correspondent of the *Times*. It is, of course, difficult, at this distance, to estimate the effect of the Government's action on public opinion in India. But much the same results are likely to ensue as in the matter of Mrs. Besant's internment, which had such unfortunate consequences. It seems such a tremendous pity that, in a situation requiring such delicate handling as the Indian one at present, such grave errors of judgment are made by those in authority.

Mr. K. C. Roy, of the Associated Press of India, who has been here for a short time, is returning almost immediately to India, after a most useful period of activity in London. His abundant information and his wide experience have been of the utmost value to the national cause.

London, April 11.

SHORT NOTICE.

THE EVOLUTION OF JAPAN AND OTHER PAPERS by LALA LAJPAT RAI. (The Modern Review Office, Calcutta. Price Re. 1.)

THIS is a collection of essays, dealing with the problems of Japan and the United States of America, from an Indian point of view, and originally contributed to the "Modern Review." Mr. Lajpat Rai's name is itself a guarantee for the truthful representation of the variety of subjects of popular interest contained in the book, for instance, the cost of administration in India, Japan and the U.S.A. Burning with the white-heat of patriotism, the writer maintains a balanced judgment and a highly dignified style throughout the book. Facts and figures have been marshalled with characteristic lucidity and clearness. The language of the book is as virile as the personality of its author.

LETTERS FROM THE PROVINCES.

MADRAS.

AGENTS PROVOCATEURS.

ON the 28th ultimo the public of Madras were startled by a signed article by Mrs. Annie Besant under the title of

"Agents Provocateurs," in which she described in her own inimitable style the activities of some of those worthies who have come to the fore of late.

They are men, she says, "who have not been conspicuous in working for the nation, but who try, by sheer violence of language and by traducing men, who have worked and sacrificed, to egg on the young to distrust all who are less violent than themselves and also to egg them on to violent action. They disappear when to take part in the mischief they have created becomes dangerous." She cites as an instance one Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu who has now announced that "his tour is ended" owing to ill-health and pressure of work. On this Mrs. Besant says, "These are poor excuses for retirement from the area of violent excitement which he has stirred up." In this connection, it is amusing to see a regular storm in the tea-pot in the shape of letters from one or two individuals protesting on behalf of Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu. The whole article is a fine plea for constitutional methods of agitation as distinguished from mere clamour or violence. In conclusion, she says, "I love the young men . . . But I can not follow them, for they lack experience and therefore wisdom."

THE FORTHCOMING REFORMS.

An article by her in the "Commonweal" of the 24th ultimo has given rise to a regular battle of words in the local press. Messrs. Satyamurti and Sambasiva Raw have come out with lengthy letters in the columns of the redoubtable 'Hindu', always ready to have a fling at Mrs. Besant. By leaving out a "not," Mrs. Besant complains in her own paper, these gentlemen have made her say just the opposite of what she did say. She had said in the "Commonweal" that if the Montagu reforms were not satisfactory, she would not accept them, but added that in case they were passed into law she would not boycott them, but would take advantage of them and make the most of them in order to press farther towards the goal. It is impossible to understand the mentality of people who take objection to this most sane and only practical attitude on the part of Mrs. Besant and who try to make out on the strength of this that Mrs. Besant has changed her attitude and has made up her mind to betray the country and to get it to assent to any reforms, even the most insufficient, that may be forthcoming! "New India," commenting on this game of misrepresentation in its issue of the 29th ultimo, recalls "how in the madness of the later French Revolution everyone who had led the Parisians in the earlier struggles became suspect. How Danton, Mme. Roland, the noble Girondins, were all suspected and executed because they could not run wild with Robbespiere and Marat. The 'loi de suspects' seems just now to run in Madras."

MR. SYED HOSSAIN'S ADDRESS.

Mr. Syed Hossain of the "Bombay Chronicle," who was one of the Home Rule League deputation, turned back at Gibraltar, was here in the course of last week "to see the President of the organisation which sent him and to take guidance from her," as he said in his lecture in Gokhale Hall on the 1st inst. "We must fight the decision of the War Cabinet," he said amidst thundering cheers. Dealing with the question of the coming reforms, he took up a most uncompromising attitude. If the reforms are inadequate, he declared, we shall have nothing to do with them, and will refuse to cooperate with the Government thenceforth. He also said that he was quite satisfied as to Mrs. Besant's attitude in this matter. It is surprising, however, to see Mrs. Besant's lieutenant Mr. Wadia inditing an open letter to the Home Rulers in "New India" of the 1st June, exhorting them not merely to non-cooperation and boycott, but also hinting at passive resistance and a policy of positive obstruction to "defeat the scheme." The average newspaper reader is at a loss to understand what all this means.

THE FIRST ANDHRA PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE.

