

Contemporary Thought.

MR. BALFOUR, the Scotch minister of education, uttered some thoughts in a recent address that it would be well for the whole educational world to hear. Among other things he claimed that universities exist for the augmentation of knowledge and happiness, and not merely for the preparation of young men for the learned professions. He referred to competitive examinations as an "abomination educationally," one that must be kept "within very narrow limits." He said most forcibly that "a man who has to teach a class for competitive examination is no longer able to teach the subject as the subject presents itself to him. He has to teach it as he thinks the subject will present itself to the examiner, and the injury to the pupil is especially bad, because those who suffer most are the ablest pupils. It is the man who is going to succeed, and who does succeed in a competitive examination who suffers most from the effects produced by competitive examination. His whole idea of learning is lowered, its dignity vanishes, the whole bloom and the whole charm are rudely brushed away from knowledge. He looks at learning no longer as the greatest delight and the greatest honour of his life; he looks at it as a means by which he can earn marks; and love is not more ruined by being associated with avarice than is learning by being associated with market-getting." We would call special attention to these forcible words, particularly to those italicized, as proof of the fact so often stated in this paper, and so often denied by other papers, that the best educational thinkers throughout the world are opposed to the philosophy of the marking system because it "lowers the whole idea of learning," and "brushes away from knowledge its whole charm." We trust American defenders of this odious system will take to head as well as heart the forcible words of Mr. Balfour and profit thereby.—*New York School Journal.*

THE most stringent temperance laws we have had passed were those of James I., which may almost be called the first piece of temperance legislation; for though the Act of Edward VI. gave power to the Justices to suppress unnecessary tippling houses, it was chiefly directed against using unlawful games, and bound the licensed victuallers to keep good order in their houses. The Act in the first year of James was intended to restrain the inordinate haunting and tippling in inns and ale houses; it declares the "true use of ale houses" to be for the relief of wayfarers, and not for the "entertainment of lewde and idle people." There was to be a penalty of 10s. for permitting "unlawful drinking," and all drinking was unlawful except by *bona fide* travellers, by the guests of travellers, and by artisans and labourers during their dinner hour. The public house was only to be open to residents in the locality for one hour in the day, for the consumption of liquor on the premises. This Act was made perpetual, with some modifications intended to render conviction more easy, in the last Parliament of James. In the reign of Charles I. the penalties were somewhat relaxed; but the law could not be enforced, and under these strin-

gent laws drunkenness increased apace. It had reached an extraordinary pitch in 1659, when a French Protestant wrote from London: "There is within this city, and in all the towns of England which I have passed through, so prodigious a number of houses where they sell a certain drink called ale, that I think a good half of the inhabitants may be denominated ale-house keepers. . . . But what is most deplorable where gentlemen sit and spend much of their time drinking a muddy kind of beverage, and tobacco, which has universally besotted the nation, and at which I hear they have consumed many noble estates. . . . And that nothing may be wanting to the height of luxury and impiety of this abomination, they have translated the organs out of the churches to set them up in taverns, chanting their dithyrambics and bestial bacchanalias to the tune of those instruments which were wont to assist them in the celebration of God's praises, and regulate the voices of the worst singers in the world, which are the English in their churches at present.—*The Contemporary Review.*

A CONTINENTAL paper publishes the following letter on Chinese railways from Peking, dated at the commencement of September: "An article in the treaty of peace of July, 1885, between France and China, provided that if the Chinese Government should decide to construct railways, it should accord a preference to French contractors for the requisite material, although the Chinese were not to be bound by this arrangement as if it were a contract. This clause was generally interpreted to imply that China was about to build railways, and the emissaries of the greatest firms in the world hastened to take the most advantage possible of the supposed new departure in Chinese policy. Gen. Wilson, representing one of the largest railways in North America, was the first to arrive at Tien-Tsin. Gen. Wilson, failing to conclude any definite arrangement with Li Hung Chang, hastened to Peking, where he, at all events, obtained a passport for a tour in the valley of the Upper Hoang-Ho. He completed a certain number of plans for which the Chinese Ministers thanked him, but at the same time informed him that they had no immediate intention of undertaking railways or other public works. Gen. Wilson then endeavoured to recover his expenses, but without any result. After him came the agents of the German banks of discount and of Berlin. All they obtained was the contract for some thousand tons of rails for the little railway between Tien-Tsin and the Pei-Ho. One of these gentlemen still resides at Tien-Tsin, and has been intrusted with the drawing up of a report on the regulation of the Hoang-Ho. After these came, in the present summer, the French representatives, who brought out a railway, rails, and trucks on the Decauville system. In order to bring conviction to the mind of Li Hung Chang, leave was asked to work this train through the streets of Tien-Tsin, but the only definite contracts given to the French are small ones in connection with deepening the harbour of Port Arthur and the building of two iron bridges across the Pei-Ho. The English are said, however, to have acted with better effect and greater discrimination. A model railway provided by one of the chief English firms supplies a permanent source of amuse-

ment in the official residence of the Tao-Tai of Sharghai, and as a censor has already been rebuked for objecting to railways as innovations it is deemed probable that Chinese obstruction is gradually, but none the less surely, giving way before the pressure of necessity.—*London Times.*

THE extent of country over which Islam holds sway is coterminous with that great continental zone called the Soudan, which extends from the Nile to the Atlantic, and from the Sahara to within between 4° and 6° of the equator. Along the Atlantic seaboard there are still some pagan spots, but Mohammedanism is slowly but surely bearing down on them—establishing itself by moral suasion if it can; but if not, then, in the name of God, with fire and sword and all the dread accompaniments of war. But not only is it proselytizing among the heathen; it has its missionaries in Sierra Leone and Lagos. It has there thrown down its gage to Christianity for the possession of the natives, and reports speak of it spreading rapidly and recruiting its ranks from the Christian community to no small extent. If that is so—and I have no reason to doubt it—there must be something terribly wrong in the method of teaching Christianity. To me, as one having the interests of Christianity deeply at heart, it has always appeared as if the system adopted was radically unsuited to the people. Meanwhile I cannot help saying, better a good Moslem than a skin-deep Christian—a mere jackdaw tricked out in peacock's feathers. In reaching the sphere of European influence, Mohammedanism not only throws down its gage to Christianity, it also declares war upon our chief contribution to West Africa—the gin trade. While we support anti-slavery societies and spend great sums in sending missionaries to the heathen, it is very strange that we are absolutely indifferent to the shameful character of this traffic. We are ever ready to raise shouts of horror if a case of maltreatment of slaves occurs, and we will not see that we at this moment are conducting a trade which is in many respects a greater evil than the slave trade. That word "European trade," as spoken of on our platforms, is complacently regarded as synonymous with civilization; it is supposed to imply well-dressed negroes as its necessary outcome, and the introduction of all the enlightened amenities of European life. It ought to mean that to some extent; but, as I have seen it in many parts of West Africa, it has largely meant the driving down of the negro to a tenfold deeper slough of moral depravity. And we—we Christians—leave it to the despised Mohammedans, those professors of a "false religion," to attack this traffic and attempt to stem the tide of degradation, to sweep it away utterly if possible, as they have already done fetichism and cannibalism, over enormous areas. If this is its mission, then, in default of something better, let Islam continue its progress through Africa! It will be the vanguard of civilization. Whatever may be said about many aspects of Mohammedanism, it at least contains as much of good as the undeveloped brains of the negro can well assimilate; and so long as good is being done in genuine reality, why should we not heartily welcome it, even though it is accomplished through a religion we ourselves do not accept.—*Joseph Thomson, in the Contemporary Review.*