

Month's Corner.

BLAISE PASCAL.

"Tell me, father, what is meant by Geometry?" Such were the words of a child of nine years old, one summer evening in the year 1632. They were uttered in a large room in a house in Paris, and addressed to a pale, intelligent looking man in the prime of life. He was seated at a table covered with books, maps, etc., and the shade which deep thought and incessant study had cast over his brow, was dissipated by the well-pleased smile with which he gazed on the upturned face of his little son. It was no common countenance to look on: childish as were the features, mind had stamped them, and a fervent soul looked through those bright young eyes, as the boy anxiously awaited his father's reply.

"Geometry, my child, is the science which considers the extent of bodies: that is to say, their three dimensions—length, breadth, and depth; it teaches how to form figures in a just, precise manner, and to compare them one with another."

"Father," said the child, "I will learn Geometry!"

"Nay, my boy, you are too young and sickly for such a study; you have been all day poring over your books; go now into the garden with your cousin Charles, and have a pleasant game of play this fine evening."

"I don't care for the play-things that amuse Charles, and he does not like my books; let me stay here with you, and tell me if the straight and round lines you often draw are part of Geometry."

The father sighed as he looked at the slight and delicate form and flushed cheek of his son, and taking the little burning hand of his son, and putting aside his books, "Well, Blaise," he answered, "I will take a walk with you myself, and breathe the fresh air, and smell the sweet flowers; but you must ask me no more questions about Geometry."

Such was one of the first manifestations of Blaise Pascal's intellect; the early dawning of that mathematical genius, destined in a few years to astonish Europe, which would probably have achieved wonders in science, rivaling the subsequent discoveries of Newton and Laplace, had he not, while still young, abandoned the pursuit of earthly knowledge, and dedicated all his powers of mind and body to the service of religion and the good of his fellow men.

His father, Etienne Pascal, was a man of talent, well known and esteemed by the literati of the day. Having himself experienced the absorbing nature of mathematical pursuits, he did not wish his son to engage in them until his mind should be matured and his body in greater vigour; and as Blaise did not again mention the word Geometry, and ceased to linger long in the study, his father hoped that balls and hoops had at length chased circles and triangles from his brain. At the end of a long corridor, in Mr. Pascal's house, there was an apartment which was only used as a lumber room, and consequently seldom opened. He one day entered it in search of some article, and what was his surprise to see little Blaise kneeling on the floor, and with a piece of charcoal in his hand busily occupied in drawing triangles, circles, and parallelograms. The child was so much absorbed in his employment that he heeded not the opening of the door, and it was not till his father spoke that he raised his head.

"What are you doing, child?"

"Oh, father, don't be angry; indeed I could not put Geometry out of my mind; every night I used to lie awake, thinking of it; and so I came here to work away at these lines."

Having passed some years in these studies and recreations, he suddenly resolved to devote the remainder of his life to an exposition of the Christian religion. For this purpose he returned to Paris, where, amid the interruptions caused by frequent attacks of illness, he conceived and partly executed a comprehensive work on Christianity, its nature and evidences. This he did not live to complete; but some of its detached fragments, found after his death, were published as his "Thoughts." About this period of his life he published the "Provincial Letters," which have been characterized by competent judges as the most perfect prose work in the French language. They treat of the points in dispute between the Jansenists, whose cause Pascal espoused, and the company of Jesuits. We find in them the pointed and dramatic powers of Molière, mingled with the sublime eloquence of Bossuet. When the latter was asked which book in the world he would choose to have been the author of, he replied, the "Provincial Letters."

