

THINGS IN GENERAL.

JOHN BRIGHT ON THE CLASSICS.

I regard what I call classics—that is, the ancient languages of Greece and Rome—as luxuries rather than anything else. It is a great luxury to know anything that is good and innocent. It is a great luxury to know a great deal of the past, not that it makes you more powerful to do much, but it is a great pleasure to the person who knows; but I do not believe myself that there is anything in the way of wisdom which is to be attained in any of the books of the old languages which at this moment may not be equally attained in the books of our own literature.—*Speech at Birmingham, England.*

FASHIONABLE LOAFERS.

The modern practice of competitive examination, whatever be its merits or demerits, has at least been the means of largely recruiting the ranks of genteel ne'er-do-weels. With vast continents still lying almost in a state of nature, and offering a splendid field for the settlement of the young and aspiring, it is pitiable to observe how few of this class possess the tact and enterprise to embrace the opportunity offered. Pampered by parents, or relying on some small patrimony, and perhaps with a silly pride of birth, they prefer a life of mere pleasure and amusement to one of honest industry, and constitute the loafers who hang about the clubs and bars of restaurants. You know them at once. Their cut-away tweed jacket, their moustache, their constitution weakened by depravity, and their boisterous laughing and talking, point them out as beings who never earned a shilling, and never will. Their chosen *role* is practically to depend on any one who will eschew honest labour, play at cards and billiards, frequent horse races, and dawdle away existence in a manner alike frivolous and mischievous. As torturations, some of them possibly have been sent to push their way in the colonies or South America; but with their idle and extravagant habits, success is out of the question. If they do not sink into a premature grave, back they come, to weary every one out with their luckless inaptitude and perversity. In comparison with such pretentious yet utterly useless being, how immeasurably more to be respected are the humblest toilers by the wayside striving to earn a bite and sup for daily subsistence.—*Chambers' Journal.*

THE REAL PERIL.

The risk which speculators have most to fear is any great or sudden advance in the value of money. In the ordinary course of things that must come. Cycles in trade are subject to the ordinary influences under which human nature is buoyant or depressed. At the present we are on the upward turn. We have not ascended very far; and if the advance were quietly and cautiously managed, there is no necessity why expanding credit and rising prices should be succeeded within anything like a reasonable time by the evils of inflation. The inflation movement carries up prices and business to a point at which they exceed the capabilities of the available supply of capital. When that point has been reached, panic follows. But though the law of action and reaction holds in trade as in other departments of human activity, the oscillation between the counter-extremes need not be, and seldom is, so rapid or intense as theorists assume. Even in their view, the panic caused by dear money does not come until after a long time, during which there is gradual development of trade, which, by and by when over-done, leads to its arrest. They allow us ten years between one crisis and another; and therefore there is a long period of what ought to be prosperous and advancing trade in front of our business community. Not that there is any assurance that no panic through dear money may come in the interval. On the contrary, many variations may be looked for; and the danger produced by dear money is one that can never be put out of sight by speculators. But such a Stock Exchange panic as may be thus caused would not involve a general business or commercial panic. From that we ought to be safe for years to come; and as to the other, the habitual operators on the Stock Exchange ought to be well able to protect themselves.—*World*

ISLANDS IN THE SKY.

The mirages of the plains are of wondrous beauty. In the autumn, when all the atmospheric conditions are perfect, strange transformations take place upon the prairie ocean. It is the morning of such a day. Along the eastern horizon a narrow belt of silver light appears. As it grows broader the silver gray of its lower line changes to gold. Fleecy clouds above the belt take on a yellow red. The grayish shadows of the dawn lift slowly from the earth and imperceptibly float skyward. Just before the red disc of the sun peers above the horizon line weird islands appear in the sky—*islands* clothed with trees and waving grasses, and held together by threads of yellow and green and azure.

The earth stands inverted in the sky. The wooded bluffs and timber islands of the prairie turn bottom upward in the glaucous ether above, with their feet knee deep in water. The ground work of this illusion is a grayish, semi-opaque mist, but the smallest object on the plain is limned against it with marvellous fidelity. Objects far beyond the range of vision over the prairie are

brought into plain view by this ethereal mirror. I have seen a little village thirty miles away over the plains standing in the sky, every feature traced with the minuteness of a line engraving.

