

The Nation

A WEEKLY JOURNAL

DEVOTED TO

POLITICS, LITERATURE, SCIENCE & ART

VOLUME LIV

FROM JANUARY 1, 1892, TO JUNE 30, 1892

NEW YORK

THE EVENING POST PUBLISHING COMPANY

1892

P 0482

was unhampered by binding precedents, and consciously adopted a policy at war with the arbitrary and technical principles which characterized the early common law. There can be no doubt that this court, if care had been continually exercised in the selection of its judges, would in fifty years have gradually moulded a much more admirable system of laws than that struck off at a heat by the three codifiers of 1880.

—Mr. Randolph Harrison of Lynchburg, Va., calls our attention to the fact that the Confederate Gen. Early, in Southern Historical Society Papers for December, 1877, is authority for the story of Lee's interview with Gen. Ewell on the first day of the battle of Gettysburg, which was treated as mythical in the review of Drake's "Battle of Gettysburg" in our No. 1884. To have the authority for a story definitely placed is one step towards a correction, and we thank Mr. Harrison for the reference. In the review it was spoken of as "a version ill-supported," and a little fuller citation of the authorities referred to will, as we think, make this clear. In his official report, Gen. Lee himself speaks of his wish that Ewell should seize Culp's Hill at the close of the first day, but adds that the National forces anticipated Ewell and occupied the hill, "but in what force could not be ascertained, owing to the darkness." He also says that "an intercepted despatch showed that another corps had halted that afternoon four miles from Gettysburg. Under these circumstances, it was decided not to attack until the arrival of Longstreet, two of whose divisions encamped about four miles in the rear during the night." He thus distinctly makes his determination not to press the attack by his left wing (which is a material part of the story referred to) follow these events. Ewell's report fixes the time. He says: "I received orders soon after dark to draw my corps to the right, in case it could not be used to advantage where it was. . . . I represented to the Commanding General that the hill above referred to (Culp's Hill) was unoccupied by the enemy, . . . and that I commanded their position and made it untenable, so far as I could judge." He waited for Johnson's division to arrive before making the attempt to take it, and "after twelve o'clock at night" sent his orders to Johnson. Johnson's attempt failed because Meade's troops had been first in occupying it, and the fact was thus discovered; but by the time Ewell got the news, "day was now breaking and it was too late for any change of place"; that is to say, he could not carry out the alternative in Lee's order by moving his troops towards the right. It is thus proved to have been near daybreak of the second day when Lee made the determination which it is the gist of the story that he reached in the afternoon of the first. Ewell further says of this second day: "Early in the morning I received a communication from the Commanding General, the tenor of which was that he intended the main attack to be made by the First Corps (Longstreet's) on our right, and wished me, as soon as their guns opened, to make a diversion in their favor, to be converted into a real attack if opportunity offered." This is the order itself, and Ewell's mode of describing it shows that it was not given on the evening of the first day, as it could not have been.

—Mr. Drake is equally explicit in making the supposed conversation occur after "Culp's Hill had been snatched from his (Ewell's) grasp."

His mistake is in failing to notice that Ewell did not know of this till nearly daylight of the second day. It is thus that these official reports show that no such conversation could have taken place on the first day, when Ewell was still expecting to seize the point which would make Cemetery Hill "untenable." The circumstances told by Gen. Longstreet and Gen. Long are equally decisive, if we had room to analyze them. Long's narration not only shows that Early's story was an error of recollection, but gives a hint how it may have arisen. Lee went to Ewell's position in the forenoon of the second day, to see the ground for himself, and expected to hear Longstreet's guns open while there. He expressed the same impatience at the delay that he had expressed on the day before at the prolonged absence of Stuart's cavalry. This seems to be the germ out of which grew the misrecollection of 1877. Further examination only shows more conclusively the truth of our general proposition, that in a struggle for a place in history between authentic facts and a telling anecdote, the odds are all in favor of the anecdote.