Under the new dispensation of a separate Congress circle newly granted to the Andhra districts, the first Andhra Pro-

vincial Conference met on the 1st inst. in Cuddappa under the Presidency of the Hon. Mr. Venkatapathi Raju. The sixth session of the usual Andhra Conference was also held in the same place under the presidency of Dewan Bahadur N. Pattabirama Raw. Both of them are reported to have been great successes.

CORRESPONDENCE.

MARRIAGE LEGISLATION.

SIR,—I am very glad to read in your issue of the 16th inst. an appreciatory note on the Hon. Mr. S. Srinivasa Aiyangar's presidential address to the Madras Provincial Social Conference at Conjeevaram, especially the portion relating to marriage legislation. But I regret I am unable to follow you when you say that "Mr. Aiyangar felt that there was need for a measure on the lines of Mr. Basu's civil marriage Bill being introduced in the Indian Legislative Council." If such was really the feeling of Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar, it must be admitted that he adopted a singularly misleading form of expressing that feeling. His exact words were: "Any legislation, however, should not be on the lines of Mr. Basu's Bill."

I have been rather puzzled over this curious prohibition. Coming as it does from one of the foremost supporters of Mr. Basu's Bill and from a lawyer and reformer of the eminence of the Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar, it is highly calculated, in the language of the Defence of India Act, to "comfort the enemy." But unfortunately Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar has given us no clue as to his meaning in his presidential address. It is most improbable that he wanted to demolish now with a short sentence, and by a sort of side-wind, what cost him more than one entire speech and magazine article to build up deliberately some years ago. At the same time it is not clear what particular lines of Mr. Basu's Bill he had in mind when he pronounced his interdict. So far as I am aware, however, there was but one line to Mr. Basu's Bill. It was the demand that those who wished to marry outside their caste or community under Act III of 1872 should not be compelled to make a declaration of unfaith in every known religion of the world. It was the assertion of the right to religious freedom and the right to freedom of marriage as two distinct, equally indefeasible and mutually compatible civic rights. That Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar recognises this line as legitimate and is in full sympathy with this principle, although his immediate demand is restricted to the case of Hindus only, is evident from the following, which he wrote to the "Indian Review" in 1911: "That liberty of conscience should be made perfectly secure, that a man should be able to marry where he loves, that those Hindus who are inclined to experiment ought not to be denied the liberty they claim, that it is a disgrace to India that there is no general territorial marriage law . . . are propositions that call for no enlargement."

What then are the lines that the Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar objects to in Mr. Basu's Bill? That Bill, as is well known, did not propose the enactment of an independent law of its own, but professed to amend an already existing law (Act III of 1872) so as to make it available to all religious people or, to use the felicitous language of Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar, to make it a general Act independent of irreligion. Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar thought at that time that Mr. Basu did very properly in availing himself of the existing Act and proposing a few amendments rather than introduce a separate Act with elaborate provisions. But this procedure involved the acceptance of the form of civil registration for the validation of the marriage. Without being opposed to this form, however, Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar has always been in favour of a clause similar to section 6 of the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act being inserted in the Bill authorising religious ceremonies being gone through as a further option and

declaring the a^d option of the religious rites of either of the parties as sufficient. He wanted this especially in the case of the marriage of a Hindu female under the Act, with a view to give full effect to the theory of sacrament and to the desire of many to avoid the liability to divorce. Since now, in his presidential address, he has concerned himself particularly with the need of a legislation for the freedom of intercaste marriage among Hindus, it is but natural that he should want it to be independent of Act III of 1872, which is more comprehensive, and that he should ask for a new law which will simply declare the validity of all intercaste marriages performed with the customary Hindu rites appropriate to the caste of either of the parties. I only wish he had added a word of explanation to this effect in his address to make it quite clear to the opponents of freedom that in asking for a civil marriage Bill, which should not be on the lines of Mr. Basu's Bill, he did not intend to hold up the latter as wrong in principle.

There are still two more defects in the proposed legislation as adumbrated by the Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar. But as I have dealt with these at some length in a letter which has already appeared in the *Hindu* of the 23rd inst. and *New India* of the 24th inst., I shall content myself with a bare statement of them here. Any legislation on the lines proposed by Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar should not be restricted, as his words may imply, only to those who are born Hindus and as such may be expected to belong to some particular caste, but should be open also to those who, whatever their race or former religion may be, happen to profess the Hindu religion at the time of the marriage. Secondly, the Hon. Mr. Srinivasa Aiyangar's proposal that the issue of such inter-caste Hindu marriages should be debarred from rights of collateral succession, when the issue of those who marry under Act III of 1872 after renouncing Hinduism are apparently not so debarred, seems to be unfair and must be discountenanced by every lover of Hinduism.

KOPARGAM RAMAMURTI.

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