

thusiasm in Austria for a canal scheme is pushing the authorities faster than they evidently care to move. The Austrian canal scheme will make a magnificent series of connections between the chief waterways of Central and Eastern Europe. The junction of the Danube with the Oder and the Vistula will permit of navigation right up to the Russian frontier, and will eventually form part of a grand connecting link between the Baltic and the Black Sea. Another connection will be between the Danube and Elbe, similarly forming a navigable road from the North Sea to the Black Sea. Finally, these two series of canals will themselves be joined, and the whole will form a superb network of waterways, which, says *The St. James's Gazette* (London), can not fail to be of immense benefit to the whole of the Austrian empire.

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PARLIAMENT.

THE press of the entire British empire is unanimous in congratulating the new Australian commonwealth on the auspicious opening of its first parliament. The great dominion at the Antipodes, says *The Chronicle* (London), is "a Britain forged without the hammer of a Vulcan or a Thor and molded without the blood of internecine conflict." *The Daily News* (London) also comments on Australia's peaceful entrance into the family of nations:

"The rivets that hold that nation together were forged by peaceful discussion, and were driven home by the will of the people constitutionally expressed. No war, with all its horrors and miseries, has been necessary to weld Australia's states into one commonwealth. The new nation has now set out on its political career amid all the signs of prosperity and harmony. There are parties, but no factions. No section of the people stands sullenly apart weighed down by a bitter sense of oppression, but all join in loyal unison to acclaim the great state that they themselves have created."

Without a particle of jealousy, with pride and hope, says *The Times* (London), we watch this new constitutional development. "Let the genius of a young and virile race have full play, and let the son surpass the father in their common aims." The Australian is much better off than the American, declares *The Tribune* (Winnipeg). He has "a larger income, has more voice in the government of the country, is freer, better educated, and better off in other ways, than the average man in the United States." Political independence is also more real in Australia than in the United States, in the opinion of *The Tribune*, which says further:

"In the United States 'labor' votes for one or other of two machine parties. Australia is the land of victorious labor parties; in the United States they do not exist. There the working-man seems content to be the political tool of partizan machines, that, in turn, are the tools of corporations and financiers. In the one country he is the political ruler, in the other he is in the political power of the Rockefellers, Hannas, and Crokers."

The Melbourne *Argus*, which favors free trade, in speaking of the problems which face the parliament, says:

"The wonder of these latter days is the manner in which science is swiftly annihilating distance, and allowing the surplus of one spot to be used to remedy the deficiency of another. And the pitiful spectacle of these same wonder-working days is that of befogged high tariffists fighting against science in their vain effort to kill international exchange, even as Dame Partington struggled with her mop against the intruding Atlantic Ocean."

Björnson's Characterization of the French.—A rather interesting opinion of the French people and their relation to the rest of the world is given by Björnstjerne Björnson, the Norwegian writer and political leader. In an interview with a representative of the *Revue Hebdomadaire* (Paris), he said:

"As for the French people, I will avow frankly that I am ut-

terly incapable of understanding them. They do not understand us; we do not understand them. . . . You speak of the influence of Scandinavian dramatists on the younger school of French dramatists. Why, it has no influence whatever. You say that Curel and Brieux show signs of that influence? Not the least in the world. They know nothing of Scandinavian drama; they understand nothing of it, and, what is more, they never will understand anything of it; and the same may be safely said of the French public.

"You see, in our old continent there are two distinct races. On the one hand the United States of Europe—cosmopolitans, if you like; on the other hand is France, quite alone, as if shut in by a Chinese wall. In fact, for a long time I have thought of the French as the Chinese of Europe. The better I learn to know them the more I am confirmed in my opinion. Travel about Europe and come in contact with Norwegians, Germans, English, Austrians, and Italians, and you will find that you have many points of interest in common. You understand each other, often with half a word. Many of your ideas are the same, and your ways of looking at things. When you have to do with a Frenchman it is entirely different. You are up against a Chinese wall at once. I do not wish to institute any damaging comparison, or to disparage French culture. Nor do I wish to give the impression that I think that they ought to change. It is the best for them. All the same, they are as set as a bronze figure. Everything passes by without making the slightest impression. But why should it not be so? French culture is of the highest grade; in many points it is most admirable. But to us outsiders, it is entirely beyond comprehension. We Scandinavians and other cosmopolitans have no right to sit in judgment on the French, simply because we can not understand them and are therefore not capable of judging justly."—*Translation made for THE LITERARY DIGEST.*

WHY RECENT FRENCH HISTORY IS PROHIBITED IN FRENCH SCHOOLS.