—Students of English phonology will welcome the reprint (from *American Dialect Notes*) of Dr. O. F. Emerson's scholarly thesis on the "Ithaca Dialect." The author, who is now Assistant Professor of English at Cornell University, has made a worthy contribution to American scholarship, and opened a new field of linguistic study of great interest and value. His historical sketch of the settlement of Ithaca, N. Y., precedes a discussion of the language of the common people of that community, special care being taken to record only the unaffected pronunciation of the uncultured. The material is summarized in tables showing the development of the vowels of the dialect from Old and Middle English, and there follows a thorough treatment of the phonology. The concluding chapter treats of the relation to English in the mother-country, and points out that the Ithaca dialect shows the peculiarities of the eighteenth and, to some extent, the seventeenth-century English. In all probability it is a descendant of some branch of the Eastern Division as given in the classification of Ellis. Possibly the same conclusion might safely be drawn from a less minute study, but it is a matter for rejoicing that this first treatment of an American-English dialect should show in both plan and execution that scientific spirit and thorough workmanship which will render it a safe model for later explorers in the same field.

—M. F. Brunetière has published a new and revised edition of his interesting book on "Le Roman Naturaliste," in which he brings out even more forcibly than before his conviction that Zola and the writers of his school do not deserve to be called "naturalists" in the true sense of the word. This opinion is stated in so many words in the brief preface, but it is developed and maintained in the whole series of articles which form the volume. Needless to say that M. Brunetière's exposition is a masterly one, and forms a valuable contribution to the literature of modern criticism, and that while readers who are not fanatical admirers of the Zolaesque school will cordially thank him for his courageous attack on the filthy and abominable books which so-called "naturalists" have produced, the partisans of the latter will find it a difficult task to invalidate his conclusions. Two essays have been omitted from this edition, the one upon Miss Rhoda Broughton's novels and that upon the Russian nihilistic novel. On the other hand, four es-

says have been added, on "Les Petits Naturalistes" (Céard, Huysman, Hennique, Maupassant), "La Banqueroute du Naturalisme" (in which Zola is severely handled *apropos* of "La Terre"), "L'Évangélisme" of Daudet, and "Les Nouvelles" of Maupassant. Recent numbers of the *Revue Bleue* contain the lectures M. Brunetière is engaged in delivering weekly at the Odéon in Paris. These lectures, fifteen in number, will cover the history of the French drama from the time of Corneille to the present day. They are particularly interesting and instructive. Of the five which have appeared in the *Revue*, two especially deserve marked notice: they are those on Racine ("Andromaque") and Molière ("Le Tartuffe").

THE COMTIST CALENDAR.

The New Calendar of Great Men: Biographies of the 558 Worthies of all ages and countries in the Positivist Calendar of Auguste Comte. Edited by Frederic Harrison. Macmillan. 1892.

THAT the contemplation of the lives and characters of great men is a salutary and invigorating spiritual exercise has always been admitted and often proved. But it is so only on condition that the heroes are apprehended in all their living reality and passion; and, unfortunately, biography is infested with pious frauds. Washed-out accounts of Washington and Franklin have done incalculable injury to American characters. Such portraits had their origin in that deep faith in mendacity, as the only thing to be trusted to excite a desire to be good and to keep society straight—a sacred duty, too, to the dead—which was pervading and powerful in this country up to thirty years ago; and, thus engendered from the spirit of lies, how could these biographies bear living seeds of anything but hypocrisy and sordidness? Auguste Comte's calendar is a more systematic and resolute endeavor to baffle the facts, not of this or that man's existence, but of biography in the whole. A list of Worthies which excludes Napoleon while admitting Harin-ar-Rashid, as if there were a single littleness of the former which was not still littler in the latter, or a single spark of greatness in the latter which was not a fiery blaze in the former, is plainly animated by some ulterior purpose; and a portraiture of man's development, as this calendar professes to be, that is arranged in thirteen equal divisions, each of these subdivided into four equal parts, and each of these again into seven others, of which six are equal and the seventh superior in every case, is no transcript from nature, but a fanciful invention.

Among Comte's contemptible traits, none more marks his smallness than this calendar—not the drawing of it up, for that might pass for a rational pastime, but the failure to inspire his disciples with manhood enough to cast it aside. Auguste Comte was as utterly wanting in admiration and sympathy for great men as he was for his neighbors. He thought of them, not as concrete souls, but only as factors in the advancement of the human race, abstractly considered. What are his thirteen greatest men? Mere figureheads: Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Archimedes, Caesar, Charlemagne, Dante, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Descartes, Frederick the Great, and Bichat. Gutenberg! What did Comte know or care about Gutenberg as a man? But he is not thinking of the men themselves. Where is Jesus? Not among these 13; nor among the 53 of the second rank; nor yet among the 519 of

