

Contemporary Thought.

As a matter of fact, more copies of standard authors are sold to-day than ever before in the history of the world, and more people are reading these writers intelligently and with deep and increasing enjoyment. The students of Dante in this country, for instance, are to be numbered by the hundred where they were formerly numbered by the score. Shakespeare has a multitude of lovers in the most remote and secluded corners of the land, who find in a lifelong devotion to the great dramatist those joys and that stimulus which their meagre surroundings cannot yield. So widespread is the desire for knowledge, in spite of the apparent materialism of American life, that one is never surprised to find a man in some remote Western town who knows Plato by heart, or a miner in some wild camp who carries the *Iliad* in his pocket. Nothing was wider the mark in Mr. Grant Allen's humorously inapt description of American scenery, recently published in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, that the statement that scholars and men of culture do not live outside of cities in this country. If Mr. Allen had made a misstatement of fact, for instance, in his interesting "Life of Darwin," he would very likely have had his attention called to the error by some resident of a remote Western town of which he had never heard even so much as the name. — *Christian Union*.

THE advocates of a political Minister of Education are right in pointing to France as the country in which the political and centralized system is carried to the highest perfection. But they should also tell us what are the fruits. Mr. Hamerton, than whom we believe there can hardly be a better authority, describes the French peasantry as not wanting in natural intelligence, but "inconceivably ignorant." "The French peasant," he says, "is not Philistine; he has not any contempt for culture, he simply does not know that there is such a thing; he does not know that science, and art, and literature exist." A peasant, and one quite of the higher order, fancied that Mr. Hamerton's printed books were manuscripts written by their owner, and compared them with other printed books which he thought were written by the booksellers. He had, in short, never heard of the existence of printing. "From the intellectual point of view," says Mr. Hamerton, "France is a Scythia with very small colonies of Athenians to be found in it here and there." Politically the French peasant does not know his right hand from his left, and the constituencies are swept, as Mr. Hamerton tells us, by the most ignorant and absurd fancies. It is difficult not to connect this failure in some measure with the tendency of a highly centralized system to kill local interest and activity. The refined taste of Mr. Matthew Arnold is pleased by the symmetry of the machine and the smoothness of its working. But a system of education must be judged by its results. — *The Week*.

THE Government, frightened out of its wits by the vindictive violence of Dr. Ryerson, rushed into a sweeping change of our educational system, when it had better have considered calmly the alternative of modification. Supposing it to be better that the administrative functions, with the financial responsibility, should be vested in a political min-

ister, there are still important functions which a body like the Council of Instruction, enjoying the confidence of all parties, seems best qualified to discharge. Especially is it best qualified to settle the text books, the squabbles about which, religious, literary, and commercial, have kept the educational world in hot water ever since the political system was introduced. To the Council no suspicion of corrupt or sinister influence, any more than of partisanship, could attach. The account of the revision of Collier's history, with a view to the excision of language offensive to the Roman Catholics, which was given the other day by the Archbishop, shows how quietly the Council could settle a question which, under the political system, would set the Province in a flame. The curriculum also might be better settled by an impartial authority, and by one whose ordinances would be more stable than those of an ephemeral minister, while the controlling influences of men, really eminent in education, and above hollow display, would be the best practical safeguard against the introduction of ambitious subjects which cannot be thoroughly taught, and can only fill the pupil with conceit. Possibly the election of the heads of training colleges might with advantage be entrusted to the same hands. For all this two meetings of the Council in each year—perhaps even one meeting—would suffice. Plenty of work would still be left for the Minister of Education. — *The Week*.

WHEN Mr. Lilly, like another Solomon Eagle, goes about proclaiming "Woe to this wicked city," and denouncing physical science as the evil genius of modern days—mother of materialism, and fatalism, and all sorts of other condemnable isms—I venture to beg him to lay the blame on the right shoulders; or at least to put in the dock along with Science those sinful sisters of hers, Philosophy and Theology, who, being so much older, should have known better than the poor Cinderella of the schools and universities over which they have so long dominated. No doubt modern society is diseased enough; but then it does not differ from older civilizations in that respect. Societies of men are fermenting masses, and as beer has what the Germans call "Oberhefe" and "Unterhefe," so every society that has existed has had its scum at the top and its dregs at the bottom, and I doubt if any of the "ages of faith" had less scum or less dregs, or even showed a proportionally greater quantity of sound, wholesome stuff in the vat. I think it would puzzle Mr. Lilly, or any one else, to adduce convincing evidence that at any period of the world's history there was a more widespread sense of social duty, or a greater sense of justice, or of the obligation of mutual help, than in this England of ours. Ah! but, says Mr. Lilly, these are all products of our Christian inheritance; when Christian dogmas vanish, virtue will disappear too, and the ancestral ape and tiger will have full play. But there are a good many people who think it obvious that Christianity also inherited a good deal from paganism and from Judaism, and that if the Stoics and the Jews revoked their bequest the moral property of Christianity would realize very little. And if morality has survived the stripping off of several sets of clothes which have been found to fit badly, why should it not be able to get on very well in light and handy garments which science is ready

to provide? But this by the way. If the diseases of society consist in the weakness of its faith in the existence of the God of the theologians, in a future state, and in uncaused volitions, the indignation, as the doctors say, is to suppress theology and philosophy, whose bickerings about things of which they know nothing have been the prime cause and continual sustenance of that evil skepticism which is the nemesis of meddling with the unknowable. — *Huxley, in the Fortnightly Review*.

THAT the mass of the people of the United States are in a condition superior to that attained in the most fortunate countries of the Old World is beyond dispute. Their advantages are drawn from the abundant resources of a territory in which there are still wide tracts of land not yet brought under cultivation. The political institutions of the United States have more than the mere negative merit of not having presented any obstacles to the material progress of the people; they have facilitated the progress of the country in civilization and in wealth. Education has been placed within the reach of all. In the most newly settled part of the country the reservation of land for the maintenance of schools has rendered it possible to provide instruction for the children of the hardy pioneers of agriculture and mining enterprises. A rude assemblage of huts grow into villages, and villages into towns, the school buildings, the teachers, and the appliances for teaching keep pace with the general improvement. We saw an admirable example of this wise liberality in the schools of Marquette. Measured by its political results, the Constitution of the United States has been eminently successful. Since it was first promulgated it has undergone no change. It has borne the strain of a terrible war; it has maintained the Union, and it has won the insurgents to the national cause by lenity and by justice. It has been sufficiently elastic and comprehensive to satisfy the aspirations of a self-governed people composed of many races and living in different parts of the country under widely different economic conditions. Looking forward to the near future, only one possible subject of dispute is seen topping the horizon—I refer to the fiscal system. Protection is now maintained for the benefit of the manufacturers, who are the few, and at the expense of the agricultural classes and the great mass of consumers. Thus far the cultivation of a virgin soil, unburdened by rent, has been sufficiently profitable to carry the load which has been laid upon it. Hereafter the agriculturists may be less able and less willing to submit to protection. Sooner or later, gradually, or possibly by some sudden change of policy, the free exchange of commodities may be accepted. When that day comes it will not be England, but the United States, which will reap the greater advantage. On the happy change which has passed in recent years in the relations between Great Britain and the United States I need not dwell at length. British diplomacy never achieved a greater or more enduring success than when it won by a generous act of conciliation the forgiveness of America for the depredations of the Alabama. The concessions we made have not weakened us, they have brought us strength—the strength which comes from the friendship and good-will of the great American Republic. — *Lord Brassey, in the Nineteenth Century*.