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AWARDS OF JUDGES IN COMPETITIVE EXHIBITIONS.

The increasing difficulty which a conscientious judge must feel in awarding prizes, at our annual exhibitions, is becoming very perplexing. The difficulty lies in the necessity of deciding what quality in the things demanding his consideration ought to be deemed most meritorious. A work of art is to be judged as a thing of beauty, by rules which are known and settled. But a thing that has several qualities, including utility, perfection of mechanism, ornamental finish, is too complex to be disposed of on any single set of principles. In such cases, the great object to be kept in view is the purpose for which the thing exhibited is primarily required.

There are many things exhibited on these occasions, for which no adequate means exist, as matters are now arranged, for forming a correct judgment upon. Take stoves as an illustration. A kitchen stove is, first of all, intended as an apparatus for cooking; and that which, in this respect, does its work best, with the least consumption of fuel, which is most easily managed, and is most durable, should be adjudged the best stove. But how are the respective merits of the various cooking stoves to be arrived at? Clearly only by competitive trial. But no such trial takes place; and the various competing stoves have to be pronounced upon in the absence of the only information that could entitle any one to say that one will better perform its part than another. In the absence of a trial before the judges, evidence impartially collected by others, if it were obtainable, would furnish the best ground for a judgment. But such evidence is not obtainable. Certificates, such as patent medicine vendors can get by the score, in favor of the superior qualities of this or that stove, may doubtless be had in abundance; but these are valueless as grounds on which to form a judgment on the respective merits of several competing stoves.

Other and secondary qualities may easily be judged of; but they do not go to the primary purpose and qualities of the stove. The setting or ornamentation of the stove may be to some extent a matter of taste. Some may like the contrast between the white ground metal and the black-washed casting; and others may insist that the red colored mica is a great addition of beauty. But the attempt to decorate the kitchen by a jewel, in the shape of a many-colored cooking stove, is at best fantastic, and more or less incongruous. It is, if not decoration run mad, decoration out of place. The chances are that the stove will be put into the hands of a cook who will not only neglect its misplaced finery but give its substantial and necessary parts very rough usage. There is yet another, but still secondary test, by which the merits of the stove may be judged. The castings may be of first, second or third quality; its parts may be well fitted together; the necessary finish may be good; the general build may be stout and promise durability; its equipment may be ample or meagre, good or bad. But even in this latter particular, difficulties will arise; for this quality will depend greatly upon cost, and it is just as essential that cheap stoves should be good as dear ones. A good casting is a needful element in a good stove; but the first requisites are the excellence of the cooking qualities, economy in fuel, simplicity and reasonable durability. The best workmanship would be wasted on a bad form of stove.

But what are the judges to do? They must be guided by what they see. They can see the castings, the general make-up, the decorations, when there are any. But they cannot know how the stove will behave in action; how it will perform the purpose for which it is made and purchased. The necessity which forces them to form an opinion upon inadequate data places them in a false position and makes their judgment of little value. It is as if one of our law courts should be required to pass upon the merits of a case without being able to get the evidence most essential to the formation of an opinion thereon. It is obvious that unless the mode of proceeding is changed, the opinions of the judges, at our annual exhibitions, on all similar cases, will come to be of extremely little value. It is of course possible that they may blunder upon a correct conclusion; but there is nothing like certainty that they will do so. Some of them may have had the means of forming an opinion elsewhere upon some one of the subjects between which they are required to decide on the merits; but this partial experience is worse

than none at all, since it inevitably tends to foster prejudice and to preclude a deliberate weighing of merits. Common fame may also serve as the basis of a judgment; but it is at best only heresay evidence, and would not serve for the condemnation or the exculpation of a dog.

And between different classes of stoves different rules of judgment would have to be applied, if we would reach a true conclusion. Decoration of a stove to be placed in the hands of Biddy, in the kitchen, can hardly be regarded as an element of merit; while the tasteful decoration of a parlour stove certainly ought to count for something, and there are conceivable instances in which it ought to sway the judgment. For instance, if two makers of the same kind of stove, showed equal merit in the casting and general make-up, it is obvious that superior decoration, where decoration would be in place, ought to carry the day. But in all cases, the essential working qualities of the stove should be the first consideration; and if there be no adequate means of ascertaining these, nothing but a random judgment is possible.

We have taken the stove not as an implement that stands alone, but as the representative of classes which have to be judged of by the appearance they present, when the only true test of the essential qualities is a competitive trial. Reaping machines, threshing machines, ploughs and a large class of other implements are in the same position. But few of these can be tried thoroughly when on exhibition. There ought to be a trial, when and where a full and fair trial is possible. It ought to be possible to establish a rank of temporary superiority.

A machine which carries off the first prize, in a competitive trial, carried on under conditions equally fair to all, ought to be adjudged the best till it is beaten; just as Hanlan will be treated as the best rower, in three countries, till he is beaten. This would give a solid basis of superiority, and greatly simplify matters. Similar machines which did not enter into competition would go on their own merits. Second best, and third best might still keep their true ground, though they might bring their makers less profit. The injustice that must now often be done, unconsciously, by judges would be reduced to a minimum, for it can never be altogether eliminated from these decisions so long as man is liable to err. Our remarks apply to no exhibition in particular, much less have they reference to any particular instances of misjudgments. They apply to all exhibitions, where prizes are awarded on competition to assumed superior excellence; and they