

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1919.

THE NURTURE OF KEY INDUSTRIES.

THE Bill "to constitute a Trade Regulation Committee, to regulate the importation of goods with a view to prevent dumping, safeguarding key industries and industries affected by the depreciation of a foreign currency," which Sir Auckland Geddes introduced in the House of Commons on November 19, will no doubt meet with strenuous opposition. It is, of course, anathema to the out-and-out Free Trader, and will be viewed with some doubt and suspicion even by those who, while not hide-bound by fiscal shibboleths, are yet distrustful of the bureaucratic control which the Bill would seem to entail. The terms of the amendment for its rejection on second reading, tabled by Mr. Wallace, one of the Coalition Liberals, are obviously drafted so as to secure the support, not only of the convinced Free Trader, but also, if possible, of those who object to all departmental control of our commercial relations.

As regards the Bourbons of the Manchester school, who learn nothing and forget nothing, Mr. Wallace is preaching to the converted; probably no argument will have the slightest effect upon them. They will find nothing in the changed conditions of the world, in the circumstances of the Empire, or in the influence of the war on our home industries to induce them to modify their convictions in the smallest degree. To them the basic principle of Free Trade has something of the sanctity of Holy Writ. It has all the force of a natural law as fixed and immutable as seemed to them the law of gravitation. But they may be reminded, as recent events have shown, that even the law of gravitation may possibly have a less stringent universality than we have hitherto been content to assume. How much more probable is it, therefore, that a so-called economic law depending upon fallible and transitory human conditions may be at least equally invalid and fundamentally more unsound.

The argument against bureaucratic control will no doubt appeal to a considerable body of public opinion. The Legislature, under the direction of the Government, has of late been steadily riveting the chains of this control in a variety of directions, and there is a growing impatience with the policy. It is a sort of aftermath of the war which the country will not tolerate to an indefinite extent. During the continuance of the war, when the free play of individualism might conceivably interfere with a united national effort, guidance

and control by a Government which we had entrusted with the safeguarding and direction of our destiny were not only accepted, but also generally recognised as imperatively necessary. But under normal conditions the continuance and possible perpetuation of bureaucratic control is wholly opposed to the genius of the English people, as past experience has abundantly proved, and is certain to be fiercely resented sooner or later.

It may be argued, of course, that the times are not yet normal, and no doubt this consideration will appeal to many who would otherwise be disposed to reject the Bill *sans cérémonie*. The allegation that it is bound to impose an intolerable burden upon manufacturers, traders, and consumers, and that it is calculated to maintain high prices and arrest our rapid industrial recovery and development, of course, begs the question. It is at least arguable that the provisions in the Bill against dumping and for the safeguarding—we purposely omit the word "protecting," as a term of offence to some people—of key industries are really calculated to assist our industrial development, even although they may tend for a time to maintain high prices. Excessive cheapness has not hitherto proved the panacea for all human ills which some, in the past, would appear to have claimed for it.

Although the House of Commons is invited by the amendment to reject the Bill, it will be observed that in the Trade Regulation Committee which it is proposed to set up, and which is to be responsible for the working of the measure, the majority is to consist of members of that House nominated by the House itself. The measure, therefore, is not, strictly speaking, bureaucratic in the sense in which this term is usually understood. It is presumably intended that the representatives of the people, being in the majority, should exercise an effective control of its operations. It rests with the House of Commons to nominate persons of knowledge and experience in commercial and industrial matters, who would keep themselves in touch with the views of the trade organisations in the country, and who may be trusted to check any undue departmental interference or restriction, and to expedite, when necessary, departmental activity. Is the House so distrustful of its power, or of the ability of its members to cope with the permanent departmental officials, that it is to be asked to reject the measure on the ground that it is too "bureaucratic"?

There is much in the Bill of a highly technical character, and even experts are certain to differ

as to the true meaning and effect of some of its provisions. Many of its terms are capable of various interpretations, and cases are certain to arise the equitable solution of which will tax the judgment and wisdom of the Committee. But the general sense of the House will, it is to be hoped, perceive that the measure is based upon the requirements and necessities of the times. This consideration ought surely to mitigate the factious opposition with which it is threatened.