Pascal in his thirtieth year already exhibited the symptoms of premature decay. He had been for many years under the care of medical men. Perceiving that the cure of their patient could not be effected, so long as he persisted in the indulgence of his sedentary and studious habits, the physicians advised him to take as much exercise as possible, which would at once strengthen his enfeebled frame, and divert him from his mental fatigue. His fondly loved sister, Madame Perier, one morning in October, 1654, accompanied him in his accustomed drive. The day was lovely, and he seemed to receive strength from the balmy air. He spoke of the folly of national antipathies, and the sin of war. "Fancy," said he, "a Frenchman addressing an Englishman, and asking him, 'Why do you want to kill me?' 'What?' the other answers, 'don't you live at the other side of the water?' My friend, if you lived on this side, I should be an assassin, and it would be most unjust to kill you; but as you live at the other side, I'm a brave fellow and feel quite justified in taking your life."

The gentle and fervent charity of his nature shone forth all the more brilliantly for his bodily sufferings. He gave alms to an extent which appeared fully to his acquaintances. One of

them lectured him one day on his imprudent expenditure, which he affirmed would bring him to poverty. Pascal smiled and quietly replied, "I have often remarked, that however poor a man may be when dying, he always leaves something behind him."

The life of Blaise Pascal drew near its termination. A fatal disease was preying upon him, brought on by the intense working of a mighty soul, enshrined in a feeble body:—"Its shell the spirit wore." A deep shade of gloom and despondency, arising from physical causes, often clouded his mind. But his sufferings were soothed by the fond attentions of his sister. She brought her family to Paris, and, having taken a house near his, devoted herself to him with anxious affection. One day, while still able to walk out, he was accosted in the street by a wretched looking man, holding a little boy by the hand. His countenance showed marks of suffering, and his tale was a sad one. He had been a journeyman shoe-maker, and lived happily with his little ones, inhabiting a small house in the outskirts of Paris. A fire broke out one night; his little dwelling with all that it contained was consumed. He and his family escaped with their lives; but, from exposure to cold and anxiety, his wife and two children fell victims to fever; and he, only just recovered from the same disease, was forced, with his remaining child, to beg a morsel of bread. Pascal's heart was touched by his tale, and, not satisfied with relieving his immediate wants, he took him into his own house, and desired him to make it his home until his health should be re-established, and he should be able to procure work. Some days passed on, and Pascal became rapidly worse: he could with difficulty leave his room, and was forced to discontinue his accustomed walks. His sister's fond cares were indispensable to his comfort: every day she passed in his chamber, ministering to his wants, and learning holy lessons of patience and resignation, springing from love to God and submission to his holy will. The poor shoe-maker also tried by every means in his power to serve his benefactor; and the pleasant laugh and winning ways of his little son George often soothed and cheered Pascal, who dearly loved children.

He had an old female servant who had lived in his house, and had served him faithfully for many years. One morning she entered his room before the hour when Madame Perier generally came, and withdrawing the curtains, she gazed sorrowfully on the wasted form and hectic cheek of her beloved master.

"How do you feel to-day, sir?"

"Not well, Cecile: I passed a sleepless night, but I had sweet thoughts which comforted me."

The old woman proceeded to arrange the room, and her master said—

"Where is little George, Cecile? I have not heard his merry voice this morning?"

"Oh, sir, I wanted to tell you about him, and still, seeing you so poorly, I did not know how to do it; for I am afraid it will flurry you so."

"Speak, speak, Cecile! what has happened to the child?"

"Oh! nothing, sir; but all yesterday he was dull and heavy, and would not eat; his father watched him all night, and early this morning brought the doctor to see him, and he says the child has got the small pox; and when I asked him whether he could not be removed to another house, he said it would risk the boy's life to do so. However, I don't know what we are to do; for we could not endanger Madame Perier and her darling children, for the sake of a beggar's brat."

Pascal thought for a moment. "No, Cecile," he said, "their health must not be risked, nor shall little George be removed. I will go to my sister's; I know her rooms are all occupied, but I am sure she will spare a small one, good enough for me during the short time I shall want it."

