RUSSIAN CIRCUMLOCUTION.

How Projects for Improvements in the Public Service Are Killed.

The reason why changes that are manifestly desirable, that are in the direction of economy, and that apparently would injure no one, are not made in Russia is one of the most puzzling and exasperating things that are forced upon a traveler's attention. In every branch of the administration one is constantly stumbling upon abuses or defects that have long been recognized, that have been commented upon for years, that are apparently prejudicial to the interests of everybody, and that, nevertheless, continue to exist.

If you ask an explanation of an official in Siberia he refers you to St. Petersburg. If you inquire of the chief of the prison department in St. Petersburg he tells you that he has drawn up a "project" to cope with the evil, but that this "project" has not yet been approved by the minister of the interior. If you go to the minister of the interior you learn that the "project" requires a preliminary appropriation of money—even although its ultimate effect may be to save money—and that it cannot be carried into execution without the assent and co-operation of the minister of finance. If you follow the "project" to the minister of finance you are told that it has been sent back through the minister of the interior to the chief of the prison department for "modification."

If you still persist in your determination to find out why this thing is not done, you may chase the modified "project" through the prison department, the minister of the interior and the minister of finance, to the council of the empire. There you discover that, inasmuch as certain cross-and-ribbon-decorated senators and generals, who barely know Siberia by name, have expressed a doubt as to the existence of the evil with which the "project" is intended to deal, a special "commission" (with salaries amounting to 20,000 rubles a year and mileage) has been appointed to investigate the subject and make a report.

If you pursue the commission to Siberia and back, and search diligently in the proceedings of the council of the empire for its report, you ascertain that the document has been sent to the minister of the interior to serve as a basis for a new "project," and then, as ten or fifteen years have elapsed and all the original projectors are dead, everything begins over again. At no stage of this circumrotatory process can you lay your hand on a particular official and say: "Here! You are responsible for this. What do you mean by it?"

At no stage, probably, can you find an official who is opposed to the reform or who has any personal interest in defeating it: and yet the general effect of the circumrotatory process is more certainly fatal to your reformatory project than any amount of intelligent and active opposition. The various bureaus of the provincial governor general's office, the chief prison department, the ministry of the interior, the ministry of finance, the ministry of justice, the council of ministers, and the council of the empire constitute a huge administrative maelstrom of ignorance and indifference, in which a "project" revolves slowly, month after month and year after year, until it is finally sucked down out of sight, or, perhaps, thrown by a fortuitous eddy of personal or official interest into the great gulf stream current of real life.—George Kennan in Century.

The Air's Transparency.

Unlike fog, haze commonly occurs during an unusually dry state of the lower stratum of air. In considering its cause, it has been suggested that the small quantity of nontransparent matter required to produce the dimming effect should always be borne in mind. If the eye can observe the change that comes over a drop of water when the fifty millionth of a gram of fuchsine is introduced, possibly a weight of water or dust not much greater would suffice for visibility in a column of air 1,000 feet long. The air is at all times charged with dust particles to a degree difficult to realize.

The purest air tested by Mr. Atkins when making his measurements on the top of Ben Nevis contained about 34,000 dust particles to each cubic inch, which would give 35,232,000 particles to every cubic foot, or 35,232,000,000 to a horizontal column of 1,000 feet. This being the case, it is manifest that a condensation upon a small proportion of these or a momentary adhesion by electric attraction would suffice to produce the optical effect called "haze" or "haziness."—St. Louis Republic.

Music of the Spheres.

The origin of this everyday phrase is sufficiently interesting to even bear retelling to those that already know it. Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, while experimenting on the vibrations of tight drawn strings, discovered that strings of certain lengths produced certain notes. He then illogically connected the seven planets known at that time with musical notes for the reason merely that the radii of the seven spheres, in which, according to then existing notions, the planets were set, were of unequal length and therefore (?) produced different notes. These notes he dubbed the "music of the spheres." This music was not supposed to be caused by the friction of the spheres in the sockets in which they were set, as is now currently thought, but was produced by the vibrations of their unequal radii.—New York Recorder.

The Young of the Sea Devil.

You may find in the sea devil a curious illustration of nature's system for adjusting reproduction. The cod lays several hundred thousand eggs at a spawning, because nearly all of them must necessarily be lost while floating on the waves and those which hatch are mostly devoured. But the sea devil, which produces but a single young one at a time, retains the latter in its belly until the infant creature is from four to six feet in length, so that when born it is able to take care of itself and is in no danger of being destroyed.—Interview in Washington Star.