

Contemporary Thought.

THERE is no possible success without opposition as a fulcrum. Force is always aggressive and crowds something or other.—*O. W. Holmes.*

ISERIOUSLY question whether the education of to-day is so well-adapted to turn out successful men and women as the education of years ago. There are too many studies, too many examinations, too much cramming to pass examinations. If there is any one thing needed to-day, it is some legislative action which would result in the erection of a better class of common-school buildings. Out of 31,399 teachers in the state, 29,324 are licensed by local officers. Abuses are inevitable. Many are licensed who are incapable. There should be a uniform system of state examinations held simultaneously throughout the state.—*Hon. A. S. Draper, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, on the "Educational System of the State."*

A CHICAGO publishing house employs "periodicals." But the periodicals are not newspapers and magazines at intervals of publication, but able and even brilliant men, who are "periodical drinkers." They remain sober for weeks at a time, then suddenly "go on a spree" for several days, and come back wrecked in health and purse. These men are capable of earning high wages; but on account of the "risk"—of their untrustworthiness—they get only about one third of what their talents entitle them to. This is a powerful temperance lecture all by itself. An observing person thinks that steady drinkers are decreasing in numbers, but that periodical drinkers are becoming more common. Perhaps the race of steady drinkers is dying out—killing itself off—and the "periodicals" are their descendants—the remnant. The offspring of the "periodicals" may be only epileptics, and the type itself finally die out altogether. It is a hopeful, if not very well founded theory.—*Detroit Free Press.*

BAD books and vicious literature are to be found everywhere. The first leaves of the most atrocious and sentimental fiction published are scattered broadcast in the vicinity of our schoolhouses. These sheets are distributed purely in the business interests of those who reap profit by engendering morbid and depraved appetites for the perusal of murderous adventures, pistol and fainting episodes, monstrous and impossible incidents of love, lust, and so-called virtue. The demoralizing influence of bad literature is difficult to exaggerate. Its effects upon the young mind are disastrous in the extreme, destroying all relish for the business of the school, and sapping and weakening the purpose or energy required to perform the most common duties of life. How often teachers point out to me inefficient and ambitionless boys or girls, with the sad explanation, "he or she is a novel reader." The remark simply but significantly explains the listlessness and stupidity of youths who have become so unfortunate as to fall into this horrible net. The ability to read, as one says, is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The child who plucks from this tree only to partake of the knowledge of evil is lost indeed.—*New England Journal of Education.*

LIBERALISM has undoubtedly led the way to Communism. "To-day the working man has consciousness of his own power," said Lasalle, "quite unparalleled by any of his competitors in former ages." Beginning with Babeuf, Cabot, Saint Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc, Prudhon, Rodbertus, Carl Marx, Lasalle, the various methods devised by them to solve the most difficult of human problems is discussed. Nothing can be more touching than the life of Saint Simon, who sacrificed his days to the propagation of his ideas. His was the faith of the martyr. He was unfortunate in those who succeeded him, and *Enfantin* was a fanatic. No one can doubt the sincerity of Fourier, though he might have proposed to pay off the debt of England by means of the sale of eggs produced by his phalansthetic hens. Prudhon, with his "property is theft," is well treated. *Socialism in France, after Blanqui*, with its "neither God nor Master"—the master to be understood, in its most ordinary everyday sense, of the employer, shows the madness of this school. Of the French Anarchists the leaders are Krapotkin, Reclus, Bernard, and Bordat. "Fire, dynamite, and assassination are approved of by at least a large number of the party." *Ex.*

