

Editor's Table.

THE YEAR comes round with such perfect uniformity that we find it hard to realize how there could ever have been any great difficulty in settling either its true boundaries or its internal divisions. Any body, it seems to us, could make an almanac, as far as the calendar is concerned. Such might be the first thought, even of persons who could not justly be charged with a lack of general intelligence. But let them think again, and they will rather find cause to wonder at the immense amount of observation involved in the process of gathering, age after age, the elements of a computation apparently so simple.

Had the seasons been so strikingly marked that the transition from one to the other had been instantaneous, or had the lesser sections of time been so contrived, in the Divine wisdom, as to be exact divisors of the greater, there would have been no difficulty whatever in the problem. But the Author of nature has not made it so easy for us. Twelve moons fall short of the year; thirteen exceed it. Any monthly division, therefore, founded on the revolutions of the satellite, must require, after the lapse of a few years, an addition, or a subtraction, of a certain period, to make the seasons come round again in harmony.

The first men, unquestionably, soon learned to note the general revolution by the return of the same seasons. The earliest agricultural operations would necessitate similar estimates, and thus a general notion of the year would be arrived at without an exact knowledge of the precise number of days contained. Hence, in all languages, some such idea has entered into the name. The year is that which comes, and comes again. In Greek (if our readers will pardon a little display of learning which we have picked up for the occasion) it is (ἐτὶ ἑτερος) *another* and yet *another*. In the Hebrew it is *repetition*. In our own, and the northern tongues generally, the word in all its forms (*year, gear, jahr, jaar, &c.*) ever denotes a *course (currus)* or *circle*.

Another mode was by rude astronomical observations, which must have been resorted to in the very earliest periods. For a good portion of the year, the sun was seen to come regularly north. Then he remained apparently stationary; and then, slowly *turning*, made his retreat again to the southern limit, there to perform the same movement—and so on without interruption or variation. Hence the word *tropic*, signifying the *turning*, and of which St. James makes so sublime and beautiful a use when he tells us (James i. 17) that the Unchangeable Spiritual Sun, or "Father of Lights," has no *parallax*,* and no "*shadow of turning*," or *tropical shadow*, as it should be rendered, referring to the mode of determining the period of *turning* by the shortest shadow cast by a perpendicular object. Still all this was merely an approximation to the length of the year, but with errors which only repeated observations could correct. By taking, however, a large number of these self-

repeating phenomena for a divisor, and the whole number of carefully ascertained days for a dividend, the error in each case would be diminished in an inverse ratio; so that we should not wonder that the number of three hundred and sixty-five days was fixed upon at quite an early period.

Such estimates, too, were aided by collateral observations of the stars. Let any one look out upon the heavens some clear night at the commencement of the year, and he can not help being struck with the position as well as the brilliancy of certain constellations. Over head are the Pleiades, the lone Aldebaran, Perseus, and Capella. Coming up the eastern sky are Orion, Gemini, Sirius, the Lesser Dog. Descending in the western are Andromeda, Pegasus, Capricornus, the Southern Fish. While low down toward the setting horizon are the Harp, the Eagle, and the Swan. Two weeks later, at the same time in the evening, he will find them all farther westward. In a month the change will be still more marked. After three months, those that before were just rising are on the meridian, and those that were then on the meridian are now setting. In six months, an entirely new host of stars will adorn the firmament, and at the end of a year, all the same phenomena will be found to have come round again. Our minuteness of detail may seem like trifling in an age so scientific as this; but it is astonishing how much our science is the science of books, and how little, after all, especially in astronomy, there is of personal acquaintance with the objects whose laws we know so well in theory. How many understand thoroughly the doctrine of transits and parallaxes, and even the more difficult laws of celestial influences, as laid down in scientific treatises, and yet, to save their lives, could not tell us what stars are now overhead, or what planets are now visible in our nightly heavens. They have read of Jupiter, they know the dimensions of Jupiter, and have even calculated the movements of Jupiter, it may be, but Jupiter himself they never saw. They would be surprised, perhaps, to discover, by actual sight, how much, in respect to position and appearance, our wintry constellations differ from those that are visible in summer; although night after night, for years and years, the brilliant phenomena have been passing over their heads, and silently, yet most eloquently, inviting their observation. This should not be so. The names and locations of the stars should ever be a part of astronomical instruction. We should learn them, if only for their classical reminiscences—for the sublime pleasure of having such a theme for contemplation in our evening walks. How easy, in this way, to fill the heavens with life, when we are led to regard them no longer as an unmeaning collection of glittering points, or what is scarcely better, a mere diagram for the illustration of scientific abstractions, but stored with remembrances of the older days of our world—the old religion, the old mythology, the old philosophy pictured on the sky—the old heroes, and heroines, and heroic events, transferred to the stars, and still shining in immortal splendor above us.

