

Current Topics

Self-Government for Poland

Russia's promise to grant autonomy to Poland was received somewhat cynically in many quarters, and there were many knowing ones who predicted that the promise would never be kept. That prophecy has already been belied, for Russia has recently conceded a substantial earnest of the promised emancipation. In the first week of April a law was promulgated from Petrograd giving local self-government to all towns in Poland. The language question is settled on practical and common-sense lines. Correspondence with State Departments, as also with public bodies or private persons outside Poland, must be in the common language of the State—namely, Russian. Replies to letters addressed to Polish municipal departments in Russia must be in Russian. Municipal placards and similar notifications must be in both languages in parallel columns. Debates in either language may be at the speaker's discretion, but the President is obliged to explain the substance of a speech if any member present announces his inability to follow it. Minutes of meetings and other official proceedings must be recorded in both languages. It is provided that any cases of disputed interpretation where both languages have been used shall be decided according to the State language—namely, Russian. The municipal autonomy now granted to Poland is equivalent to that enjoyed by Russian towns; and it is stated that the new law is welcomed alike by Russian and Polish organs of public opinion.

The War

We hailed the capture of Przemyśl by the Russians on March 22 as a great victory, and we are bound in justice and in logic to admit that its recapture by the Austro-German forces is what Mr. Lloyd George has described as a 'set-back.' At the same time there is a sense in which our eastern Ally is justified in regarding the loss as only temporary, and as merely an incident in a great and complicated struggle. The Russians have an almost illimitable capacity for absorbing defeat. After even a really heavy reverse, when other nations would become seriously demoralised, they quietly pull themselves together, and continue to peg away almost as if nothing had happened. In the meantime these concentrated massed attacks, even where they are successful, are costing the Germans dear; and the Russian policy of pegging away and keeping the enemy busy, is playing the Allies' game of 'attrition' to perfection. Russia is filling exactly the role that is desired and expected of her; and, considering the enormous advantage of the enemy in the matter of strategic railways and of munitions, she is filling it well. The real trial to the spirit, as the long European summer days ebb away, is not these isolated German successes here or there in the hundreds of miles of front, but the weary wait for the commencement of the Anglo-French offensive in the west. We may console ourselves with the reflection that the delay is quite possibly not wholly due to unpreparedness; or, if it is, it has at any rate the compensating advantage of enabling the Allies to mature their diplomatic measures, so that every iron may be in the fire at once when the time is ripe for the final effort. The war is a war of diplomats, as well as a war of troops and generals and munition workers; and the diplomatic representatives of both sides have been very assiduous in their attentions to those interested neutrals who, it was known, were morally certain sooner or later to come into the struggle. So far the adherence of Italy to the cause of the Allies has been secured; and there appears to be a near prospect of Roumania and Bulgaria entering the arena on the same side. If and when that eventuates, it may safely be taken for granted that things will begin to happen all round.

A German Press Item

Referring to the early fighting in connection with the landing at the Dardanelles and with the struggle

to secure a position on the Gallipoli Peninsula, our Friday's papers contained the following cable, dated Fremantle, June 3:—'Reuter's Cairo correspondent's reports of the fighting at Gallipoli contained in the newly-arrived papers by mail state that the Australasian wounded are very cheerful, and speak with glowing pride of the part they played in the great fight. They are proud of having been chosen for a task the success of which depended entirely on extraordinary dash and daring. When the wounded heard of the rejoicings in Australia and New Zealand they cheered, and cried: "We are going to do better when we get back."' *

That, we know, is the truth: and it is only what we should expect of and from our boys. But it is very different from the sort of stuff with which German papers, and pro-German papers in America, are being 'fed up' by official German press agents. Referring to precisely the same time, place, and incidents, the following inspired paragraph appears in pro-German American papers: 'Reports from Cairo, Egypt, state that there has been a mutiny among the Australian troops in which many lives have been sacrificed. The mutiny was caused by the Australians being urged to the front to breast the withering fire of the enemy while the British troops lagged behind. It was the same way with the Indians. These poor, brown men were compelled to take their places before the guns of the foe, while the flannelled fools and oafs of the home regiments sheltered themselves in the trenches behind the bulwark of Hindus on the firing line. As a consequence thousands of the Hindus have deserted the British colors and gone over to the Turks, preferring to fight in the cause of men who will fight along with them to fighting and exposing themselves for the sake of cowards who take every advantage, however mean, to save their own skins.' It is a sure sign of weakness when a country has to resort to the publication of that sort of stuff to 'keep its end up.'

A Belgian Florist's Troubles

As is generally known, many thousands of the stricken Belgian people have depended for work and livelihood on bulb culture; and, thanks to the advent of quite another 'kultur,' a large proportion of these have been reduced to complete beggary. With immense difficulty and at cruel loss, a number of growers have managed to transfer large parcels of their stock to Holland; and they are writing letters and publishing short catalogues entreating British customers to send them even the smallest orders. The Belgian firms are selling very cheaply, and are willing to take all the risks and to wait for their money until the safe arrival of the goods. Probably not very much can be done from New Zealand, but every little helps, and will be appreciated; and we bring the matter under the notice both of professionals and amateurs, and, in particular, of the directors of public gardens, in the hope that anything that can be done will be done. *

As illustrating the straits to which Belgian growers are reduced, we publish a sample letter which has been received at this office. It is headed 'A Modest Supplication to Our English Friends'; and the quaint English in which it is couched in no way lessens the interest and pathos of the document. We print the letter exactly as it has reached us:—

'Sas Van Gent,

'Holland, March 1915.

'Sir and Madam,—Herewith I beg to take the liberty to refer to my previous letter and catalogue; I should not trouble you so much by requesting you for orders, but as you are aware of the great trouble I have been put to by taking in my begonias from Melle-lez Gand, Belgique, and to bring them all the way up to Sas van Gent (Holland), with old horses and carriages, as my best horses have been confiscated by the Germans, one would lose his spirit by the fact to know, that this beautiful crop would remain unsold; and what

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