

OUR LONDON LETTER.

(Special Correspondence Journal of Commerce.)

London, Saturday 20th, 1913.

Conditions of British Trade.—For nearly two years there has been such a constant and steady rise in the volume of British trade, whether judged by exports, imports or home consumption, that the decreasing imports and the comparatively insignificant rise in exports in August as compared with the returns of August, 1912, have excited more than usual comment. It should always be remembered that the Board of Trade Returns in this country are the shuttlecock of the political parties and will remain so until the advocacy of Protection ceases. Hence we have witnessed the papers on one side loudly drawing attention to the decline and saying nothing about the reasons for it, and on the other side the papers indicating more or less completely the why and wherefore of the contrast. No one month's figures can accurately measure the real condition of any country's trade. In our own case the comparison with August of last year is affected by several important considerations. In 1912 we were just recovering from the effects of heavy labor disturbances general throughout the country and culminating in the great coal strike and the strike of the transport workers. Accordingly August of that year saw an immense release of accumulated stocks. Further, the Balkan War, which seriously affected the trade of the whole world, did not break out till the autumn. The prosperity of all industrial countries for so long has also enabled a multitude of people to take holidays this year, and these include wage-earners as well as employers and capitalists. It has been noticed that holidays have been longer, and of course, to this extent, production has diminished. The trade of the country is till sound and very profitable. We have had some more instances of the refusal of contracts by British firms because they cannot find time or labor to increase their output. Some slight slackening may be apparent—orders are not coming in quite so fully in several trades—but it is impossible even by a stretch of imagination to say that there is any real indication of a decline in the boom.

Australian Development.—It is assumed that one of the recommendations respecting Australia to be made by the Empire Trades Commission will relate to the advisability of encouraging the taking up of "ready-made farms." Something has been done already in the Commonwealth toward the establishment of such holdings and I believe the report of the recommendation of the Commission is correct. Curiously enough, a Canadian (Mr. Macmaster) who is with the British Parliamentary visiting Australia, spoke in Sydney recently of the need for organized land settlement under private auspices; and now there is an article in THE TIMES from its Australian correspondent, showing how the farmers of New South Wales have at last become recognized as a power in the politics of that State. These are all indications of a movement toward strengthening the resistance to the power of the Labor Party in the Commonwealth. New South Wales is the dominant factor in the present Federal situation. Though their majority is so narrow, yet, such as it is, the Liberal party owes it to New South Wales. The farmers have had organisations of a sort for many years, and now they are emerging into a definite third party, declared to be independent of the other two, they will be an influence to be reckoned with. It is inconceivable that they will support Labor legislation. Their independence is exercisable only so far as it can be used to weight the scales in favor of measures desired by the agricultural classes, who regard themselves as having been rather the victim of many of Labor's legislative schemes. The strength of the third party will be added to, undoubtedly, if the establishment of more men on the land is successfully carried out. Hence the popularity of the proposals I have mentioned. It really comes to this; that the turn of the political balance in Australia depends upon the class of immigrants.

If they are artisans who go thither to work in the factories—and Australia's manufacturing industry is developing rapidly—they will be an accession to the Labor party. If men of a different class can be attracted to the land, they will support the other party. Australia's future would appear to lie more on the lap of the politicians than on the lap of the gods.

Educational Types.—An observation made by the President of the Educational Science Section in his address at the British Association meetings provides one of those sharp contrasts of method that leap into notice now and then. As you are aware, thoughtful people in this country are deeply concerned over the quality and position of our public education. From Eton to the slum school there is no department that does not come under severe criticism. The general opinion is that teaching will be no better, no more scientific, until teachers of a higher standard are employed; and as this means at once greater demands on the public purse, the problem resolves itself into a question of finance. Apart from that, there is a pretty general consensus of opinion that educational methods should be directed more toward the development of character than the acquisition of knowledge. Until the public read the address to which I have referred there seemed to be a comfortable notion prevalent that everybody was agreed upon this need of the development of character. But now a test question leaps to the front, What sort of character? The President of the Educational Science Section (Principal E. H. Griffiths, F.R.S.) most highly praised the work of the Boy Scout movement as an agency in the development of character, and actually regretted that our political system does not admit the appointment of Sir Robert Baden-Powell as Minister of Education with plenary powers for the next ten years. Such wholehearted commendation excluded the possibility of another view of the Boy Scout movement. Yet another and quite opposite view exists, and is growing stronger. I do not refer to the encouragement of the military spirit for which the Boy Scout movement is sometimes blamed. The matter is one of character. Is the character of the Boy Scout the ideal which our educational methods should seek to evolve? A serious discussion of this test—question would very soon indicate a wide conflict of opinion. Many people think the Boy Scouts a collection of little prigs, who spend their lives carrying out copy book maxims. Even those critics who see no harm in this cannot close their eyes to the fact that the Scout Masters are, as a class, young men of the kind that have no strong elder-brotherliness about them, not enough virility of character, are not, in short, typical young Britons. In the mass they give one the impression of all being spectacled, pragmatism, somewhat over-weedy, and approaching the goody-goody type. I am perhaps exaggerating, but only because I am trying to show that if it were authoritatively announced that the ideal to be attained by reformed educational methods were the Boy Scout, and the ideal teacher the Scout Master, an overwhelming protest would be raised. It all illustrates the absurdity of consciously attempting to develop a national character of any particular type. The more natural the surroundings of childhood, the better the race. Simplicity and healthfulness should be the ideal conditions of up-bringing, and these are qualities hard and costly to attain.

The United States Tariff.—The same causes that produce the contrast already noted in the manner in which the British Press deals with our national trade of the great measure of tariff revision which has just passed the United States Senate. The most important papers on the Protectionist side have given the scantiest possible attention to the passage of the measure. One leading journal announced it in two lines. The fact is, many people were hoping against hope that the Wilson administration would find it more difficult than it has proved to be to carry the thing through. Now it is achieved they seek to minimize its importance by saying