But to return from our digression—any one may see how such an observation of the stars furnished a second mode of ascertaining the length of the year. The men of the olden time were driven to this earnest watching of the heavens by an interest, of which, in these days of almanacs, and clocks, and compasses,

* The word *parallax*, or "*parallage*," here must refer to the sun's declination north and south of the equator. We have no reason for supposing that the ideas connected with the term in modern astronomical science were at all known to the Apostle. It may, however, be taken generally, for any deviation from one unchangeable position, and, in such a sense, preserve all the beauty and sublimity of the metaphor.

we can form but an inadequate conception. The period of the year was named after the principal star that rose just before, or set just after the sun. For example, when Sirius rose and set with or near the time of the sun, it was called the "dog days"—the only one of these old sidereal measures of time that has come down to us. Another season was under the sway of Orion. It was called the "stormy constellation," and at its heliacal rising, or when, as Hesiod expresses it,

The gentle Pleiads, shunning his fierce pursuit,
Sank late in the Ocean wave—

then was the ship to be drawn up into the well-secured harbor, and the sailor for a season to shun the dangerous deep. In the same way the periods of different agricultural operations were assigned to different constellations—some to Arcturus, others to the humid Hyades, and others, again, to the Bull, who "opened the year with his golden horns." From the observed fact of simultaneousness arose, also, the notion of some secret causative influence between the concurrent events. Hence those views of astrology, so early and so widely held among mankind, and which assigned to each event its celestial concomitants, and to each individual man his natal star. Exploded it may have been by the modern progress, but there was nevertheless at bottom an *idea* of more value than any science, however accurate, that does not give it the first and highest place. It was the thought of the absolute unity of nature, and of the unbroken relation of every part of the universe to every other part—in other words, the sublime idea which the oldest philosophy strove to express by that grand word, Kosmos.

The length of the year, as a whole number, was early known. It was some time, however, before the disturbance created by the fraction began to be distinctly perceived, and still longer before it was reduced to any thing like satisfactory measurement. In the division of the 365 days into monthly periods, lay at first the greatest difficulty. The lunar number was in general employed, not only as the nearest marked divisor, but because the new and full moons were so generally connected with religious festivals whether this arose from convenience of arrangement, or from the idea of some deep religious meaning symbolized by the ever dying and reviving phases of this mysterious planet. We can not, however, help being struck with the superior accuracy of the Jewish, when compared with the confusion and change that prevailed in the Greek and Roman calendar.

No reader of the Bible can avoid remarking its extreme particularity of date. The oldest and, on this account, the most striking instance is in the narration of the flood: "In the 600th year of Noah, in the second month, and on the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened." And so also in respect to its close. There is the same particularity, too, in the date of the Passover, of the Exodus, of the arrival at Sinai, of various events in the wilderness, of the wars and settlement of Canaan, of the building and dedication of the temple, and of the messages of the later prophets. The first would seem to present the most unanswerable proof that the Jewish computation had been derived from an antediluvian science that must have been of a higher kind than we are generally disposed to acknowledge. With all their mathematics, and with some attainments in astronomy to which the Jew could make no pretension, the calendar of the Greeks presents the appearance of far more confusion. Herodotus, after saying that the Egyptians first *found out* the year, and divided it into twelve parts by *means of the stars*, praises their

arrangement (which was probably the same with, or derived from, that of the Patriarchal times) as being much more easy and correct than the division of the Greeks. "The Egyptians," he says, "divide the year into twelve months of thirty days each; and then, by adding five days to each year, they have a uniform revolution of time; whereas the Greeks, for the sake of adjusting the seasons accurately, add every third year an intercalary month" (Herod. ii. 4). By this, however, they seem only to have made "confusion worse confounded." The great difficulty of the Greeks arose from the attempt to do what the wiser Egyptians and Hebrews seem to have abandoned—namely, to divide the year solely by lunar months. By arbitrary intercalations, it is true, they could bring the solar and lunar years to a tolerable agreement, but then, their effect was continually to change the places of the months relatively to the seasons. The periods of intercalation were at first every two years, then three, and lastly four, and eight. In the two latter they seem to have been governed by some respect to the quadrennial return of the great Olympic games, and the Olympiads corresponding thereto. The computation of the year was afterward brought to a still greater degree of accuracy by what was called the cycle of Melon, which, by embracing a period of nineteen years brought the times of the new and full moon to fall again, very nearly, on the same days of each month.

