

THE NEW AGE

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NOTES OF THE WEEK.

IT is not for us or for anybody yet to pass judgment on the wisdom of the Bagdad expedition. Being, as we all are save a very few, upon the wrong side of the tapestry of military events, guesses concerning the design are more likely to be wrong than right. What, however, we can do is to listen to what is told us, attempt to understand it (since, presumably, it is told us for the purpose), and pass our opinion upon that. As they are without prejudice to the question of the higher strategy of the event, our comments must needs be patriotic at the same time that they are confined within a fair compass; they are also likely to be just. From this point of view, what is there to be said of the Bagdad expedition but that on the facts, as they have been officially published, it seems to have been a blunder of miscalculation from the beginning until now? That it has gone wrong we can all now see for ourselves; and that it has gone wrong from miscalculation is practically admitted even in the official denial of it. Look, for instance, at Lord Crewe's reply upon the subject to Lord Bryce on Tuesday. The facts as known up till that moment were that the British expedition, a division strong, had reached within twenty miles of Bagdad, had there encountered the enemy more than four divisions strong, and had been compelled to retreat with great losses a distance of eighty miles to its fortified base at Kut-el-Mara. Lord Crewe, while not contradicting these facts, chose to interpret them in a fashion that we can only say is insulting to the intelligence of the nation. On the face of it, it would appear to anybody that the expedition was either not carefully planned or was planned in the dark. To go forward with only a division into an enemy region whose strength was unknown was an adventure of folly; and to be then "surprised" was a proof of it. Yet, in the face of the obvious miscalculation, Lord Crewe was still disposed to maintain that the expedition was not only planned, but efficiently planned. "The advance," he said, "was contemplated months before, and a sufficient force was collected to carry out the operation." But though thus contemplated and fully prepared for, "the task proved to be a heavier one than was anticipated, owing to the superior forces of the enemy and their powerful arma-

ment of artillery." The two contentions, it will be seen, are mutually incompatible. The expedition cannot have been at once "sufficient" and insufficient. Either it was badly planned, or it was badly carried out; and since there is no question of the latter, the former conclusion is certain. What, in fact, we must deduce from the episode is that once more our "general-staff mind" has failed us. Everything goes wrong on account of the incompetence of our higher command.

It is the same, we can say with more confidence, in departments of administration nearer home. There, too, Ministers profess at the same time to have been fully prepared and confess to being surprised at the turn events take. But what nonsense it is to make these professions and admissions simultaneously! "You cannot have fully considered the grounds beforehand," we can say, "or you would not be surprised to find what you do find." And the apology is the more exasperating from the fact that, in nine cases out of ten, the factor that has taken the Ministers by "surprise" was one that commoner people saw in advance with half an eye. An example may be found in the recent admission by Mr. McKenna that the paltry five millions subscribed to the last War Loan through the Post Office was "not by any means as great a total as he had anticipated." We and others, on the other hand, are surprised, if at all, that the total should have been so great. The margin of saving among the poor is much narrower than Ministers foolishly calculate; and the machinery of the Stock Exchange, such as was foolishly applied to the loan, was obnoxious to the habits of the tiny investors. To procure a better result there was needed, in the first place, a campaign of economy and, in the second, the devising of a simple machinery of investment; and in the absence of these elementary precautions the present result ought to have been anticipated. That it was not condemns Mr. McKenna out of his own mouth. Another example, still, however, to be substantiated by the event, will be found in the coming disappointment of the Government's anticipations of the results of their recent conference with the Trade Unions on wages and savings. As we said last week, the appeal ought to have been made with the utmost simplicity, in the most obvious good faith, and with manifest understanding of the mentality and circumstances of the working