No doubt the Bill will be modified in its passage through Parliament. It is certainly capable of amendment in some details. But it is to be hoped that the Government will stand firm in its effort to safeguard the key industries. The list of these named in the Second Schedule is considerably shorter than that drawn up by manufacturers' associations, and much of it is too technical to be within the comprehension of the average member of Parliament, who has little or no knowledge of science. It may be that the events of the last four or five years have made him acquainted with a certain amount of chemical terminology, but the list of articles enumerated in the first two sections of the Schedule dealing with synthetic colouring matters, drugs, "intermediates," and "fine chemicals," is sufficiently deterrent to the lay mind, and scarcely lends itself to effective party debate. It is to be regretted that at the present juncture no acknowledged representative of chemical science is a member of the House—no one of the authority and knowledge, perspicacity and breadth of view, for example, of the late Lord Playfair or of the late Sir Henry Roscoe. It is certain that, whatever might have been the views of these distinguished men concerning the fiscal policy of the Bill, they would be in hearty sympathy with the effort to resuscitate and strengthen an industry which had its rise in this country, and in all probability would never have sunk into partial insignificance had Parliament dealt earlier with the admitted deficiencies in our system of national education.

The Schedule may be said to have its origin in the war, and to embody some of its lessons. It is the direct result of the painful experience of our shortcomings as revealed to us on its outbreak. Some of the industries with which it is concerned are at present not much beyond their initiatory stage, but, as has been proved, they are all more or less necessary to our national welfare, and in the light of our recent experience it would be the height of unwisdom not to do everything in our power to place them on a permanent and independent basis. We are at the parting of the

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ways, and on the House of Commons rests the serious responsibility of choosing the right path. To neglect the present opportunity, or to be blind to its significance, would be an irreparable disaster.

THE DRAGON OF MYTHOLOGY.

The Evolution of the Dragon. By Prof. G. Elliot Smith. Pp. xx+234. (Manchester: At the University Press; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1919.) Price 10s. 6d. net.

THE dragon may be regarded as the most venerable symbol employed in ornamental art, and it has been the inspiration of much of the world's great literature in every age and clime. The dragon-myth also represents the earliest doctrine or systematic theory of astronomy and meteorology. The study of dragon-lore thus leads us back to some of the most primitive workings of the human mind, and embraces many subjects which at first sight seem to have little connection with the end in view. Prof. Elliot Smith's work on the evolution of the dragon, indeed, alludes to almost every aspect of primitive thought and myth, and the author discusses questions which vary from the origin of embalming to the worship of the cow, the elixir of life, the swastika, and the reasons for wearing clothes. His volume consists of notes of three lectures delivered in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, illustrated by beautiful reproductions of an appropriate series of drawings. The chapters are entitled respectively *Incense and Libations*, *Dragons and Rain Gods*, and *The Birth of Aphrodite*.

Prof. Elliot Smith maintains that the dragon was originally a beneficent creature, the personification of water. The fundamental element in the dragon's powers was the control of water, whether rivers or seas, pools or wells, or clouds on the tops of mountains. The substratum of its anatomy usually consists of a serpent or a crocodile, with the scales of a fish for covering, the feet and wings (sometimes also the head) of an eagle or hawk, and the fore-limbs (sometimes also the head) of a lion. All the parts are symbols of the various attributes and uses of water in Nature. With various slight additions and modifications, this composite wonder-beast ranges from western Europe to the far east of Asia, and thence across the Pacific to America. It must, indeed, have had a common origin, and Prof. Elliot Smith particularly emphasises the interest of the American version, which he regards as having gradually evolved from several successive importations of ideas from the Old World. He remarks that "one and the same fundamental idea, such as the attributes of the serpent as a water-god, reached America in an infinite variety of guises, Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Indonesian, Chinese, and Japanese; and from this amazing jumble of confusion the local priesthood of Central America built up a system of beliefs which is distinctively American, though most of the ingredients and the