

## At the Capitol

### A Policy in Government Control

**A**LMOST in spite of its own efforts Congress is becoming more and more an exponent of government ownership and government control. In the forty-eight bills which have been passed at the present session there have been twelve which were not for appropriations or for some minor administrative adjustment; and practically each one of these twelve might be taken to justify Senator Hardwick's description of the dawn of "State socialism, pure, simple, unadulterated, and self-confessed." Congress has set the government up as an agent for the compulsory insurance of seamen, has authorized condemnation proceedings for any land that the War Department chooses to utilize, has established government control over foods and fuels, exports, freight cars and the ships for which private initiative had done the planning. One bill which has passed the House will provide further supervision in the manufacture and sale of explosives; another will provide, more nearly than has yet been provided, government supervision over the profits of individuals and corporations.

It was of course to be expected that preparation for war would mean centralization and a cutting down wherever possible of the practices of waste and duplication which are complacently tolerated when the country is at peace. But it was also to be expected that the broad strides which have at least legally been taken toward a temporary state socialism should meet vigorous opposition from a Congress which has for years been hostile to anything suggestive of government ownership. Progressives in Congress have long been trying to substitute for the policy of bestowing water-power sites upon private concerns a beginning at development of those sites by the government itself. Attempts to meet the rising curve in tenant farming, to experiment in government munitions production, to organize an agriculture that is now showing the effects of indifference, have had determined opposition. The legislative experience of Mr. Meyer London, and his failure to secure support even for his resolutions of inquiry and investigation, is a record of the antagonism to government control in Congress.

With a traditional conviction that anything which the government might do in the management or control of business was a failure almost foreordained, it is surprising that there has not been more discussion of the possibilities of failure in the present instance. Assertions that the Constitution was being outraged, and that the Executive was usurping the last prerogatives of Congress, there have been in number. There have also been one or two unassured references to the issue of states' rights; and there have been regrets expressed by Mr. Moore and other members that, proper as might be such measures as the one granting government insurance to sailors, there was no denying that they were competitive with the established privileges of private enterprise. But there have not been a dozen attempts to prove that unregulated private enterprise is the asset in a time of war that it is in a time of peace. Mr. Lodge, admitting "a desire to show the beauties of government management," has argued for the private manufacture of rifles; his colleague, Mr. Weeks, has predicted nothing but disappointment in efforts at government control, because, "for more than sixteen hundred years, there have been attempts to regulate the prices of products by governmental action, and they have invariably proved failures." The infrequency of attempts to raise the issue indicate a general acknowledgment in Congress that in an emergency

control over business can, if it successfully skirts constitutional provisos and states' rights and congressional prerogatives, profitably be lodged in a central authority.

Whether in addition to this acknowledgment of temporary desirability there are being fostered the beginnings of a partiality for government management and control, in times of peace, is not so clear. In the way of defining one innovation as a purely temporary device, and another as being in part at least worth saving permanently, there have been few attempts. There is a clear difference, for instance, between Senate bill 1871, conscripting men for an army, and Senate bill 2356, declaring the government's interest in the problem of car shortage. But there has been no effort to suggest that while the purpose of Senate bill 1871 is momentary, the provisions of Senate bill 2356 recognize a need which is quite as real, if less suddenly imperative, in a time of peace as in a time of war. Mr. Mann, classing all war measures in a single group as unavoidable, has acknowledged that "we are undergoing the greatest revolution in government which this country has ever seen," and expressed a sincere hope that it will turn out to be a purely temporary one. Mr. Lodge and Mr. Weeks have not expressed an opinion, but would doubtless be glad to do so if they had the smallest idea that any part of this new socialization was to hold on after Germany had been defeated, and cause for socialization removed. On the other side, Mr. Borah has declared that his method would be to make temporary use of the great industrial organizations of the country, "and then, when the war is over, turn them back, stripped and purged of their monopolistic elements."

Subtract the remarks of Mr. Borah and Mr. Mann, however, and there has been little discussion of what part of the reorganization now being effected is being done in any way except temporarily. This is unfortunate—for if there is to be a part of the new order salvaged, at the end of the war, its permanency will be better prepared for by an early beginning to enlist favorable opinion for it in Congress. Such an opinion might produce bills more nearly drawn so as to make their peace-time continuation easy and desirable. So far, interest in building public approval for future innovations has been limited to a few radicals, with no regard for party lines. But since the Republican party in Congress has as many stand-pat members as the Democratic party has negligible ones, the question of permanent extension of some government interest in business may ultimately reach the electorate. In voting upon a specific issue in the congressional elections of 1918 there may be expressed a public judgment on the issue.

In the meantime, though the present session may not have long to run, here is a subject for congressional discussion—and one which might well be substituted for the debate over administrative trifles that will set in, when the revenue bill and the new appropriation bills are up for consideration and there is afforded the customary opportunity for a discussion of irrelevant issues. A topic immediately available is the disposition that is to be made of the immense funds which will derive from operation of the new government merchant ships, a problem as yet not considered in Congress. A more general need is the desirability of having some steadier course than objecting, one day, to a small venture in government insurance, and on the following day conscripting life and granting authority to requisition the United States Steel Corporation. Congress has an unsatisfied desire to debate questions of policy, and here is one of which even an inadequate discussion will serve the purposes of publicity.

