

the removal of the export duty. The railroads have had much to do with making it possible. Though the United States still occupies the first place as a source of the wheat supply of the Mother Country, Lord Cross hopes to see the figures reversed at some future day and India taking the lead, but the difference is yet so vast that the change can scarcely come for many years. Though Canada is not deemed worthy of separate mention by Lord Cross or the *Times* in the connection, her contribution being, no doubt, included in the American figures, there must surely be possibilities of development in the immense and fertile prairies of our North-West, which should make her a formidable competitor of both rivals. But, as in the case of India, there is yet much to be done before that consummation can be reached.

THE situation in France is still as wavering and uncertain as ever. Premier Floquet seems, however, to have been driven by stress of danger to the display of an unwonted degree of courage and firmness. The latest news as we go to press is that the Chamber has, by a considerable majority, resolved to abandon the *scrutin de liste* and return to the *scrutin d'arrondissement*. The adoption of this Government measure, after the strong declarations of M. Floquet that it was necessary to guard the country against pretensions founded on treason, can hardly fail to strengthen, temporarily at least, the Government position. If the change goes into effect immediately, it must checkmate Boulanger, by preventing him from further resort to the device of standing for each district as it becomes vacant. To this device the *scrutin de liste*, under which deputies were elected by departments on a general ticket, readily lent itself. The return to what is in effect a system of local or district elections will probably put an end to this game. The crucial test of the Government's stability will, perhaps, be applied in connection with the debate on their scheme of constitutional revision, which comes up on Thursday.

THE alacrity with which both the British and the American Governments responded to Prince Bismarck's invitation to a conference on Samoan affairs has called forth some sarcastic comment on both sides of the water. The course proposed was the only sensible one, and the readiness with which it was accepted redounds to the honour of both nations. If a brief conference shall lead, as may be hoped, to a settlement satisfactory to all concerned, the contracting parties will deserve congratulation, not only for having quickly untwisted a small but dangerous complication, but also for having given a decided impulse to the modern movement in favour of better methods of dealing with international difficulties. The fact that any agreement made on behalf of the United States will not be binding until ratified by the Senate may make the situation embarrassing for the representative of an administration on the eve of quitting office, but it will also strengthen his hands in holding out for such terms as are likely to commend themselves to the Republican Senators. In view of the unusually complaisant attitude which the German Chancellor has of late assumed towards Great Britain, it may be predicted with tolerable safety that the terms proposed on behalf of Germany will not be hard to accept. It is evident that the vision of an Anglo-German alliance, in effect if not in form, has of late passed before the eyes of the great diplomatist, and he is far too astute to let a small present issue bar the way to a great advantage in the future.

BOOKS AND READING.

IT may be thought that education has now made such progress among us that it is no longer necessary to insist upon the importance of reading or to give suggestions as to the books which should be read or the manner of reading them. We are not quite sure that this opinion is well-founded. It is quite true that most people are now capable of reading books in their own language. It is also true that a considerable majority of those who are able to read do read something. But there is still a vast number of persons—not at all badly educated—who read hardly anything at all; and there is a number as large, perhaps larger, of persons whose reading must be so unprofitable that perhaps they had better not read at all. Indeed, there is a conflict of opinion on this very point, men of equal eminence taking different sides; some holding that it matters little what a man reads when he reads, providing only that he gets the habit of reading anyhow, since, the habit once formed, he will certainly, in time, eschew the evil and choose the good. Others again,

notably Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Frederic Harrison, are very earnest in protesting that bad books are worse than nothing, that the man who is reading mere worthless or hurtful books would do very much better to let books alone altogether.

It is of small importance to adjust the balance between these opposing views. The utility of reading is so generally recognized that, even if it is abused, there is little hope of its being abandoned. Without reading and study men cannot gain knowledge, cannot become learned or cultivated in any full sense of these words. It is therefore more to the purpose to offer some guidance to the reader, for people will read, than to tell those who are reading amiss to desist, which they will be little likely to do. With regard to the class of subjects which are profitable for reading, we might say at once that all are profitable, if only they are taken in their proper proportions. It is too late in the day to prohibit the reading of fiction and poetry and the drama. It may be all very well for those who are shut up in the cloister, or who are living by rule under some definite authority, to renounce anything which is forbidden to them. Obedience of this kind may be a very good thing, especially if it keeps people to their own chosen and appointed work. But the man who tells ordinary people, "living in the world," that they shall not read fiction, may as well tell the wind not to blow. Besides, he cannot possibly be consistent. The most severe prohibitionist in this line would read and recommend the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is fiction. And the same may perhaps be said of many Scripture parables. We say "perhaps," because Archbishop Trench suggests, and many persons believe, that the parables of the Gospels, or some of them, are true stories.

But, although we cannot hope or desire to stop the reading of fiction, we may do something to regulate it and to restrain it. One who reads nothing but light literature is as certainly ruining his literary digestion as one who ate nothing but pastry would be ruining his stomach. If any one should find it impossible to read a volume of history, or a play of Shakespeare, or a book of *Paradise Lost*, or a play of Walter Scott's without toil and weariness, then such an one had better call a halt without delay, and subject himself to a process of self-examination. It will be well, in such a case, to break off the reading of novels at once, and begin the effort to read something else, taking perhaps a little at a time, until his powers are confirmed, just as an invalid is permitted to return to his full diet only by slow degrees.