Madame Perier soon came, and the arrangement was made according to his wishes. After providing amply for the comfort of the sick boy and his father, he left his quiet house and airy apartment, never to return thither again. With much pain, and suffering greatly from exhaustion, he was borne to his sister's house. There on the 19th of August, 1662, at the age of thirty-nine years, the gentle and holy spirit of Blaise Pascal returned to Him who gave it.—*Protestant Churchman.*

THE FRUIT OF MAN'S AMBITION.

From Reflections at the end of the "Life of Julius Caesar" published by the Religious Tract Society, in the Monthly Series.

In this example of gigantic and terrible depravity, we behold the emptiness and frailty of man's ambition. For five short months of uneasy grandeur, in which his restlessness was kindled to a maddening fever, by the honours lavished on him, Caesar reaped the fruit of years of toil, and it turned to ashes in his mouth. What a lesson to us all! What are we making our chief good? For what are we spending our strength, our time, our money? If it be for any object that centers in self, that is limited by time, that is confined to earth, what words can express our folly? what colours can paint our disappointment? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." We were not made to live for ourselves—for the shadows of earth—for the trifles of time. We were made that we might be guided by the light of God's truth, fashioned after his image, and satisfied with his favour. If we lose sight of this, we may be rich, famous, or powerful, in our small degree; but we shall not be right nor safe; and it is as contrary to our nature as it is to the word of God that we should be truly happy.

Shall the story of men's lives be told in vain? Let the history of Julius Caesar stamp upon our hearts the lesson taught by Him who, while he was the Son of God, became, as our

Saviour, teacher, example, and Lord, the greatest of men: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" We should fail most seriously in our duty, in portraying the life of Caesar, if we did not take occasion to remember what it is that really constitutes a great man. The world has been blinded by the excess of splendour which surrounds some names. Caesar was a great man. We are not careful to deny, at this moment, that he was the greatest man of that kind.

But is a soldier of necessity in the highest class of human beings? Is ambition the noblest of human motives? Is it the best order of character to meet corruption by corruption, and to conquer force by force?

The greatest man is he who does most good. To do good on a large scale can be the privilege of few; but what only the few can do separately, the many may do by union. We may, therefore, hope that great men are not so rare as they may seem. Wide cornfields wave their ripening treasures where no oak spreads out its boughs as the monarch of the woods. Many a gentle stream waters miles of verdure, giving life and healthful occupation to hundreds of happy men and women, where there is no cataract to allure the travellers from every region to listen to its roar, and to tremble at its sublimity.—It is not want of sensibility to the grandeur of single objects in nature that makes us say that the number and the usefulness of the lesser beauties of our world affect our imagination with a sense of something greater, as well as of something unspeakably more pleasing; and so in looking upon men. Happily the Caesars are but few; happily still would it be if the class to which he belonged had never been known! We know that, in the time to come, our world will have no occupation for such men. "Neither shall they learn war any more." "Neither shall character will not be wanting. Divine wisdom has taught us a weighty truth, in one short sentence: "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." To be a conqueror requires forethought, arrangement, boldness, patience, courage; but how much more are these qualities required in him who would subdue himself! Here is the secret of true greatness—self-denial and self-control. For want of this, Caesar enslaved the world; but in that world there was no greater slave than Caesar.

How much of human wisdom is there, as well as of Divine authority, in the brief proverb of the Scriptures! "This true and solid greatness should be aimed at by every child. Every parent should inculcate it by precept, and commend it by example. It is prudence, it is strength, it is happiness. With this no character can be bitter: without it no character can be great. It lies at the foundation of industry. It opens a sure path to honour. It is the natural effect of believing the great truths of the gospel, which humble us as sinners, and revive us as penitents, that they may encourage us to watch and pray, and quit ourselves like men. Blessed are they who are helped by God's own Spirit to gain this victory: to them the world becomes an easy conquest. How really pitiful is Julius Caesar when compared with the lowliest Christian! We are not so ignorant as to despise the gifts of God in bestowing great talents; but we have the highest authority for looking with more admiration on one talent well used, than on a thousand misapplied. The humble peasant, or mechanic, has a warfare to accomplish—a name to honour—a triumph to gain; and in the lowliest vale of life we know of many who are fighting "a good fight," keeping the faith, finishing their course, to whom "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give" a crown that fadeeth not. How many a pious mother, how many an affectionate teacher, how many a faithful pastor, or missionary, will then be found to have been wiser than the world's philosophers, and mightier than her heroes!

