

FROM AN ENGLISH OFFICE WINDOW

Judicial Committee on Circuit

There is a certain amount of discussion of practical measures of law reform to which two out of three political parties have made a contribution. A report of a committee set up by the Conservative and Unionist Party organization deserves consideration because it dealt with the question "whether there is any objection to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council "going circuit" throughout the Empire"? It is observed that there has been a certain demand from some quarters in the Dominions and Colonies "particularly Canada and Australia" for this change in procedure. The argument advanced to the Committee was that the prestige of the Judicial Committee would be enhanced if they administered justice on the spot. The committee sympathized with this view but did not think it to be practicable at present. They state that "there is not such a regular flow of appellate work from different parts of the Empire as to make a regular circuit convenient or desirable". That does not meet the more common proposal for an occasional visit, though the objection may equally apply to it that "members of the Privy Council will usually be of an age when frequent journeys to remote parts of the Empire must tend to impose a considerable strain on their health and energy". It may be surmised that the reason which really carried weight with the committee was the view "that the sitting of the Judicial Committee in London as the center of the Empire contributes a link between the Dominions and Colonies and the Mother Country which it is important not to impair". Exactly how far this line of thought fits with the title of the report "Looking ahead" is a matter which I may leave to the judgment of my readers.

What is a Cocktail?

A bench of magistrates have decided that a cocktail is only what people think it to be. The question came before them on a charge of deceiving the public by selling a drink, which was nothing more than a diluted flavoured cordial, as a cocktail called "Glamorous Nights". They based their decision on the fact that there is no legal definition of a cocktail in this country. They did not add whether a glamorous night also falls within their definition.

The Annual Practices

For many years there has been a certain amount of competition in the world of legal publishing. Many may be disposed to argue that this is a good thing as monopoly is not always synonymous with efficiency. On the other hand it has involved the duplication of material carrying with it expenditure both in cash and accommodation. Notable among publications falling within this category have been the Annual and the Yearly Practices of the Supreme Court and the County Court. Their respective publishers have now agreed upon the issue of one Practice Book for the Supreme Court and another for the County Court. It is thus possible to produce a complete volume instead of the truncated version made necessary by war conditions. Now that a start has been made in this way it is possible that there may be further developments especially in the publication of law reports. On the other hand it is to be hoped that war will not have too far reaching effects. It would be unfortunate, for example, if the new edition of the Encyclopædia of the Laws of England which it has stopped were not to be completed, as the Encyclopædia has a distinctly useful function not fulfilled by the more ponderous work bearing the name of Halsbury.

Wages Councils

When Mr. Churchill was President of the Board of Trade in Mr. Asquith's first Government he was responsible for the Trade Boards Act 1909 which was aimed at improving the conditions in what were then known as sweated industries. Originally it was directed especially to tailoring, box-making, lace-making and chain-making. Under the powers authorizing the extension of its scope there have been added a considerable number and variety of trades. This Act and later legislation on the subject (8 & 9 Geo. V, c. 32) have been repealed by the Wages Councils Act which has just received the Royal Assent.

Mr. Bevin, the Minister of Labour, claims that the change of name embodied a new conception of Parliament's attitude in so far that what was known as sweated industry was past. The aim of the new measure is to ensure orderly wage regulation throughout the whole of industry and by means of voluntary or statutory machinery to establish an industry wide system of standard wage rates. The Act applies to approximately 15,500,000 workpeople. A large portion of the Act is devoted to continuing the arrangements which have been made under the emergency powers contained in the Conditions of Employment

and National Arbitration Order. For five years employers will be under an obligation to observe no less favourable terms of employment than those set up between employers and the trade unions. In other words there will be effected a complete national fair wages clause in order to maintain stability. The effect, however, is not to peg wages for five years. What is really being done is to allow voluntary machinery to operate unhindered during those five years either up or down. Mr. Bevin stated that he was absolutely opposed to any attempt at fixity of wages but he contended that when an agreement was honorably made no one should be allowed to break it during those five years. The easy passage of the measure through both Houses of Parliament shows that it has the support alike of employers and workpeople.

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