GREAT as were Burke's literary powers, and passionate as was his fondness for letters and for literary society, he never seems to have felt that the main burden of his life lay in that direction. He looked to the public service, and this though he always believed that the pen of a great writer was a more powerful and glorious weapon than any to be found in the armory of politics. This faith of his comes out sometimes queerly enough. For example, when Dr. Robertson in 1777 sent Burke his cheerful "History of America" in quarto volumes, Burke in the most perfect good faith closes a long letter of thanks thus:—"You will smile when I send you a trifling temporary production made for the occasion of the day, and to perish with it, in return for your immortal work." I have no desire to say anything disrespectful of Principal Robertson; but still, when we remember that the temporary production he got in exchange for his "History of America" was Burke's immortal "Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol on the American War," we must, I think, be forced to admit that, as so often happens when a Scotchman and an Irishman do business together, the former got the better of the bargain.—*Augustine Birrell in the Nineteenth Century.*

OUR existing ciphers, though originally Indian, are now universally described as Arabic, because they came to the Western world from India and Africa through the mercantile medium of the Spanish Arabs. From Spain they spread to the European nations, though not without considerable opposition by the way, such as invariably testifies to the goodness and soundness of every genuine human improvement. Whenever you hear a loud popular clamour raised against anything as wicked or foolish, you may be pretty sure it will really turn out in the end a valuable invention. What everybody says must be wrong. This simple conclusion flows as a matter of course from the familiar principle, first definitely formulated by "poor Carlyle," that there are so many billion people in the world, mostly fools. Pinyin numerals met with little favour, accordingly, from the meli-

eval merchant. The bankers of Florence were forbidden, on the verge of the fifteenth century, from employing these dangerous Saracen signs in any of their account books, and the University of Padua (so very like our own Oxford) ordained that its stationer should keep a list of books for sale with the prices marked, "not in ciphers, but in plain letters." The hapless modern purchaser rather desires, on the contrary, that prices should be marked, not in letters, but in plain ciphers. It is noticeable that the very word cipher, here employed, is itself Arabic, and its progeny includes not only the French *chiffre*, but also, through Italian *zero*, the much less immediately recognizable derivative, zero. Arabic numerals were at first confined in use to mathematical works; they were then employed for the paging of books, and it was not till the middle of the fifteenth century that they first found their way with any security into general commercial society.—*The Cornhill Magazine.*

JULIUS CÆSAR was elected to the office of Consul. He saw that the peasant proprietors were melting away, and that the city "of Rome was being choked with impoverished burgesses who ought to have been farmers and fathers of families, but were degenerating into rabble and feeding upon public grants of meal." Julius Cæsar was not a revolutionary politician, but he saw that if revolution was to be escaped some reasonable reform was inevitable. So must every impartial observer of the present incidents and circumstances of British land at the present day. "If the noble Roman lords could have forgotten their fish preserves and game preserves" and recollected that they had most important duties to fulfill, the then existing government might have been maintained. But they made no sign, they offered no concession, and Cæsar introduced his land law. By that law no injustice, no wrong, was to be done to existing occupiers, and no rights of property violated which had any tangible and just foundation. Discerning the political perils of the times, Cæsar proposed to buy up large tracts of state lands held by the great landed proprietors on the usual easy terms, and to initiate the reform by settling 20,000 veteran soldiers upon them. It was admitted that Cæsar's measure was a mild and moderate one, and yet it was hotly opposed in the Senate. Cæsar could make no progress there, and finally "took his bull by the horns" and appealed to the popular assembly. The Forum was crowded to excess. Pompey spoke in support of the measure, and in a scene of much excitement and disorder the agrarian law was passed. The readers of the "Croker Correspondence" will find political parallels in the terror which beset the governing aristocracy in 1831, when the moderate and necessary reforms of that year were proposed to them; and again, when Sir Robert Peel carried the repeal of the corn laws. "Moderate reform," exclaimed Croker, "moderate gunpowder." Recurring to Cæsar's policy it should be added that a land commission was at once appointed to work out the new land law, and thus the question was set at rest for his time. But it is certain that the treatment of the land by the Roman Senate and aristocracy was for centuries a dangerous and irritating element of popular feeling.—*The British Quarterly Review.*