

Current Topics

The Great Offensive

Most sensible people have given up worrying and speculating as to the probable date of the great offensive in the West, and have settled down to possess their souls in patience and quietly to await developments, in the full confidence that the move will be made at the time that it carries with it the greatest assurance of final success. That this attitude is fully justified may be gathered from the definite testimony of an Italian officer, Colonel Barone, who has just returned from a visit to General Joffre. Writing in the *Preparazione*, the Italian military organ, this officer says:—'Some people, among them the supreme commander of the French Army, think that in the present circumstances a general offensive on the Western front can be delayed without inconvenience, in order that once it is begun it may with certainty be carried out thoroughly and without interruption.' Colonel Barone is of opinion that, by pushing her advance into Russia, Germany is marching to certain disaster, and that it is far better for the Allies in the West to await this event and then strike. 'It is from this aspect,' he concludes, 'that the Franco-British commanders regard the situation, and I make bold to add that far from thinking they are abandoned to their fate, the Russian General Staff is of the same opinion. The French Generalissimo is certainly not asleep, and he deserves entire and illimitable confidence.' Mr. Hilaire Belloc gives us a similar assurance. 'I made a bet with a friend,' he says, 'that the great offensive in the West would begin on June 1. I would not have made that bet if I had known Joffre. I did not know Joffre. His great offensive will only take place when he thinks the moment opportune, which may not long be delayed. While we must nerve ourselves against the possibility of the great offensive failing, we should remember that it will not be attempted until General Joffre and Sir John French consider that the conditions making for success are present. We have to deal with something more difficult to understand than chess, but something in which those two men are masters. We are nearing a crisis in a campaign compared to which the South African War is a minor operation. When the great offensive does take place, let us see that we comport ourselves fittingly under the strain.'

The Holy Father's Health

According to the *Philadelphia Catholic Standard and Times*—which, in regard to Roman news, is one of the best informed and most reliable of our exchanges—latest advices from Rome convey the disquieting tidings that Benedict XV. has become a victim of insomnia by reason of his unceasing contact with the affairs begotten of the war. Serious and unwelcome though the item is, the news can hardly be said to afford matter for surprise. Even in normal times the burden of the Pontificate is sufficiently heavy; at a time like the present, the strain, alike on head and heart, must be positively crushing. Various subsidiary causes have contributed to bring about the untoward development in the Holy Father's condition. 'Besides this constant contact with the genius of "Black Care",' says our contemporary, 'the afflicted Pope has had depressing ceremonies to go through connected with the memory of his similarly stricken predecessor, Pope Pius X. He has had to preside over the ceremonies commemorating his death. Cardinal Merry del Val pontificated at the first Requiem Mass offered up for the repose of the soul of the deceased Pontiff, whose two sisters and niece were present at it. They and a large number of others who attended received Holy Communion from his hands. Other Requiem Masses followed, among the celebrants being Monsignor Parolin, a nephew of Pope Pius, and Monsignor Bressan and Monsignor Pescini, who were private chaplains to his Holiness. The tomb was covered with flowers and foliage early in the morning; but these had all

disappeared by noon, every visitor taking a flower or a leaf to be kept as a souvenir of the beloved Pontiff. These solemn functions and the excitement attending the arrival of throngs at the great Basilica naturally affected the already shaken nervous system of the Holy Father, so that the way for the dreaded insomnia had been made straight and easy.' There is, unhappily, no immediate prospect of the Pope's almost insupportable burden being lightened; on the contrary, the clouds are gathering ever more and more ominously. It only remains for Catholics, and indeed for men of good will of all creeds, to pray fervently that the end of the fratricidal struggle may be hastened, and that the Father of the faithful may be strengthened in mind and body to discharge the high and delicate duties that press so heavily upon him.

The Picture Censorship Question

Some weeks ago, in commenting on the movement for securing a better supervision of cinematograph films in the Dominion, we remarked that the main desideratum is that the censorship, however exercised, should be close, stringent, and effective. That is the pith of the whole matter. It is no advantage to have the mere name of censorship without the reality—rather it is a positive disadvantage, as misleading and blinding the public in regard to the true position. Some short time ago, Mr. John Fuller, jun., writing to a Wellington paper on the censorship question, declared that the proposal was unworkable because it would be impossible to obtain a satisfactory censor, and then proceeded to knock the bottom out of his own argument by pointing out that the pictures shown here were censored before they reached New Zealand. If they could be censored outside of New Zealand, why should it not be feasible to have them censored in this country? But what is the character of the censorship which the pictures receive before reaching this country? Let us take the case of American pictures. We frequently see the display of pictures from America introduced with the announcement: 'Passed by the National Board of Censorship, U.S.A.' That sounds very satisfactory and impressive, until we discover that the National Board of Censorship is a self-appointed organisation, under the influence and in the control of the film companies themselves. Censorship of that sort, of course, means practically nothing at all.

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Mr. Fuller goes on to suggest that the great body of the people are opposed to and will resent the censorship proposal, but experience elsewhere furnishes no justification for such a view. In connection with this aspect of the matter, an instructive incident is reported from Ohio, U.S.A. A very drastic censorship law prevails in that State, but attempts appear to have been made to evade its operation. A recent official communication relative to the subject contains the following statement: 'In many instances it was found advisable to order many scenes to be eliminated rather than eliminate the entire film, and in many cases film exchanges and film companies failed to make the elimination, yet no penalty was attached. In 1915 a Bill known as the Besaw Act was introduced in the General Assembly which sought to make the exchanges responsible.' The Bill was strenuously opposed by the picture companies and by the so-called National Board of Censorship. Nevertheless it passed by an overwhelming majority and became effective on August 27, 1915, unless a successful referendum petition should suspend its operation until after the November elections. What next happened is plainly and concisely told in an item in the *Bill Board Magazine* of September 4. The item reads: 'Columbus, O., August 28.—Failure of B. J. Sawyer, a Cleveland attorney, who had charge of the referendum campaign in behalf of the motion picture manufacturers and exchanges, to secure the 67,500 required signatures in the 90-day period resulted yesterday in the passage of the Besaw law. The new law gives the State Motion Picture Censor Board increased powers in the prosecution of exhibitors who show films