the third rank; nor even among the 181 of the fourth rank—not there at all! Buddha, Confucius, and Mahomet—the gentle Mahomet!—are in the second rank; Zoroaster, Manco Capac, Menu, Sesostris in the third. Jesus is omitted because he does not represent the sentiments which it is Comte's purpose to inculcate. Most persons, asked to name a baker's dozen of the greatest names of all time, would choose twelve of them from among Alexander, Buddha, Caesar, Charlemagne, Dante, Homer, Jesus, Mahomet, Michelangelo, Moses, Napoleon, Newton, Pythagoras, Shakespeare, and Socrates; but only half of Comte's list is drawn from these. Those great leaders of armies and rulers of peoples, Attila, Belshazzar, Charles XII., Clive, Cortez, Queen Elizabeth, Genghis Khan, Julian, Marlborough, Napoleon, Omar I., Peter the Great, Pitt, Timour, Turanne, Wallace, Wellington, William the Conqueror, are not recognized as great men at all. Godfrey de Bouillon goes in as a staunch Catholic. Comte held everything like Protestantism in detestation; we search his list in vain for the names of Calvin, Huss, Knox, Luther, Savonarola, Swedenborg, Wesley, Wilclif. These he excluded as mere destroyers, thus betraying a very false notion of the process of mental development, in which destruction plays an essential part—there was no other good in Comte himself. He took little stock in doctors, and did not know John Hunter, Jenner, Sydenham, nor Vesalius.

Some great names in science, too, are omitted, as Gilbert, Herschel, Rumford; and perhaps not a single scholar is named as such. Yet mediocrities like Vaucanson and Montgolfier appear in the second rank! And this in the year of our Lord 1849, with the mechanical theory of heat in the air! Of course, Sadé, Carnot, Gaultois, Abel, are not to be dreamt of. Queer notions of philosophy find places for the stupid Albertus Magnus, the superficial John of Salisbury, the crazy Raymond Lully, the empty Ramus, the emotionalist Bonaventura, the unsound Hobbes, the insignificant Cusa, Campanella, Vauvenargues, Ducloux, and others equally destitute of all claim to greatness, while such important thinkers as Epicurus, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham, Berkeley, Rousseau, Bentham, James Mill, pass unnoticed. Comte was too small a mathematician to appreciate Cauchy, Fresnel, Gauss, Laplace, or even Ricardo. Fermat, who as a reasoner cannot possibly be placed lower than second in the whole history of mind, for he invented a form of inference absolutely novel, and, besides, discovered the mode of reasoning of the differential calculus, all but its notation—this man is admitted to the list, but only in the lowest rank, as second to a second-rate mathematician, John Wallis.

But this is only an example of how little the utilitarian world cares for reasoners. Reasoners are of no use, for the most part, except to posterity—and unborn posterity rouses but a mild interest. The calls of a bread-and-butter profession prevented Fermat from accomplishing much. He could do little but jot down on margins of books and on stray leaves surprising propositions about numbers without demonstrations, destined to puzzle his ablest successors for over two hundred years. One of his theorems is still under investigation. Nevertheless, Comte, a professed mathematician, wearily assigns to Fermat bare standing-room among his assemblage of Worthies. So it was with Jacob Steiner, another most wonderful reasoner, with little question the greatest of all geometers, though not in Comte's list. Extreme poverty quite prevented the publi-

cation of the greater part of his discoveries, which have thus been lost; and those that were published had to be published without demonstrations. Thus they remained a dead wall for geometry during thirty-six years. It was the same, in a measure, with the remarkable reasoner, Thomas Young, though he practised a lucrative profession. Kepler's great work, beyond comparison the most marvellous piece of ampliative reasoning ever executed, as well as the most momentous in its consequences, was rendered possible only by his wife's riches and the bounty of the Emperor. His contemporaries, no doubt, held Kepler in high esteem, but they could not dream that his performance was destined to lead to a Newton's, and thence, through the development of modern physics, was to revolutionize the daily life of every civilized being. It was only a sinecure professorship, which another had voluntarily resigned to him, that enabled Newton to do his work (the wealthy Halley paying the printer); and surely this one result by itself fully justifies and compensates all the expenditures that have ever been made in England to establish foundations. Rowan Hamilton, the inventor of quaternions, likewise held a professorship without definite duties. The annual dues of the Royal Society prevented him from the advantage of membership; Newton had been excused from their payment.

