

CONTEMPORARY OPINION ON EDUCATIONAL TOPICS.

EDUCATION.

In 1611, Thomas Sutton, a gentleman of England, died, and left an estate to charitable purposes, including the foundation of the famous Charterhouse. There was some dispute as to the will, and Francis Bacon took occasion to address the king a letter of advice respecting the proposed disposition of the property, as in case the will was set aside the king would be heir. In that letter occurs a passage which has a singular force here and now, where conditions exist not unlike those indicated by Bacon. "Concerning the advancement of learning," he writes, "I do subscribe to the opinion of one of the wisest and greatest men of your kingdom:—That for grammar schools there are already too many, and therefore no providence to add where there is excess. For the great number of schools which are in your Highness' realm doth cause a want, and doth cause likewise an overflow, both of them inconvenient, and one of them dangerous. For by means thereof they find want, in the country and towns, both of servants for husbandry and apprentices for trade; and, on the other side, there being more scholars bred than the state can prefer and employ, and the active part of that life not bearing a proportion to the preparative, it must needs fall out that many persons will be bred unfit for other vocations, and unprofitable for that in which they are brought up; which fills the realm full of indigent, idle, and wanton people, which are but *materia rerum novarum*."

We are discovering something of the same want and overflow now, especially in our cities. We need not even change Bacon's terms, though the words themselves have a little different meaning. Now, as then, there are too many grammar schools, or what is

more to the purpose, the grammar schools teach too much grammar. Bacon complains that in his day the schools caused a want of farmers and mechanics, and an overflow of clerkly people. Precisely this complaint must be made at present. The tendency of our highly organized public-school system is to discourage manual labour, and to multiply enormously the number of those who seek to maintain themselves by the pen or by trade. The course of instruction is almost exclusively intellectual in its scope, the time occupied covers years when the training for mechanical pursuits naturally begins, and the apparent prospect of a higher social pursuit leads to an aversion from the humbler occupation. The result is that the mechanical arts suffer an indignity, and boys who might have been fitted for good workmen become indifferent book-keepers, clerks, and salesmen.

Now a state rests for prosperity not upon its clerks, but upon its workmen; it is the men who handle tools that contribute to its wealth and may be trusted for its defence, and it is of the first importance that this class should be trained not only in the arts, but in intelligence and character. But the divorce of manual and mental education in our public schools tends to perpetuate the separation out of school. If there is intelligence in the workman and a capacity to improve his art, these are not the distinguished results of the training which the public schools give; that training steadily withdraws the young from mechanical and agricultural pursuits, and crowds them into occupations, already overstocked, which depend for their prosperity indeed upon the development of the arts.

Moreover, the public-school system not being found favourable to the mechanic arts, what great educational force remains? The apprentice system has nearly disappeared.