

## TEACHING THE MECHANICAL ARTS.

\* "A curse on these stupid letters. All learned men are beggars . . . I swear by God's body, I'd rather that my son should hang than study letters. For it becomes the sons of gentlemen to blow the horn nicely, to hunt skillfully, and elegantly carry and train a hawk. But the study of letters should be left to the sons of rustics."

SUCH in the reign of Henry VII. was the ordinary English gentleman's notion of scholarship, of a literary education. It looks very childish to us now, and we should despise the gentleman of the old ideal, as not only a rustic but an uncultivated boor. But any self-congratulation in which we might be inclined to indulge at our own advance in educational notions, will be apt to receive a check when we come to ask whether these notions of ours are, after all, so rational; whether our ideas of gentlemen and gentlemanly education have any other foundation than convention and prejudice. English gentlemen of four hundred years ago considered the pursuit of literature, art, and science unworthy of any of their class, which was expected to live solely for sport. American gentlemen (and this includes all Americans) hold the same opinion with regard to all mechanical pursuits. The prevailing feeling among our people might be expressed thus: "A curse on these stupid handicrafts! All mechanics are beggars. I swear by the Almighty Dollar, I'd rather that my son should live by charity, politics, or gambling, than be a mechanic. For it becomes Americans to blow their own trumpets properly, to speculate smartly, and elegantly to carry a cane in soft, clean hands. But handicrafts should be left to foreign-

ers." And so, to a very large extent, they are.

Are such notions a whit less childish than those of four hundred years ago? I think they are even more so; for a man may very well be a gentleman without scholarship, but he cannot be one without being able to earn his living by his own labour. The truth is, while we flatter our vanity with the notion that we are an enlightened people, on the ground that we have a form of government and certain mechanical contrivances which our forefathers had not, we are sunk in barbarism as regards all ideas of human worth. For well-nigh two thousand years Christianity has taught that character, and not position or possession, gives value to men. We act and think for the most part as if such teaching had never existed. We teach our young men and women how to seek for place and comfort, and only incidentally how to be noble and pious.

Of all the dangers that threaten our country there is none greater than that which has its source in the prevailing dislike to manual labour, and contempt for it, as undignified and servile. So long as our human conditions require that the majority of men and women shall labour with their hands, such dislike and contempt, when developed into a national characteristic, can have but one of two results. It will either force the majority of our citizens into a position which they know to be despised, or it will leave all mechanical labour to be performed by foreigners. We shall have the bulk of our own people hating the institutions under which they live and seeking to overturn them, or we shall have a mass of foreigners, occupying the position of a servile class, and

\* Introduction to Pace's "*De Fructu*," published in 1500.