If, however, it is a matter of strict necessity and of duty to our own intellectual nature to limit our reading of fiction and light literature generally, it is still more obligatory upon us to avoid all corrupting literature. And we are apt to make mistakes on this subject. It is quite easy to say of certain books that they are filthy, and it is not difficult to bring the censor down upon their publishers. But these books are seldom the worst. A book of this kind was suppressed the other day in England, and its publisher was fined. Yet an eminent literary man remarked, with perfect truth, that the book was no more demoralizing than an open sewer would be; it was simply sickening and disgusting. The books of this kind which are most mischievous are those of which it is impossible to prohibit the circulation. Every one must take care of himself, and, as far as possible, of those whom he can influence.

It was remarked by the late Lord Lytton to the present writer that, "in literature we should read the older books, and in science the new." There is no great need for this caution in regard to the latter class; but the importance of the other portion of the counsel is imperfectly recognized. Of course, it was not the intention of so eminent a writer to interdict the reading of new books. In that case his own occupation would have been gone; and such a piece of advice would have exposed its author to the lash of Horace, as applicable in our own times, as in his. But we are certainly justified in holding that the man or woman who can find no pleasure in books, unless they are of the ephemeral type, has no proper appreciation of literature at all. And this is true of a great many of our modern readers.

"The books which ought to be in every gentleman's library," as some one sarcastically called them, are too often allowed to rest on their shelves, whilst the books which will never find a permanent resting place in any library are often eagerly devoured. We may as well make up our mind, as Mr. Frederic Harrison has lately warned us, in his excellent essay on the "Choice of Books," that, if this is all that our reading amounts to, we are in a very bad way indeed. If we cannot read Shakespeare and

Milton and Scott without weariness, then we must really give up pretending to be educated people. And there are many persons who cannot read a play of Shakespeare or a novel of Walter Scott's without weariness, or at all!

It is something that these things should be already said and heard; because a great many persons are under the quite false impression that the mere fact of their devouring quantities of ephemeral novels proves them to be readers of certain literary pretensions, if not also students. These false notions may not be dissipated at once or very widely. But if only one here and there will make the resolve to adjust the proportions of their reading in a more satisfactory manner, the influence will spread, and the reformation will at least have been begun.

It is beyond the purpose of these brief and straggling notes either to consider the whole subject of reading in anything like a complete manner, or to suggest a collection of books which are worthy of being read, and which ought to be read by all who aspire to literary cultivation. To a great extent safe guidance will be found in the papers of Mr. Frederic Harrison and Sir John Lubbock, the latter of whom has given a list of what he regards as the hundred best books. We may, however, suggest a way of beginning to those who have had little guidance in this business of reading, and may be glad to be helped into better ways.

First of all, then, there are English classics which are acknowledged by all competent persons to have a position beyond the range of criticism. And with the works of these, or some considerable part of them, it is the duty of all who aspire to be educated men and women to be acquainted. We name, as mere samples, Shakespeare, Milton, and Scott. Perhaps none could be named greater than these, although we are aware that by some persons Chaucer and Spenser are preferred to Milton. In French literature, there are Corneille, Racine, Molière; in prose, Bossuet's *Histoire Universelle*, Pascal's *Provincial Letters* and *Pensées*. In German, there is Goethe's *Faust* and *Hermann and Dorothea*, Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. In Italian, Dante, to go no further. In Spanish, Don Quixote and the plays of Calderon; and English readers may be recommended to Archbishop Trench's admirable little volume on that which is the principal play of this Spanish Shakespeare, namely, *Life is a Dream*. There are good translations of most foreign works which are worth an English dress; and those who are unable to read the originals should have recourse to them. As examples may be mentioned, the excellent translation of *Faust* by Bayard Taylor, and of Dante those of Cary and Longfellow. With regard to classical authors, Homer and Virgil for instance, there are many very good translations, and of late some excellent renderings in prose have been published by eminent Cambridge scholars. Probably these translations will give an English reader the best notion of the originals. Many however will continue to prefer metrical renderings. Pope's Homer will always be popular, and Chapman's will be valued by those who appreciate strength and force.

WILLIAM CLARK.

WHAT IS THE EMPIRE?

THERE is a preliminary stage in military instruction known as the balance step without gaining ground. To it the Imperial Federation movement might be compared. The agitation, though in continual activity, makes no visible progress towards its professed goal—an improved plan for the government of the Empire. Nevertheless there must be something in an idea that continues to exert such an attraction upon so many patriotic minds and eminent men in different parts of the Empire. Its persistent life bespeaks some underlying truth not yet fully developed or expressed. An analysis of the positions of the Federationists will, I think, betray the source of such strength as their movement exhibits, and also the cause of its final weakness. A real sense of unity, although far from universal, is very widely cherished among thoughtful inhabitants of the Empire. This genuine sentiment would gladly find expression in a suitable programme. But while the advocates of the movement appeal to it in one breath they affront it in the next. Their conception of Federation treats as indispensable the admission of Colonial representation to the Parliament of Great Britain, or the creation of a Federal Council sitting in London, as a supreme executive, and with some legislative powers. They imply that until one or more of these great changes is effected the Empire has no constitutional unity, except a unity of superiority and subjection. In Canada at the present time they are very busy in pressing upon the Canadian people in their writings and by their speeches that the time has come to elect between Federation, inde-