With the Romans it was still worse. Nothing shows how much better they understood fighting than astronomy, than the way they managed their year. Under Romulus it was said to have consisted of only ten months. It is not easy to see how this could be adjusted on any mode of computation, and yet the numerical names, some of which have come down to our own calendar, would seem to present some proof of it. The last month in the year is yet called *December*, or the *Tenth*. In the days of Numa it consisted of twelve lunar months, with a system of intercalation something like that of the Greeks. The two added months were January and February, which, in numerical order would have been Undecember, and Duodecember, or the Eleventh and Twelfth. The year, however, by the clumsiness of these methods, and by the whole matter being left in the hands of the Pontifices who seem to have had little science, and still less honesty, became turned so completely topsy-turvy, that instead of being put at the end, these two new months were finally arranged at the beginning. The first was called January from the great (some say the greatest) Latin deity, Janus, whose original name was Djanus or Di-annus, *The God of the Year* (similar to the Greek Kronos or Time), and who was most expressively represented with two faces, one ever looking back upon the past, and the other forward to the coming period.

In the hands of the Pontifices the Roman year had again been getting more and more out of order, until, in the days of Julius Cæsar, the first of January had retrograded nearly to the autumnal equinox. This very useful despot determined to take the matter in his own hands, and make a thorough reform; but, as a preliminary, was obliged to have an extraordinary year of 445 days, which was called the *year of confusion*. Before this, there had been, too, a continual neglect of the fraction of a day, although its existence seems to have been known at a much earlier period. Cæsar arranged the months as they now stand, and made provision for the fraction by ordering a day to be added to February every fourth year. This seemed to answer every purpose, until, after the lapse of more than fourteen centuries, it was found that the seasons

began to disagree with the almanac, and the religious festivals to fall somewhat out of place. The error was estimated to amount to eleven days; the correction of which was assumed by the Roman Pontifex. but with the aid of a science far more accurate than had been possessed by the Pontifexes of the older time. The modes now adopted, for preserving accuracy in future, are known to most well-informed readers, so that we shall not dwell upon them farther than to say, that they consist generally in such omissions of the leap year, from time to time, as will correct the very small excess by which a quarter of a day exceeds the actual fraction of the tropical year.

"And God said—Let there be lights in the firmament of Heaven, and let them be for days, and for years, and for times, and for seasons." It requires some thought before we can fully realize how much we are indebted, morally and mentally, as well as physically, to these time-measuring arrangements. We must place ourselves in the condition of the savage before we can know how much of our civilization comes from the almanac, or, in other words, our exact divisions of time aiding the idea and the memory—thus shaping our knowledge, or thinking, and even our emotions, so as to make them very different from what they might have been, had we not possessed these regulators of our inner as well as our outer man. How unlike, in all this, must be the life of the untaught children of the forest! Let us endeavor to fancy men living from age to age without any known length or divisions of the year—no lesser or greater periods to serve as landmarks, or, rather, sky-marks, in their history—and, therefore, without any possibility of really having any history. Summer and winter come and go, but to the savage all the future is a chaos, and all the past is

With the years beyond the flood, unmarked by any intervals which may give it a hold upon the thoughts or the memory. The heavenly bodies make their monthly, and annual, and cyclical revolutions, but their eternal order finds no correspondence in his chaotic experience. The stars roll nightly over his head, but only to direct his steps in the wilderness, without shedding a ray of light upon the denser wilderness of his dark and sensual mind. The old man knows not how many years he has lived. He knows not the ages of his children. He has heard, indeed, of the acts of his fathers; but all are equally remote. They belong to the past, and the past is all alike—a dark back-ground of tradition, without any of that chronological perspective through which former ages look down upon us with an aspect as life-like and as truthful as the present. The phenomena of the physical world have been ever fitting like shadows before his sense, but the understanding has never connected them with their causes, never followed them to their sources, never seen in them any ground of coherence or relation, simply because time, the great connective medium of all inductive comparison, has been to him an undivided, unarranged, and, therefore, unremembered vacancy. Hence it is, he never truly learns to think, and, on this account, never makes progress—never rises of himself from that low animal state to which he may once have fallen, in his ever downward course from the primitive light and truth. Æschylus, in the Prometheus, makes such to have been the first condition of mankind. But, however false his theory in this respect—opposed as it is to the sure teachings of revelation—nothing can be truer to the life than the fancy picture he has given us—

No sure foreknowing sign had they of winter,
Nor of flowery spring, or summer with its fruits.
Unmarked the years rolled ever on; and hence

Seeing, they saw not; hearing, they heard in vain.
Like one wild dream their waste unmeasured life;
Until I taught them how to note the year
By signal stars, and gave them Memory,
The active mother of all human science.

