

# THE WEEK.

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## THE WEEK:

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### CURRENT TOPICS.

We observed last week that we could not see how it is possible to justify on moral grounds the resolution of the City Council decreeing the reduction of salaries of its employees without notice, and even making the reduction retroactive. We did not believe that they could, "without serious disregard of right, carry out the policy proposed." We are not surprised, therefore, to learn that the Mayor is advised by professional authority that the resolution of the Council is illegal, and cannot therefore be carried out. The Council certainly did not establish its wisdom or gain prestige by its hasty and ill-advised action at the outset of its career. Still, the motive was probably good and the impulse in the right direction. This experience will teach it the wisdom of making haste slowly.

It is evident that the army of advertising agents who make it their business to travel over all lands and affix their hideous pictures and grotesque legends to every natural or artificial wall or other surface where it is likely to be an offence to the eye, have had their day and will shortly find their occupation gone, in Great Britain. Last year saw the formation of "a National Society for checking the abuses of public advertising." The Society has already six hundred or more energetic members. Branches are soon to be organized in the provincial towns. A Bill has been drafted by Mr. Edward Boulnois, M.P., who is acting in concert with this Society, to be called the "Advertisement Regulations Act." Among the provisions of this Bill is one for the absolute exclusion of any kind or sort of advertisement, or of "advertisement stations" from any "arable land or pasture land, woodland, garden, public park, common, inland or tidal water, foreshore or any part of the same, . . . or any tree, rock (or any part of the soil) . . . or at any railroad station distant more than 200 yards from the nearest booking-office." Provision is to be made for the removal of advertisements and "sky-signs"—beyond the reasonable and necessary professional or business signs attached to buildings—from streets, commons, and other public places. A somewhat similar Bill is already before Parliament, whether emanating from the same source we do not know. It provides for the prohibition of advertisements in public places in rural districts, and for the protection of pillars, posts, gates, fences, walls, hoardings, trees, "or any other thing whatsoever," that is visible to any person, on any "highway, main road, footpath, bridle path, railroad, canal, navigable river, or any place open to the public." If the British have been slow to move in the matter, it is evident that "thorough" is to be the word in the end, and that that end is not very far off.

Recent European despatches seem to indicate that Premier Crispi has pretty nearly succeeded in quelling, for the moment at least, the disorders in Sicily. In overawing the mobs of the island with a much stronger force than would ordinarily have been deemed necessary in dealing with so small a population, he has shown how well he understands, being himself a Sicilian, the fierce and fearless dispositions of his fellow-countrymen. It is said that

he will not remain satisfied with suppressing the manifestations of popular unrest, but will deal with the causes as well. So far as we can gather from various sources of information, the chief causes of the poverty and starvation which have led to the disorders are two—a merciless landlord system and the *Ostroï* tax. Owing to the old-time despotic rule, under which the men who worked the large estates were not permitted to live on them, the greater number of the three millions or so of inhabitants are collected in towns, though their occupations are agricultural. In addition to the ordinary taxes, which are oppressive enough, the *Ostroï* is a special tax levied by the municipalities upon everything which comes within their gates. Under this system the farmer who works his farm at a short distance from the town is actually compelled to pay taxes on the produce which he himself has raised when he brings it to his own home. Wheat, grapes, olives, flax, all must pay, in addition to all general taxes, their share towards the revenue of the little town in which he lives. How oppressive and exasperating such an impost must be can readily be imagined.

But the worst evil under which the poor Sicilian groans, or rises in mad insurrection, is probably the outcome of the peculiar landlord system under which he lives. There are, it appears, in most districts, no tenants, the vast farms of the absentee owners being cultivated by bailiffs, whose efficiency is gauged by their success in keeping wages at the lowest possible figure. These farms generally belong, not to individual landlords but to family *coparcenaries*. Under a system of compulsory division at death, they, or rather their products, for the estates themselves are not divided, are divided among the *coparceners*. These never reside upon their estates. The *Spectator*, from which this part of our information is derived, says that they would be compelled to live under police protection if they did so, a fact which of itself speaks volumes. The products being thus sub-divided and the *coparceners* non-resident, it may readily be understood that such a thing as a voluntary reduction or remission of rents is almost unknown. The condition of the Sicilian farm labourer, thus ground between the upper and nether millstones, must be anything but enviable. It is clear that to put down the riots by force is at best but a temporary expedient. Radical reforms are imperatively necessary. Whether Crispi's