THE circular recently issued by the French Minister of Education to all the colleges and lycées in the republic forbidding instruction in French history later than the year 1875 has called forth much adverse comment. An article in the *Courrier des États-Unis* (New York) shows that the terms of this circular prescribes that instruction in the domestic history of France must hereafter end with the adoption of the new constitution in 1875. Even in tracing the effects of remote events, such as the great revolution, the minister specifically directs that the process shall stop at 1875. Moreover, all books not in conformity with this program are prohibited, both as text-books and as library books, and the rectors are enjoined to see that the students have no access to such works. Hitherto instruction in French internal history has been carried down to within quite recent years.

Those who favor the measure claim that current history has been frequently distorted by political bias, and declare that the measure was rendered necessary by the attempts of politicians to gain a university following. The minister, they hold, being unable to insure the impartial presentation of facts, did well to secure the "neutrality of ignorance." The bulk of the criticism, however, is to the effect that it is absurd to graduate young men who have no knowledge of the internal history of their country during the past quarter of a century. The *Courier* says, by way of comment:

"As this fateful date of 1875 does not apply to foreign affairs, these young men will learn of the conquest of Egypt by England without learning why France had no share in it. They will learn that in 1885 there was a Franco-Chinese war which overthrew the Ferry ministry, but why or how will be concealed from them. It has been asserted that the measure is really due to the imprudence of a few university professors who were permitted to take part in the Dreyfus agitation. Others claimed the same privilege, and great confusion ensued. Now the ministry of public instruction, which, by its laxity, is responsible for the whole trouble, has gone to the other extreme."—*Translation made for THE LITERARY DIGEST.*

MISCELLANEOUS.

HOW JACOB A. RIIS BECAME A NEWSPAPER MAN.

MANY who read the books and magazine articles of Jacob A. Riis—who has told the more fortunate half of New York City “how the other half live”—may not know that Mr. Riis is the head police reporter on the New York *Sun*, and that he has been a reporter for nearly thirty years. In his autobiography, now running in *The Outlook*, he says that his father had hoped that he would follow some literary pursuit, but that he himself was determined to be a carpenter. So, in the ancient town of Ribe, on the north coast of Denmark, where he was born and brought up, the young man followed the carpenter's trade until, disappointed in a love affair, he left Denmark and came to America. He wandered about New York State and Pennsylvania, working at odd jobs, often with too little to eat, until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war. Now, thought young Riis, is the time to help humiliate Prussia, the old foe of Denmark; and he tried to get passage to France, but without success.

An article in *The Sun* on the subject led him to apply to Charles A. Dana, the editor, for a chance to get into the war. Dana smiled and explained that an editor and a recruiting agent are not the same thing. The narrative continues:

“I turned to go, grievously disappointed, but he called me back.

“‘Have you,’ he said, looking searchingly at me, ‘have you had your breakfast?’

“No, God knows that I had not; neither that day nor for many days before. That was one of the things I had at last learned to consider among the superfluities of an effete civilization. I suppose I had no need of telling it to him, for it was plain to read in my face. He put his hand in his pocket.

“‘There,’ he said, ‘go and get your breakfast; and better give up the war.’

“Give up the war! and for a breakfast. I spurned the dollar hotly.

“‘I came here to enlist, not to beg money for breakfast,’ I said, and strode out of the office, my head in the air, but my stomach crying out miserably in rebellion against my pride.”

After further experience with the inhospitality of New York that brought thoughts of suicide to his mind, then a trip to friends in Philadelphia, and a fairly comfortable winter in Jamestown, N.Y., he went to Buffalo, where he found work with a builder, who discharged him, however, after a rather warm argument on religious matters. To quote again:

“It was about this time I made up my mind to go into the newspaper business. It seemed to me that a reporter's was the highest and noblest of all callings; no one could sift wrong from right as he, and punish the wrong. In that I was right. I have not changed my opinion on that point one whit, and I would rather die a good reporter than a millionaire. The power of fact is the mightiest lever of this or of any day. The reporter has his hand upon it, and it is his grievous fault if he does not use it well. I thought I would make a good reporter. My father had edited our local newspaper, and such little help as I had been of to him had given me a taste for the business. Being of that mind, I went to *The Courier* office one morning and asked for the editor. He was not in. Apparently nobody was. I wandered through room after room, all empty, till at last I came to one in which sat a man with a paste-pot and a pair of long shears. ‘This must be the editor; he had the implements of his trade. I told him my errand while he clipped away.

“‘What is it you want?’ he asked, when I had ceased speaking and waited for an answer.

“‘Work,’ I said.

“‘Work!’ said he, waving me haughtily away with the shears; ‘we don't work here. This is a newspaper office.’