WAGES FOR LABOUR. Data furnished to the *Albany Cultivator* by the *London Mark Lane Express*.—In England, the average rate of agricultural wages for an able man, with a family, is 9 shillings, or \$1.98 per week. From this is to be deducted cottage rent at 35 cents per week, leaving \$1.63 per week to provide himself with the necessities of life. In France a labourer in the same situation receives \$1.04 per week; in Prussia, 66 cents; in Germany, \$1.02 per week; in Holland and Belgium, \$1.20; in Italy and the Austrian States, \$1.15. It will be remembered that these averages are those of the common labourer—shepherds, carmen, and mechanics, receiving rather more. The food which the wages named above will purchase in the several countries, is stated in the *Express* as follows:—

In England, the labourer can obtain for his 163 cents, or his week's wages, either 39 lbs. of bread, or 11 1-2 lbs. of meat, 7 1-4 lbs. of butter, 12 3-4 lbs. of cheese, or 174 lbs. of potatoes.

In France, with his 104 cents, he can buy either 46 lbs. of bread, 13 1-2 lbs. of meat, or 261 lbs. of potatoes.

In Prussia, with his 66 cents per week, the labourer can buy either 36 lbs. of bread, 16 lbs. of meat, or 8 3-4 lbs. of butter.

In Germany, with 102 cents he obtains either 43 1-2 lbs. of bread, 18 lbs. of meat, 11 1-2 lbs. of butter, 24 lbs. of cheese, or 54 quarts of beer.

In Holland and Belgium, 120 cents will buy either 58 lbs. of bread, 22 lbs. of beef or 460 lbs. of potatoes.

In Italy and the Austrian States, the labourer, with his 115 cents can buy either 50 lbs. of bread, 22 lbs. of beef, 8 lbs. of butter, 3 lbs. of cheese, or 168 lbs. of potatoes.

This table is interesting, as showing not only the prices of labour in the countries named, but

also the price of bread, meat, butter, cheese, &c. It is true, the bread is stated by the pound instead of grain by the bushel; but, as the flour of a bushel of wheat, say 40 lbs., will make from 63 to 65 lbs. of bread, an estimate may easily be made of the quantity of wheat or flour a man in any of the countries named would receive for a week's work. The labourer in this country, who receives his bushel of wheat a day, or other articles in proportion will readily conceive the meagre fare, and slender chance of "laying by anything," which must attend the foreign agricultural labourer. In all these countries it will be seen the value of provisions is at least as great as here, and in some instances much greater. It is only by the comparisons which such authentic statements enable them to make, that the free labourers, the farmers or mechanics of this country, can fully appreciate the advantages of their position.

[The closing remarks, originally designed for the United States, will in the main apply equally to the labourer in these Provinces.]

THE SUBMARINE TELEGRAPH AT PORTSMOUTH.