THE PULPIT and the PRESS—the past and the present, the rising and the waning power, would be to some minds the first idea suggested by such a collocation of terms. But we trust the time has not yet come for the actual verification of any such contrast. Far be it from us to underrate the value of the very instrument through which we seek to instruct and reform the public mind; but woe to the land and to the age in which such an antagonism shall ever be realized. The Press is man's boasted means for enlightening the world. The Pulpit is Heaven's ordinance; and sad will it be for the Church, and sadder still for the State, when any other power on earth challenges a superiority, either in rank or influence. The clergy can safely occupy no inferior place; and such is their position, unless they are ever in advance of the age, not in the common cant of a superficial doctrine of progress, but as champions of the eternal and *immovable* truths, while they are, at the same time, contending in all the fields, whether of theology, or science, or literature, or philosophy, in which there may be an enemy to be subdued, or a victory won for Christ. Such rank, we believe, may still be claimed for the Church. In former centuries she had neither antagonist nor rival. Now has she hosts of both. Yet are her servants still in the "fore-front of the hottest battle." Philosophy and science are swelling loud and long the note of triumph, and yet it is still true, even in a period the most thoroughly secular the world has ever known since the days of the Apostles, that the highest efforts of mind are connected, as ever, with the domain of theology. Science, literature, and even politics, find their most profound interest for the human soul when the questions they raise lie nearest to her sacred confines, and connect themselves with that "faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." What true worth in any problem in philosophy, in any discovery in science, the moment it is once conclusively settled, beyond a peradventure, that man has no hereafter? What becomes of art, and poetry? What meaning in "progress," and "ideas," and the "rights of man?" But it is this dread though all-conservative idea of a hereafter, which it is the office of the Pulpit ever to keep before the human soul, not as a lifeless dogma for the understanding, but in all those stern relations to a higher positive law, which shall ever prevent its coalescing with a frivolous creed in theology, or any boasting philosophy of mere secular reform. In doing this, there is needed for the Pulpit, first of all, and above all, the most intense seriousness of spirit, secondly the most thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, and thirdly, learning, science, and philosophy, fully equal to any thing that may be brought to cope with it in its unyielding strife for the dominion of the world.

In urging this, however, we should never forget, that while the power of the periodical Press is often unduly enhanced by a falsely coloring medium of estimation, the glory and influence of the Pulpit are diminished by a similar cause. Apparent variety of topic, an apparent freshness in the mode of treatment, a skillful adaptation to the ever varying excitements of the hour, all aided by the ceaseless craving in the human soul for mere intellectual novelty, give to the one an appearance of superiority it does not really possess, while, in respect to the other, the necessary

repetition of the same great truths, from age to age, has produced just the contrary effect.

There is no way, therefore, in which we can better employ the imagination than in helping us to get away from such a false and blinding influence. How would the mightiest minds of the ancient world now estimate the two prime powers of which we are speaking. Let us imagine Cicero, or Aristotle, to be permitted to revisit the earth, and study its new modes of thought as they would strike them from their old and, therefore, unbiased point of observation. Lay before them all the wonders of the modern newspaper press. They would doubtless be startled with many things it would reveal to them in the discoveries of modern physical science. But take them in those wide fields of thought in which mere physical discovery avails not to give superiority, and we may well doubt whether they would yield to us that triumph we so loudly claim. There is nothing in any modern declamation on the rights of men, or rights of women, that would make Aristotle ashamed of his *Politica*. Cicero might hear discussed our closest questions of social casuistry, yet think as proudly of his *Offices*, and his *Republic*, as he ever did while a resident upon earth. No modern political correspondence would make him blush for his Letters to Brutus and to Atticus. The ablest leader in any of our daily journals, would not strike them as very superior, either in thought or style, to what might have been expected from a Pericles, a Cleon, an Isocrates, or a Sallust. Our profoundest arguments for and against foreign intervention might, perhaps, only remind him of the times when democratic Athens was so disinterestedly striving to extend her "liberal institutions," and aristocratic Sparta, with just about equal honesty, was gathering the other Hellenic cities to a crusade in favor of a sound conservatism. Modern Europe, with its politics, would be only Greece on a larger scale; and our own boasts of universal annexation might only call up some sad reminiscences of the olden time, when "the masses" did their thinking through the sophist and the rhetorician, instead of the lecturer and the press.

