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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER :

METRIC MEASURES AND WEIGHTS.

A correspondent wishes to know the present status of the metric system of weights and measures in Canada. In reply we may say that an "act to render permissive the use of the metric or decimal system of weights and measures" was passed by the Dominion Parliament in 1871, and by that act the metric system was legalized throughout Canada. That is to say anyone may now buy or sell by the metric system, and no contract or dealing can be nullified by reason of the terms and quantities being specified in that system. The question of making the metric system compulsory in Canada, as has been done in several other countries which have adopted it within recent years has come up in Parliament and the Cabinet, but it has been felt that to make such a step effective it would be necessary that either Great Britain or the United States should take the same step at the same time. No compulsory act is therefore likely to be passed until one or both of those countries adopt it. In Great Britain a permissive act has existed for a good many years, and a large majority of members of the Imperial Parliament have pronounced in favor of it, while almost every chamber of commerce, and many leading scientific institutions have petitioned in favor of it. There is a still stronger feeling among the commercial and scientific men of Great Britain in favor of decimalizing the English coinage, but the obstacle to these changes is the masses and not the commercial classes. The latter realize that one of the causes of the rapid expansion of the foreign trade of Germany and other European nations compared with that of Great Britain, is the steady spread of the metric system throughout the civilized world. The United States also realizes this handicap upon its prospects in foreign trade, and though there is the same conservatism among the people there as in Great Britain over the change from familiar measures, the United States Government is so convinced of the advantages of the metric system that after the lapse of two years the specifications on all government contracts shall be called for in the metric system. Every manufacturer and dealer who wishes to get a Government contract will have to learn to figure in the metric system.

The letter of Chas. Baillairge, C.E., in this issue, points out some of the objections that can be urged against the metric system. We may agree with Mr. Baillairge, that the number 12 affords the greatest number of even fractions of any that could be selected. It can be divided by 2, 3, 4, or 6, without a remainder; and the divisions of the foot into 12 inches is a very convenient one. The number 12 and its multiples were favorites with the Jews, who were a practical people. But unfortunately the duodecimal system does not run through our English weights and measures. In weights, for instance, we have three tables, all of them differing without any necessity, and only two of them having a weight or denomination comprising 12 units. In the metric system all the measures whether of length, area, volume or capacity are related to each other, and all are based on the decimal system of notation—that is 10 of one denomination make one of the next higher. A person of ordinary intelligence can take the metric wall chart published by the Canadian Engineer, and learn the whole system in an hour. No one who recollects his early school days can say the same of our present cumbersome system.

The critics of the metric system are apt to get into a confusion of thought on this subject. The chief objections they urge are really no reasons against the metric system, but against the decimal system of notation. Their quarrel should be with the arithmetic and not with the metric system. The decimal system of computing numbers is practically universal, and the metric system only translates the present varying and confusing tables into the system of figure-computing which is in universal use. It may be that 12 is a better scale than 10 for computation, and this may be