

Electricity vs.
Steam.

The rapidly extending application of electricity is, in the opinions of many, making it but a question of time, and probably of a comparatively short time, when the ponderous steam locomotive shall have given place to the electric motor, even on the great railroads. The change will be, as the *New York Post* puts it, merely "substituting stationary for movable sources of power," "the stationary boiler and engine house for one which travels about on wheels. Instead of generating the power required to move every train of cars in immediate connection with that train, the power is to be generated at one spot, and drawn off where and when it is wanted." An event which is thought to have great significance in this connection is the recent alliance or partnership which has been entered into between two of the most powerful companies in the United States—the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia, and the Westinghouse Electric Company of Pittsburg. The former company employs a force of about five thousand men, and the latter is one of the largest electrical concerns in the world. The combination is said to be a very strong one, not only financially, but by reason of the splendid equipments of both companies for their special lines of manufacture, and the corresponding ability of their mechanical and electrical engineers. The significance of the alliance is believed to be in the certainty that the shrewd business managers of the two companies evidently believe that the railroads will shortly enter upon the great work of making the change above indicated. The change will probably be ardently welcomed by the traveling public for many reasons. The absence of the intense annoyance of the smoke and cinders of the locomotive, the reduction of noise, and the probable substitution of an hourly or half-hourly service for the great trains coming but two or three times a day, are among those which most readily suggest themselves.

Depressing
Fiction

Mrs. Humphry Ward's new and mournful novel "The Story of Bessie Costrell," which we reviewed in our last number, has already gained a large circulation. The more dismal a book is the greater its circulation is almost sure to be. We may be mistaken, but it seems to us that women write most of the doleful tales and it is the women who read them, and weep over them, and say they are "just too sad for anything." It is a sickly, morbid taste, and one with which we have no sympathy. "The Story of Bessie Costrell," is a good bit of work in its way, simple, strong, but intolerably depressing with very little indeed to relieve the gloom. We confess that we do not want to read a painful novel, even though it be the work of a master hand, and its pictures drawn from the life. When we read fiction we read for recreation, not for the purpose of strengthening pessimistic sentiments, or stirring painful emotions, and we cannot rid ourselves of the conviction that ninety-nine out of a hundred—the hundredth being hopelessly dyspeptic or misanthropic—agree with us, if they would be honest with themselves and with the public. We speak from bitter experience. More than once during precious moments snatched from what should be vacation days, we have been beguiled into taking up some brief story of the modern "realistic" type, only to fling it aside in disgust at the disappointing end, which leaves us either in the mistiness of a fog, or in the agony of a tragedy. Let others immolate themselves, if they please, on the altar of literary fashion, or realistic art, but give us for our part the good old-fashioned novel in which the hero and heroine, after braving appalling dangers and coming through innumerable tribulations like

the true heroes they are, emerge into the sunshine, make their happy way to the marriage altar and "live happily ever after." What say you, gentle reader? Is it not time that a vigorous reaction was setting in from the lugubriousness of the so-called realistic art which is taking all the romance out of present-day fiction?

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The Question of the Unemployed.

A CABLE despatch informed us, a few days since, that the heads of five of the "Settlements," which are so remarkable a feature of the religio-social philanthropy of the day in England, had presented a memorial to Lord Salisbury, reminding him of a certain utterance of his, made on May 22nd, in a speech at Bradford, and asking him to give effect to that utterance. In the address referred to Lord Salisbury had said that the condition of the unemployed in England was foremost among the questions which needed the attention of Parliament. We are living in a day of great questions, national as well as international. Each country has its own sociological problems. In most cases these are, more or less, the outcome of conditions peculiar to the particular country or people. But the unemployed are everywhere. The question how to find work for those who are unable to find it for themselves is, we may safely say, the universal question. If by some happy revolution it could be brought about that next year every man and woman in every civilized nation, who is able and willing to work, would be provided with employment suitable to his or her capacity, on such terms as would enable the workers to provide comfortable food and raiment for themselves and those dependent upon them, the world would become in a short time a very different world and a much more comfortable one to live in. The charitably disposed could then, with clear consciences, give brief and pointed answers to able-bodied mendicants. Tens of thousands in every land would be delivered from the grim spectre of want and semi-starvation, and one-half the great armies of police and detectives might be disbanded.

We have no idea that either Lord Salisbury or Mr. Chamberlain indulges in any very sanguine anticipations of being able to bring about such a millenium; by devising a scheme whereby work will be provided for every willing worker. But they are pledged to do, or at least attempt to do, something to alleviate the pitiable condition of the unemployed masses and their suffering families in the United Kingdom.

What is the cause, or what are the causes of the great and growing evils arising from the inability of breadwinners to find markets for their labour? This is the necessary preliminary question, if any effective cure is to be found. Some may, perhaps, affirm that the evils, however great, are not growing; that in all ages and nations multitudes of unemployed have stood at the street corners crying out for work; and that great suffering has prevailed because no man did hire them. It may be that the numbers of such have but kept pace with the growth of the world's population. Statistics are not to be had, and there is probably no means of settling the question whether the world has been growing better or worse in this respect. Let the inquiry take a more practical form. Why is it that the march of civilization and science, while increasing a hundred-fold the demand for labour, and the varieties of employment, has not brought about a more even distribution of both industry and its products? Or, again, the world is, as yet, by no means full. There is still ample room for all, and for several times more than all, its present inhabitants, if only they were more uniformly distributed.