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ANNEXATION OF KOREA.

THE annexation of Korea by Japan was inevitable. The only wonder is that it has been delayed for the last four years. The Emperor, the royal family and the ruling classes of Korea have all been reconciled to the inevitable, by the tender regard shown by the Japanese Government for their personal interests; and nobody seems to have thought it worth while to consult the preferences of the masses. They, however, are not likely to feel hurt, because they are not used to being consulted. The Emperor was an absolute monarch, assisted by a cabinet responsible only to himself. He has now resigned the imperial dignity, which he only assumed in 1897; and has been adopted with all his relations into the royal family of Japan. That the annexation will turn out a good thing for the Koreans we do not question. Japan within a few decades has become centuries ahead of Korea in civilisation. The Koreans are farmers almost to a man, and pretty bad farmers. Japan is a country of diversified industries and of intensive farming. Under the new regime the Japanese will over-run Korea, and the Koreans will soon be the richer, for the competition and for the intelligent example of their new fellow subjects.

Of the effect upon foreign nations it is too early to predict. An outlet for the surplus population of Japan was an urgent necessity. The annexation will provide a safety valve, which will relieve the pressure for a few years, but which cannot be permanently effective. The maintenance for ten years of the old Korean tariff, which is much easier for foreign nations than the tariff of the Japanese Empire, shows a wise disposition upon the part of the Mikado's government to avoid arousing hostility abroad. The absorption of Korea has never been in doubt since the fall of Port Arthur. That it has been so quietly accomplished is matter for general satisfaction.

CONSCRIPTION FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM.

THE news that Lord Esher has come out in favour of compulsory service in the army is ominous. Hitherto he has been a warm advocate of the system of voluntary enlistment. It is said that he has been converted by the failure to obtain sufficient recruits for Mr. Haldane's "Territorials."

While the nation may come to regard conscription as unavoidable every Briton will regret the necessity for the adoption of a system so un-British. Every nation in Europe except Great Britain has suffered under it, and most of them, if not all of them, are still suffering from it. The ancient republics were founded upon compulsory military service and if the British people have escaped its tyranny and maintained their individual liberties to a large extent, it is principally because they have been "encompassed by the inviolable sea." Whether the sea that laps the British shores is still inviolable, is the most question, the decision of which will determine, whether and to what extent, even the cherished liberty of the subject must give way to the exigencies of the national safety. No one doubts the patriotism or the courage of the people. A great war would draw thousands upon thousands to the colours, who for want of training would be utterly unfit for service. There was a time when the Royal Navy had to depend upon the press gang for its recruits, but the people never liked the system, especially those who were pressed. What Britons begrudge is not fighting for their country; it is the serious interruption to their business life and the interference with their personal liberty involved in compulsory service. To the average Briton conscription spells slavery; and it will be a shock to his self-respect, if the time ever comes when he cannot consistently sing that "Britannia rules the waves and Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." A more rigorous naval policy might or might not avert the necessity for conscription. But if we are up against it, the best thing we can do is to frankly recognise the conditions. The safety of the Empire is the first consideration; and if compulsory military service is necessary to that safety we must simply have it. It might be well however to try the experiment of universal military training, not necessarily involving any prolonged withdrawal of the people from civil life. In case of emergency there will be no lack of volunteers for active service. Anything like balloting for the militia will be intensely objectionable. Compulsory service will lose half its offensiveness if it is made universal and will lose a good deal of the other half, if the sacrifices of civil interests are intelligently minimised. We have compulsory universal service in Canada, in name and in law although not in practice. Lord Esher has something more effective in view for the United Kingdom.