

customed to the 'domestic forum' of arbitration, and the official referees constitute to a certain extent a departure from our regular legal system. The administration of the law under complicated Acts of Parliament has in the case of the railway commission been partly entrusted to laymen specially conversant with the interests involved. But, with these exceptions, the settlement of disputed rights and the adjustment of contractual and other relations between man and man, have with us been exclusively assigned to the legal profession. Extra-judicial bodies have, it is true, of late years grown up among us, such as chambers of commerce and boards of conciliation for the settlement of strikes and locks-out. But these are purely voluntary in their character, and have no legal status or authority. Bodies of this kind, however, as their practical influence extends, are not unlikely in the future to claim statutory powers of a judicial or quasi-judicial character. And in the bill recently mentioned in these columns, which Sir Albert Rollit has introduced this session, it is proposed to establish commercial tribunals in which the lay element will be largely represented.

In France the non-professional administration of justice in certain classes of cases has been established since 1806. The Councils of Prud'hommes are described to be local boards elected for the settlement of disputes between masters and workmen. The whole system is indicative of a much simpler and more patriarchal state of society than that in which we live, and the jurisdiction exercised is much less important than that with which Sir A. Rollit seeks to invest his tribunals. The questions dealt with by the councils are wages, contracts, deductions made from wages in consequence of misconduct, absences from work, apprenticeship, valuation, piecework, and, generally, the differences which arise in the relations of employer and employed. The burning question of strikes, however, which in this country has been made the occasion of the appointment of extra-judicial bodies, is excluded from the purview of these councils, and no matters, such as the rate of wages, of a sumptuary or quasi-sumptuary character are submitted to them for decision. The first council was

constituted for the district of Lyons, and the functions of the Prud'hommes have been successively enlarged and revised by a series of enactments, the most important of which are the decree of May 27, 1848, and the laws of June 1, 1853, and February 7, 1880.

Each council is created at the request of the local chambers of commerce by a Government decree, which must specify exactly how many Prud'hommes are to form the council, six being the minimum, excluding the president and vice-president, over how many communes this authority is to prevail, and what industries are to be subject to it. Thus the jurisdiction is strictly limited in each case. Mines and railways are not included, nor are the relations of shopkeepers, merchants, and clerks. The councils are, in fact, *par excellence*, the artisans' tribunal. Efforts, however, are being made to bring all industries within the jurisdiction. The members are elected and the franchise is bestowed on a basis which is calculated to ensure intelligence and character in the voters. It is confined to masters and workmen belonging to the specified trade, who are over twenty-five years of age and have resided at least three years in the locality. A Prud'homme must be thirty years of age and able to read and write. These conditions seem to indicate that the French urban population is much less migratory than our own, and we imagine could hardly be fulfilled in London and the other large cities of this country. Masters and men are equally represented in the council. Before 1830 the president and vice-president were appointed by the State, and could only be employers; but now the Prud'hommes elect these officers for the year out of their own numbers; and if the president be a master, the vice-president must be a workman, and *vice versa*. The Prud'hommes are usually, but not necessarily, paid a salary at the expense of the district over which their jurisdiction extends. Half of the body retire every three years, but the retiring members are re-eligible. It is, one would imagine, an object of ambition for an intelligent workman to obtain election to the council, which it is to be hoped affords scope for energies which might otherwise be devoted,