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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

Mr. Joseph Chamberlain has not yet fulfilled his promise to provide relief for old-age poverty, but he has announced that a select committee shall be appointed for an investigation of the subject. Meanwhile he has introduced a bill the purpose of which is to give industrious and thrifty workingmen homes of their own. The measure to which we refer proposes to give to the occupiers of small houses in English towns the same facilities for becoming the owners of their houses as have been given to the owners of small farms in Ireland. The purchase money, however, is to be advanced not by the imperial Government but by local authorities, who are strictly limited as to the amount applicable for the purpose. Whatever, for instance, the expenses accruing under the bill rise above the rate of a penny in the pound, the bill will cease to be operative until the expenses sunk below that limit. In no case is compliance with the bill obligatory on a local community, or on any present individual owner. It is only when the actual owner of houses occupied by workingmen is willing to sell, and the local authority is willing to advance part of the purchase money, that the transaction will be authorized. The appraised value, moreover, of a house to be purchased must not exceed \$1,500, and the maximum sum to be advanced in furtherance of the purchase thereof is to be \$1,200. The remainder, that is to say, one-fifth of the whole, must be furnished by the workingman who is to become owner of the dwelling, and he will also be called upon to repay in annual installments the money advanced. If the installments are not paid regularly, or if the house is not maintained in a sound and proper condition, the local authority, which is, practically, a portagee, is to have power to enter and sell the premises.

One object brought against the project is that it tends to interfere with the mobility of labor; that is to say, to constrain a workingman to remain in a given place, although his interests may call him elsewhere. This objection is met by a provision which enables workmen to transfer their holdings with the utmost facility. All ownerships arising under the bill are to be registered by the local authority, and transfers of ownership are to be made on payment of a fee not exceeding \$2.50. Moreover, if an owner's work draws him away before he

can find an individual purchaser for his dwelling, the local authority is empowered to take it at a price to be fixed by arbitration. A more serious criticism of the bill is based on the prediction that the burden of supplying the purchase money, although temporarily placed upon the local authorities, will eventually be devolved upon the imperial treasury. Whatever the cost of the scheme may prove to be, it will be just so much deducted from the local funds applicable to other uses, and, even as it is, the demands are incessant for the replenishing of local funds from the imperial exchequer. In 1885 the fraction of the imperial revenues annually alienated to local purposes was \$28,500,000; at present the amount attains the gigantic total of \$57,500,000.

What now renders the framing of a budget so difficult a task for the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the formidable extent to which the imperial Government has assumed burdens that used to fall upon local authorities. It is sometimes said, by way of reply, that the payer of local rates is the same person as the payer of imperial taxes. Even if that were true, it would seem wasteful to draw money from a person by a tax only to return it to him after much expense and delay. If, on the other hand, the payer of local rates is a different person from the payer of imperial taxes, it would seem unjust to take money from the latter and then allocate it to the former. In spite of the opposition which it is likely to encounter, not only from the radicals but from some of the Conservatives, there is but little doubt that Mr. Chamberlain's bill to enable workingmen to own their dwellings, will become a law in the course of the present year. It will be a highly interesting experiment that we shall then begin to witness.

The reported decision of the German Government to promote the all-through route between Cape Town and Cairo has an interesting bearing on the project in which the German Emperor has been much interested since his visit to Palestine, namely, the establishing of direct communication by rail between Constantinople and Cairo.

When the gaps at present existing in this great world-route are filled in, it will be possible to travel from any point in Europe direct to Cape Town

without even a glimpse of any of the great seas or oceans. Some sections of the route between Constantinople and Cape Town, via Cairo, are already built. The gaps that require to be filled in, are, first, that between Kaisersieh, in Asia Minor, and Damascus, in Syria, passing through Marash, Aintab, Aleppo and Hums. The section between Damascus and Misirib, already built, is the continuation of the Beyrout-Damascus railway. The second gap is between Misirib and Egypt. The present intention appears to be to run a line from Misirib, which lies to the eastward of the Sea of Tiberias, by way of Es-Salt and Kerak, east of the Dead Sea, to Maan, one of the principal stations on the Syrian pilgrimage route to Mecca. From there a branch is contemplated to Kalat-el-Akabah, at the head of the Gulf of Akabah, the northeastern arm of the Red Sea, while the main line would run westward, by the south of Mount Hor, to some point on the Suez Canal, where it would effect a junction with the railway to Cairo.

The prolongation of the line from Maan to Mecca direct, or by way of Kalat-el-Akabah, whence it would follow the Egyptian pilgrimage road to Mecca, would be a matter for after consideration. The present project deals only with the connection between Syria and Egypt, which might follow another route from Misirib by the valley of the Jordan and east of the Dead Sea, instead of the line mentioned. The African gap is between Khartoum and Buluwayo. The line that will connect these two points will not pass entirely through British territory, but is interrupted by a section of considerable length through German East Africa. For this reason and others of a military nature, the policy of extending the Egyptian end of the line beyond Khartoum, or further than the Abyssinian frontier on one side and Darfur on the other, is at the present time severely criticised in England.

The disposition of the British Government appears to be to make haste slowly in the matter, and for the present there is no very fervent desire to have any railway connection established between Egypt and Syria, with the prospect of the extension of the Anatolian Railway to Damascus. Such a connection would bring about a complete revolution in England's military and political position in Egypt and deprive her of the exceptional advantage she at present enjoys through her control of the communications with Egypt by sea by means of her fleet. Once the railway communication through Asia Minor and Syria to the

Egyptian frontier is perfected, a Turkish army can be collected with comparative ease, and beyond the range of the guns of a fleet, at some point where its presence alone will be productive of great inconvenience to the British Administration in Egypt. The inconvenience will be greater still if the through line to Buluwayo is completed, and, under the arrangements with Germany, it becomes more or less an international highway.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that a number of influential Anglo-Africans and several military experts who have gone into the subject have come to the conclusion that both from the commercial and imperial point of view Mr. Rhodes' scheme is open to the most serious objections. It is admitted that in itself the construction of the through line from Khartoum to Buluwayo is a desirable thing, but now that the expediency of building it has been openly questioned from the standpoint of British interests generally, the matter assumes an entirely new complexion. The arguments that have been put forward against carrying on the line beyond Khartoum for the present are said to have created a profound impression in influential quarters in England; and this would account for the unwillingness of the Government to accede to Mr. Rhodes' demand for a guarantee of the interest on the cost of his road. There are also several questions affecting the control of the countries lying on either side of the Nile Valley between Khartoum and the equatorial lakes yet to be settled before the construction of an all-through route can be carried out expediently.

For many years the Russian calendar, which is also in use in Servia, Bulgaria and Greece, has been twelve days behind that of the rest of the civilized world. Beginning next year, and until the year 2100, the Russian calendar, unless reformed meanwhile, will be counted as thirteen days behind that of other nations. The reason is that civil time is still measured in Russia by the old Julian calendar, which makes the solar year longer than it really is by eleven minutes and a few seconds. Roman Catholic countries adopted the reformed or Gregorian calendar 317 years ago, thus making the civil year practically identical with the true or astronomical year. The very fact that a Roman Pope brought about this reform set Protestant countries against it, and the Gregorian calendar was not adopted in Great Britain till 147 years ago. Ignorant folk believed that they had