“I went, abashed. I tried *The Express* next. This time I had the editor pointed out to me. He was just coming through the business office. At the door I stopped him and preferred my request. He looked me over, a lad fresh from the ship-yard with horny hands and a rough coat, and asked:

“‘What are you?’

“‘A carpenter,’ I said.

“The man turned upon his heel with a loud, rasping laugh and shut the door in my face. For a moment I stood there stunned. His ascending steps on the stairs brought back my senses. I ran to the door and flung it open. ‘You laugh!’ I shouted, shaking

my fist at him, standing half-way up the stairs, ‘you laugh now, but wait—’ And then I got the grip of my temper and slammed the door in my turn. All the same, in that hour it was settled that I was to be a reporter. I knew it as I went out in the street.”

Selling extension-tables and flat-irons was the occupation by which young Riis next made himself useful to the world, after which he was again found in New York City. While attending a school of telegraphy he saw an advertisement in a newspaper offering the position of city editor on a Long Island City weekly to a competent man.

“Something of my old ambition stirred me. It did not occur to me that city editors were not usually obtained by advertising, still less that I was not competent, having only the vaguest notions of what the functions of a city editor might be. I applied for the job, and got it at once. Eight dollars a week was to be my salary; my job, to fill the local column and to attend to the affairs of Hunter's Point and Blissville generally, politics excluded. The editor attended to that. In twenty-four hours I was hard at work writing up my then most ill-favored bailiwick. It is none too fine yet, but in those days, when every nuisance crowded out of New York found refuge there, it stunk to heaven.

“Certainly I had entered journalism by the back door, very far back at that, when I joined the staff of *The Review*. Signs of that appeared speedily, and multiplied day by day. On the third day of my employment I beheld the editor-in-chief being thrashed down the street by an irate coachman whom he had offended, and when, in a spirit of loyalty, I would have cast in my lot with him, I was held back by one of the printers with the laughing statement that that was his daily diet and that it was good for him. That was the only way any one ever got any satisfaction or anything else out of him. Judging from the goings on about the office in the two weeks I was there, he must have been extensively in debt to all sorts of people who were trying to collect. When, on my second deferred day-day, I met him on the stairs, propelled by his washerwoman, who brought her basket down on his head with every step he took, calling upon the populace (the stairs were outside the building) to witness just punishment meted out to him for failing to pay for the washing of his shirts, I rightly concluded that the city editor's claim stood no show. I left him owing me two weeks' pay, but I freely forgive him. I think I got my money's worth of experience.”

Book canvassing was next adopted, with the result that on more than one day he had nothing to eat. One evening, after two such days had happened to come in succession, young Riis and his dog “Bob” were sitting on the steps of the Cooper Institute when the principal of the telegraph school, passing by, happened to spy him, and remembered that the manager of a downtown news bureau had asked him to find him a bright young fellow whom he could break in. The pay was to be ten dollars a week. The next morning early Riis made his application to the manager of the bureau:

“He looked me over a little doubtfully, but, evidently impressed with the early hours I kept, told me that I might try. He waved me to a desk, telling me to wait until he had made out his morning book of assignments; and with such scant ceremony was I finally introduced to Newspaper Row, that had been to me like an enchanted land. After twenty-seven years of hard work in it, during which I have been behind the scenes of most of the plays that go to make up the sum of the life of the metropolis, it exercises the old spell over me yet. If my sympathies need quickening, my point of view adjusting, I have only to go down to Park Row at eventide, when the crowds are hurrying homeward and the City Hall clock is lighted, particularly when the snow lies on the grass in the park, and stand watching them a while, to find all things coming right. It is Bob who stands by and watches with me then, as on that night.

“The assignment that fell to my lot when the book was made out, the first against which my name was written in a New York editor's book, was a lunch of some sort at the Astor House. I have forgotten what was the special occasion. I remember the bearskin hats of the Old Guard in it, but little else. In a kind of haze, I beheld half the savory viands of earth spread under the eyes and nostrils of a man who had not tasted food for the third day. I did not ask for any. I had reached that stage of starvation that is like the still center of a cyclone, when no hunger is felt. But it may be that a touch of it all crept into my report; for when the editor had read it, he said briefly:

“‘You will do. Take that desk, and report at ten every morning, sharp.’

“That night, when I was dismissed from the office, I went up the Bowery to No. 185, where a Danish family kept a boarding-house up under the roof. I had work and wages now, and could pay. On the stairs I fell in a swoon and lay there till some one stumbled over me in the dark and carried me in. My strength had at last given out.

“So began my life as a newspaper man.”