But now let fancy change the scene from the reading room to the ministrations of the Christian temple. To present the contrast in its strongest light, let it be the humblest church, with the humblest worshippers, and the humblest preacher of our great city—some obscure corner which the literary and editorial lights of the age might regard as the last place in which there could be expected any thing original or profound. Yes—the poorest sermon of the poorest preacher in New York could hardly fail to strike the great Roman, and the greater Greek, with an awe which nothing of any other kind in the modern world could ever inspire. What wondrous truths are these, and whence came they! Whence this doctrine of eternal life, so far beyond what we ever dared to think—this preaching of "righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come," so far transcending all the ancient moralists had ever taught! Whence these new and startling words, these superhuman ideas of grace, of prayer, of redemption, of a new and heavenly birth! And then again, the sublimity of that invocation—the heavenly thought, and heavenly harmony, of that song of praise and love! All is redolent of a philosophy to which our most rapt contemplations never ventured to ascend. Even the despised hymn-book may be soberly supposed to fill their souls with an admiration that Dryden and Shakspeare might fail to inspire. How transcendent the conceptions on every page! How far beyond all ancient or modern poetry that is alien to its spirit, or claims no kindred

with its celestial origin. Here, indeed, is progress. But we must close our sketch. Is the picture over-drawn? Or have we truthfully presented the highest, although, in spirit, the least acknowledged aspect of the real superiority of the modern mind—even the humblest modern mind—over the proudest intellects of the ancient world?

Editor's Easy Chair.

B*TWEEN CONGRESS, KOSSUTH, and CHRISTMAS*—an alliterative trio of topic—we hardly know where to find the handle of a single other moving hammer of gossip. The hunt for chit-chat is after all a very philosophical employ; and we do not know another *colaborateur*, in the whole editorial fraternity, who has smacked the turbulence of congressional debaters, the enthusiasm of the Hungarian Patrick Henry, and the *cadeaux* of our Noel, with more equanimity and composure than ourselves.

Our chair, as we have hinted, is an easy one; and throwing ourselves back into its luxurious embrace, we have raced through the swift paragraphs of morning journalism, or lingered, as is our wont, upon the piquancy of occasional romance, with all the gravity of a stoic, and all the glow of Epicurus. We are writing now, while the street and the salon are lighted up with the full flush of the Hungarian enthusiasm. It amounts to a frenzy; and may well give to the quiet observer a text on which to preach of our national characteristics.

And *firstly*, we are prone to enthusiastic outbursts; we love to admire with an ecstasy; and when we do admire, we have a pride to eclipse all rivals in our admiration. We doubt if ever at Pesth, in the best days that are gone, or that are to come, of Hungarian nationality, the chief of the nation could receive more hearty and zealous plaudits than have welcomed him upon our sunny Bay of New York. A fine person, an honest eye, and an eloquent tongue—pleading for liberty and against oppression—stir our street-folk—and we hope in Heaven may always stir them—to such enthusiasm as no Paris mob can match.

But, *secondly*—since we are speaking sermonwise—our enthusiasm is only too apt to fall away into reaction. We do not so much grow into a steady and healthful consciousness of what we count worthy, as we leap to the embrace of what wears the air of worthiness; and the very excess of our emotion is only too often followed by a lethargy, which is not so much the result of a changed opinion, as of a fatigue of sentiment. Whether this counter-action is to follow upon the enthusiasm that greets the great Guest, we dare not say. We hope—for the sake of Hungary, for the sake of Liberty, and for the sake of all that ennobles manhood—that it may not!

Thirdly, and finally, as sermonizers are wont to say, we are, at bottom, with all our exciting moments, and all our fevers of admiration, a very matter-of-fact people. We could honor Mr. Dickens with such adulation, and such attention as he never found at home; but when it came to the point of any definite action for the protection of his rights as an author, we said to Mr. Dickens, with our heart in his books, but with our hands away from our pockets, "we are our own law-makers, and must pay you only in—honor!"

How will our matter-of-fact tendencies answer to the calls of Kossuth? We are not advocates or partisans—least of all—in our *EASY CHAIR*: we only seek to chisel out of the rough block of every day