C. M.

## Books and Things

**W**HISTLER, after telling his Ten O'clock audience that Art did not care whether the artist was virtuous or not, and after giving instances of her unwillingness to treat virtue as an ally, said this: "Art, the cruel jade, cares not, and hardens her heart, and hies her off to the East, to find, among the opium-eaters of Nankin, a favorite with whom she lingers fondly—caressing his blue porcelain, and painting his coy maidens, and marking his plates with her six marks of choice—indifferent in her companionship with him to all save the virtue of his refinement." Mr. John Bailey seems to think not that virtue is always the artist's enemy, but that virtue was not Swinburne's friend. In the July Quarterly he contrasts Swinburne's life before 1879, the year when Watts Dunton took him to Putney, with his life thereafter. From his arrival at Eton up to 1879 Swinburne "lived a life of ever-increasing intellectual activity, of promise, performance, fame, authority, of no little noise and scandal. . . ." The years which came after 1879 "were years of always diminishing activity. . . . Chelsea was Sturm und Drang, Poems and Ballads, and Songs Before Sunrise; it was creation, excitement, and violent energy of life alternating with catastrophic seizures of illness. Putney, on the other hand, was a life monastic in regularity, almost monastic in quietness; filled full of air and sleep and exercise and sobriety; with less and less creative energy and no illness. . . ." Obviously a contrast with a moral. But what moral? That *Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille* is not always true? Well, Goethe never said it was. That poets who in youth sow the wind and their wild oats are doomed to reap, later on, oatmeal and mildly domestic breezes? A correct and regular life at Putney did not make Swinburne's talent grow. But what reason have we for supposing that it would have grown if he had gone to Nankin instead of to Putney, and had eaten opium without undue regularity? Hadn't his talent in fact stopped growing long before Watts Dunton taught him how to lead a virtuous life of "exclusive devotion to art"?

A small part of the air has long been thick with rumors that Watts Dunton, when he became Swinburne's dry nurse, did some rescue work of the first class. He reclaimed the poet. What from? Mr. Bailey censures Mr. Gosse for being too cautious here, and speaks of "the more serious weakness at which" Mr. Gosse "only hints with an unnecessary reserve which may do injustice to Swinburne by leading to worse suspicions." Good. Away with silence. Away with reserve. By all means let us have the truth, which Mr. Bailey proceeds to give us in his own way. "It would have been better," he thinks, "to say frankly that Swinburne was rescued by Watts Dunton from a life over which the vice which degraded Pitt and Lamb and Porson was obtaining a sway which must ultimately have been as fatal to one of the greatest of modern English poets as it was to the greatest of all biographers." Mr. Bailey's standard of frankness is low. What words would he have chosen if he had wished to say, with guarded circumspection, that Watts Dunton made Swinburne stop drinking? How long must a man have been dead before you can decently disclose the fact that during certain years of his life he drank too much? Were I addressing a school for infant prohibitionists, and were I bent on persuading my little hearers to judge with indulgence some illustrious drinker, I might refer them to other excessive drinkers whose names they had learned to love and to cherish. Por-

son would not be one of those names. But Mr. Bailey has not this excuse. He is writing for an audience of grown-ups. He must have many readers who would cheerfully swap his frankness, or Mr. Gosse's reserve, for information about Swinburne's "serious weakness." Did the poet go in for wines or for hard liquor? Was his palate as sensitive as Goethe's, who could detect that the madeira he was drinking—I think the story said madeira—had been kept in a sherry cask? Or was Swinburne as crude as Keats, who "once covered his tongue and throat as far as he could reach with Cayenne pepper, in order to appreciate the delicious coldness of claret in all its glory—his own expression." Coldness of claret! At the moment when I first read that passage all the head waiter in me rose, and read no further.

Mr. Bailey seems to stand on safe ground. He thinks drink might have been fatal to Swinburne. He thinks life at Putney, so guarded and padded and uneventful, did Swinburne's art no good. What would have been good for it? That is the interesting question Mr. Bailey raises. What life would you prescribe for a poet in mortal danger of repeating himself, industriously, till the end of his life? Sooner or later, out of memories and hopes and guesses, and also out of words, every writer who is a writer succeeds in weaving his own style. It may be sepia or pink or russet, or delicate in its grays, or particolored and bright, but there it is, this cloth he has woven, and he carries it about with him, laying it on flat surfaces, draping it faithfully upon hollowed and bossy things, hoping the new shape may renew the old fabric. He thinks, pathetic self-deceiver, that if you give a new subject to an old author the result will be new. What can be done for him, what advice given? Not to go and live at Putney? It does not sound constructive, somehow, nor is it adequate to the occasion. Shock of experience is the only remedy for the self-repeater's sickness, and even shock is less sure than the fountain of youth.

I don't believe that Watts Dunton, who with the best intentions in the world did what he could to arrest Swinburne's development, really arrested it. In 1879, when the suburban Palace of Art became Swinburne's home and refuge, he was already more than forty. The moral of his life is not that a poet should drink to excess into middle age, not that he should keep away from all the Putneys on this planet. It is a mistake for a poet to grow old—that is the moral. If you must grow old, and must go on writing, your best course is to learn how to be discontented with yourself, how to quarrel with your way of doing things. Swinburne had a special excuse for not learning this wisdom. As he grew older he could no longer write the first *Atalanta* chorus, or *Ave atque Vale*, or *A Forsaken Garden*, or the beginning of *At a Month's End*. But even in old age he could and did invent new metres. Mr. Bailey tells us that in Swinburne's last book, *A Channel Passage*, "there are some forty poems, apart from sonnets, and all but one or two of the metres occur only once." Perhaps he had friends who counted the metres, went to Putney, and told the poet that his natural force was not abated. A man with such friends and such a gift would naturally forget that metres should not only be new but sound new. He would assume that what he had written in a new metre must be new poetry, nor would he readily see in himself any resemblance to the horseman who made all his mounts look alike by his way of riding them.

P. L.