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BOOKS AND THE AGE.

ONE of the most prominent characteristics of the age, undoubtedly, is the thirst for knowledge—the desire to acquire practical and compact information on all subjects. To get at facts, to know the why and wherefore, to comprehend principles, to understand laws, to have the thousand and one things of passing or permanent interest made plain—such are the demands of the age and the dividends required, in these times, from books. Nor would it be difficult to account for this impetus to reading and research, in these days of steam and telegraphs, when nation daily gossips with nation and hemisphere with hemisphere over passing events, and the whole earth is quickened with flashing thought and quick-spiced word. The intellect, if in accord, takes a reflex from the times, and widens its reach and grasp, and action touched by its wand bounds off to new achievements.

But, more practically, this stimulus to reading in our day is, no doubt, due to the extension and influence of education and the incitement of the press;—for what are the subjects that are not now discoursed of in school books or discussed in newspapers? They stand pre-eminent as educators of the people—the former with its exhaustive theoretical information; the latter with its varied and practical daily fare. The competition in all professions and trades, too, has done much to stimulate reading, and to incite a more prevalent habit of reading, as it has necessitated those employed in either to be thoroughly well informed in their respective vocations, and to bring to their work a wider intelligence and a higher culture. Bearing thus on practical life, in professional education, and in social accomplishments, the character of this reading, also, has necessarily much improved, and become more useful and wholesome. From the vapid and the sensational in literature, the popular taste has oscillated to the intellectual and the serious.

The great secrets of science, the profound laws of the universe, the subtle influences of nature, and such like studies, now engage and engross the reader. The records of the

past, discovery and invention, travel and exploration, language and race, government and laws, trade and commerce—these, and such like subjects of inquiry, command and draw the attention of the student and the citizen.

There is, it is true, a spirit of inquiry abroad that is purely fanciful in its aims and pursuits—metaphysically trifling, or pedantically frivolous—a mere dabbling in this or that branch of knowledge in the most superficial manner, or a dilettante skimming of the deep waters of erudition and thought. But, in contrast to this, and specially remarkable as a feature of the times, there is an earnest and active desire for popular and practical information, and the diffusion of useful knowledge. Self-education, with its aids and appliances, is everywhere called into play; and there is a general and untiring scaling of the heights and plumbing of the depths of knowledge.

The monk and the cell are no longer the sole depositors of its secrets, and the treasured scroll of the recluse has become the horn-book of the child at school. The mariner at sea now can forecast his weather, and the miner underground has more than pick-axe to guide him. Literature with its treasures wins its students, philosophy allures its attendants, and science enlists its votaries from among the people.

In the liberal studies, the Universities and schools of learning hold their sway; in the arts and technical branches there are schools of design, Polytechnic Institutions, and British Science Associations; and in mercantile life business colleges, with their Professors of Political Economy and Commercial Law, fulfil their required purposes. The age, truly, is astir with thought; and books, its vehicle and channel, play no unimportant part. But in all this the age is a fast one; and we fear the antiquarian, the leisurely scholar, and the man of solid, well-digested information and learning, are passing away. People read, the masses read, cram, and devour—but what and how? Are not the requirements of the times for ready, handy information, encyclopedic knowledge—digests and compends that give the pith and marrow of a subject? The want of the

PAGE.

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49 & 52
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