We are enabled to supply the following additional particulars respecting the submarine telegraph laid down across our harbour. It is now about three years since the telegraph from the Nine Elms terminus to the terminus at Gosport was first established. Subsequently, from the inconvenience experienced at the Admiralty office here, because of the distance to the telegraph station, the wires were continued from that place to the Royal Clarence-yard. With this addition, however, although the inconvenience was lessened, it was far from being removed, the harbour intervention, leaving a distance of upwards of a mile to the Admiralty's house, unconnected, and notwithstanding the wish of the authorities, both here and in London, that the telegraph should be carried to the dockyard, no attempt has hitherto been made to do so, because it has been considered almost impossible to convey it under water. An offer, indeed, was made to the Admiralty to lay down a telegraph enclosed in cast-iron pipes, which were to be fixed under the water by the aid of diving bells. This scheme, having been found to be impracticable, has been very prudently abandoned. Whatever difficulties may have hitherto impeded the project, the establishment of submarine telegraphs appear now to have been entirely overruled, for the time occupied from the commencement of carrying the telegraph from shore to shore, and transmitting signals, did not occupy a quarter of an hour. The telegraph, which has the appearance of an ordinary rope, was coiled into one of the dockyard boats, one end of it being made fast on shore, and as the boat was pulled across, the telegraphic rope was gradually paid out over the stern, its superior gravity causing it to sink to the bottom immediately. The telegraph consisted of but this line, and, unlike those along the various railways, required no return wires to perfect the circuit. The electric fluid was transmitted from the batteries in the dockyard, through the submerged insulated wire, to the opposite shore, the fluid returning to the negative pole through the water without the aid of any metallic conductor, except a short piece of wire thrown over the dockyard parapet into the water, and connecting it with the batteries. The fact of the water acting as a ready return conductor was established beyond question; for, to test this most thoroughly, repeated experiments were made in the presence of some of the principal dockyard authorities, including the heads of the engineering departments. There can no longer be any doubt that, without reference to distance, the water will act as a return conductor in completing the circuit. It will be recollected that in 1842 Mr. Snow Harris, when proving the efficiency of his lightning conductors in his experiments from this dockyard to the Orestes, exemplified that water would serve to complete the electric circuit. On that occasion, however, the distance traversed by the return current through the water was but trifling, compared with the space accomplished in the present instance. The batteries used were Snace's; and a very delicate and accurate galvanic detector, invented by Mr. Hay, the chymical lecturer of the dockyard, who was present throughout the whole proceedings, was also brought into requisition. Independent of the simplicity of this submarine telegraph, it has an advantage which even the telegraphs on land do not possess,—in the event of accident it can be replaced in ten minutes. The success of the trial here has, we understand, determined the inventors to lay down their completed line across the Channel from England to France, under the sanction of the respective Governments.—*Hampshire Guardian.*

VOTING MACHINE.—A convict in the state of New Jersey has invented a machine for taking the yeas and nays in Legislative Assemblies. It is described in the *Trenton News*; and if it realizes the statement, it may truly be called a wonderful machine. "Yesterday we saw for the first time, a most wonderful machine, made for the purpose of saving time in taking the yeas and nays in houses of legislation. The model of this machine has only been completed a day or two, and is not even yet quite ready to be exhibited. "The machine, when put into use, is to stand at the clerk's table, and from it two wires are to extend to the desk of each member, terminating in two knobs, one of which should be marked yea and the other nay. When the question is to be taken, and it is announced by the chair, the clerk unlocks the machine by touching a spring, and every member pulls one of the knobs attached to his desk. If he wishes to vote yea, he pulls the yea knob—the whole being done simultaneously and in a moment. "The clerk then turns a small brass crank, part way round, and then figures appear before

him, in the machine, one of which gives the number of yeas, the other the number of nays which have been voted, and the third the aggregate of all the votes taken. At the same time and without any additional movement, the yeas and nays are all distinctly registered on the clerk's catalogue of members, which is printed pretty much in the usual form; the persons voting being marked by a small round hole pricked through the paper.

"All these operations are done with unerring certainty, and the whole should not require more than a single minute. The size of the house or the number of members, will make no difference in the time required. As soon as all the members who wish to vote have pulled their wires, the work is complete. The clerk then has only to turn his crank, and in an instant the number of yeas and nays and the aggregate vote stands before him in large figures, and all that he has to do is to declare the result. His marked register will, at the same time, show how every member has voted.—*Statesman.*

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