

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 28, 1895.

THE "TIMES" ON THE SCIENTIFIC  
SITUATION.

WE rejoice that at last the daily press is beginning to see the necessity of the State action which we have been preaching for some years to prevent as far as possible the ruining of many of our industries threatened by the development of scientific research and processes in other countries.

Yesterday the *Times* spoke out with no uncertain sound in connection with the often repeated cases in which, in various foreign markets, English are being replaced by German goods. The paragraph to which we refer runs as follows:—

"Our Berlin correspondent called attention two days ago to the immense strides made by German industry during the last quarter of a century, and to the failure of our Government to pay any adequate attention to a development so closely concerning British interests. In this commercial age this industrial nation has one commercial Attaché in Paris who is supposed to keep an eye upon all Europe, and one at St. Petersburg who has all Asia for his province. A commercial Attaché at Berlin for Germany alone would find ample occupation and would furnish knowledge of things that deeply concern us, which it may be feared neither the Government nor the mercantile classes of this country possess at present. We also require urgently a commercial Attaché with especial qualifications for the Far East. Yesterday our Paris correspondent informed us that on his first appearance as Minister for Foreign Affairs M. Berthelot asked money for the establishment of six new consulates in China. The contrast is sufficiently striking between the policy of the two countries, and the difference runs through the entire treatment of the material interests of the two peoples. Both in Germany and in France it is held an essential part of the duty of the State to second, and not only to second, but to stimulate and direct the efforts of private enterprise. In this country, though State interference with commerce is being carried to a dangerous length, State assistance, even in the way of collecting information, is regarded with stupid distrust and disfavour. Our home industries themselves in many cases languish for want of intelligent direction. Our agricultural distress might be alleviated were the State not far above the education of the population in the minor agricultural arts, and the organisation of agricultural industries after the manner in vogue on the Continent. In the same way, although nothing can excuse the short-sighted folly of our manufacturing classes in not providing for scientific research in the various branches of

industry, yet it is the duty of a wise Government to take measures to counteract the folly of classes when it threatens the general interest. In one word, Great Britain stands at this moment in imminent danger of being beaten out of the most lucrative fields of commerce, simply because it does not recognise, while other nations do, the value of scientific organisation in the field, in the workshop, in the laboratory, and in the conduct of national policy."

The development of this question at the present moment, on the very day when the public meeting to promote a memorial to Huxley was held, reminds us how much we have lost—how much weaker we are for his absence. Never was Huxley more emphatic than when he pleaded, years ago, for the organisation of our scientific forces, so as to secure the victories of peace. It is now certain that we have lost many of these peaceful battles, and that we shall lose more because our legislators have either not read the signs of the times, or have been led by those who, if they were consistent, would bring back our Navy to its state in Queen Elizabeth's time, when it was the outcome of individual and local effort.

It is encouraging to think that when the attention of the commercial classes has been drawn to what is happening, as it must be before long, and when the public will possess full knowledge of the utter chaos of our public departments in all things appealing to the national life, so far as it depends upon commercial enterprise under the existing conditions, some action must be taken. We have Committees of the Privy Council for this and that and the other departments, but where are the Scientific Privy Councillors? Where are the meetings held at which they give the State the benefit of their knowledge? In what record do we find the minutes of such "My Lords" as these?

It is not fair even to the administrators of the several departments that the present state of things should be allowed to exist. Too few of these have been chosen on account of their scientific knowledge, and as each question arises they have to pick up their information as best they can. There are several ways of doing this, one of them exhibited by the Board of Trade inquiry last week into the revised regulations referring to the Electric Lighting Acts. The Conference showed conclusively how much the Department gained by the free imparting of knowledge by outsiders.

But this is only one direction in which reforms are needed. The Chambers of Commerce throughout the country must sooner or later take the matter up; and when this is done, many other ways of abolishing the existing chaos will suggest themselves. Some of them we may refer to on a subsequent occasion.