I could distinguish the dogs wandering through the streets, the cows standing idly about the yards, and the opening and closing of a door in the cabins. I have seen dog sledges, whose trains were out of sight below the horizon, trail through the heavens in tortuous course, long lines of cart trains swaying to and fro over the sand dunes in the sky. In all these cases the ground does not appear, only the objects growing upon or passing over it. Everything has the appearance of growing or standing in the water. The feet of animals, the roots of trees, the foundations of houses, are all lost in an aqueous mist.

The ordinary features of the mirage—the simple drawing of distant objects near the spectator—are of common and, in many places, of every day occurrence at some seasons of the year. A few rods away on every side a slight line of grayish mist, exactly resembling that risen from lake or stream in early morning, appears, and upon its surface is limned the whole landscape, changing constantly, like the colours of a kaleidoscope, as a traveller advances. The illusion continues but a few minutes, however. The gold fades from the fleecy clouds overhead as the yellow light descends upon the plain, chasing the receding shade before it. The sun rises, and the dissolving views of the mirage fade slowly away.—*From a Prairie Letter in Lancaster (Pa.) Examiner.*

SPECULATION.—A business very often spelt without the first letter.

AN English critic says that "the slavery of science" has invaded even novels and social essays.

PROFESSOR: "Mr. —, you have a wonderful faculty for learning to forget." Student (aside): "Not so much that I learn to forget, as that I forget to learn."—*New York University Quarterly.*

THE spread of Christianity in Japan during the last seven years has been remarkable. There are now forty-three Protestant churches in that country, with a membership of 1,500. There are fifty-four Sunday schools, with 2,000 scholars; three theological schools, with 175 students, eighty-one missionaries; ninety-three native assistant preachers, ten native pastors, and 150 preaching places. In addition to the distinctively religious work, a large number of secular schools are carried on by Christian preachers.

S. P. Q. R.—One night, while a Roman piece was being performed there was a discussion among the supers as to the meaning of the initials S. P. Q. R. inscribed upon the banners. Dan Shean, who overheard the conversation, quietly suggested that it meant "salaries paid at a queer rate." The joke was reported to the manager, who summoned Dan to his presence, and severely reprimanded him for the remark. "Sure, Sir," answered Dan, with a sly twinkle in his eye, "you've been misinformed. I told 'em it meant salaries paid quite reg'lar!"—*Belgravia.*

AT the railway stations in India the passengers are served with water by a Brahmin, from whom, being of the highest caste, all persons may take without defilement. He goes along the train with his brass vessel; a sudra, or low-caste man, stoops, and in his open hands placed together and raised to the level of his mouth, receives the precious liquid. The vessel of the Brahmin is not touched, else he would be defiled. A Brahmin asks water, and is served with it in the smaller vessels, from which he drinks, there being no defilement between Brahmin and Brahmin.

THE executors of Sir Rowland Hill are authorized to expend a sum not exceeding £250 in completing and publishing a history or statement, not as yet complete, in connection with the penny postage system, and also in writing and publishing a biography of him. After this has been done, his books, papers, and memoranda in connection with the subject are to be offered to the British Museum; and the marble bust of him by Brodie, or any portrait of him, or a copy to be made at the expense of his estate, is to be offered to the trustees of the National Portrait Gallery.

ROBINSON CRUSOE AT DINNER.—Talleyrand had invited Sir George Robinson to dinner, and, mentioning that their guest was a great traveller, desired Madame to pay him much attention, and to speak to him of his travels. This she did by informing him how concerned she had felt when reading of the privation he had undergone, and the shifts he had been put during his sojourn on the uninhabited island. Her visitor was greatly puzzled; said nothing, but bowed his acknowledgments and thought no more. Presently she asked, with much apparent interest, for news of "*cher Vendredi*," that dear faithful man Friday, who had been such a comfort to him. The truth then dawned upon him, and Madame was informed that a less celebrated personage than the hero she was interested in had the honour of being her guest.