Aristotle himself, the prince of thinkers, would scarcely, we believe, be heard of to-day, if it had not been for Alexander. Even as it was, his great works excited so little attention that if a single copy had not been exhumed from the cellar where it had been rotting, forgotten, for eight two centuries, the whole current of human thought would have been different, and we should perhaps be this day in semi-barbarism. The same thing would equally have resulted if it had not happened that the greatest man of thought of all time was beloved by the greatest man of action. It needed an Alexander to appreciate an Aristotle: ordinary men have not imagination enough to be interested in posterity.

If Newton had not done his work, it would have got done piecemeal, with a delay of, say, fifty years in the establishment of the law of gravitation. If Kepler had not done his more difficult work, it would have had to wait for the further development of mathematics and of philosophy, which would themselves have been greatly retarded, so that civilization would probably have been put back almost two centuries. We should now be living in something like the age of Queen Anne. If Aristotle had not done his work, the result would have been too vastly altered for our comprehension.

Falsify the Potter, a man of great penetration, and the best possible judge of such a matter, gave it as his opinion that a large majority of the world's powerful thinkers are either crushed by circumstances or forced into the pursuit of wealth, and so lost for the world's uses. Who can imagine how we should be situated now if these men had had the encouragement that the public interest required? No doubt, human misery would have been greatly abated, for poor and for rich, and human life much prolonged. But we have to suffer for our forefathers' improvidence. There is no civilized country where a great work of reasoning is less feasible than in ours. We have most superb observatories and laboratories, it is true, but what would a Kepler, with his bad sight and awkward hand, be doing in such an

"Ad observationes vero sum hebet visus, ad mechanica inepta manu, ad negotia domestica et politica curiosus et cholericus nature, ad constantem sedendum præsertim ultra justum et statum tempus spualium infirmo corpore, etiam cum valetudo constaret."

establishment? Perhaps among our sixty millions there may just now live such a mind; certainly, nobody is on the lookout for him. If he does exist, one wonders what he is doing. Reading examination papers?

The notices in this volume are perfunctory, dead-and-alive things; considering the men, not as they lived and breathed and burned, but as they appear in relation to the cult of Comte's *Grand Être*. There are but 644 pages for 538 biographies, so they could hardly but be jejune and dull. Yet the reader might at least have been referred to the best sources of further information. In fact, he is referred to second and third-rate authorities. Loose and incorrect statements are so abundant that we do not think it necessary to give instances of them.

KENNAN'S SIBERIA.—II.

Siberia and the Exile System. By George Kennan. The Century Co. 1891.

IF Mr. Kennan's book is to be regarded from the standpoint of its title, as a discussion of the exile system in general, it will be seen from the foregoing instances that a good many things remain to be said. If it is to be considered as a remonstrance against the treatment of political, administrative exiles, only, we will concede at once that this treatment entails some hardships to which they are generally unaccustomed, and which even the poor students find physically hard to bear. That they suffer, at times, from the caprices of brutal officials, may also be safely admitted. Two points, however, cannot fail to impress the unbiased reader: the freedom of intercourse with politicals allowed the author, even when the officials caught him in the act; and the fact that the bulk of his most valuable testimony (next to that afforded by official documents) was furnished him by Government officers in charge of exiles, some of whom were frank, and the majority of whom were frank and humane. When it is considered how undesirable these charges are, far from society and friends, and that first-class officials can obtain desirable posts elsewhere and will not accept these, it must be admitted that the balance of testimony is strongly in favor of the assertion that kind-heartedness and humanity, not brutality, are the prevailing characteristics of the Russian character. That prisoners should not be left at the mercy of brutal policemen and officials in Russia—or in America—is indisputable. Unfortunately, the means for enforcing discipline in this respect, even at much shorter range than from St. Petersburg to Irkutsk, has not yet been discovered.

If there is one thing which Mr. Kennan has succeeded in demonstrating more plainly than this general high average of Russian character in the officers, who rule mildly, and the prisoners, who endure with patience and even cheerfulness, it is not only that the Russian Government is fully aware of the evil state of the Siberian prisons and *étapes*, but that it has appropriated funds and given orders for the construction of new and suitable buildings. "If all the money that had been appropriated for the construction and maintenance of 'tumble-down' buildings could now be gathered together, it would be enough to pay for the erection of a line of solid-silver *étapes* along the whole route from Tomsk to the city of Irkutsk," is the testimony of a well-posted inspector of exile transportation, as quoted by the author. If "the greater part of it has been divided between fraudulent contractors and corrupt Government officials," what an