

vate business we have long had instances of assault and even murder by men who have lost their jobs and thrown themselves with insensate fury upon foreman or manager. Such a thing, it is now clear, must be reckoned with in the public business also. It serves to show anew what qualities of resolution and of devotion to duty and even of heroism a conscientious executive must bring to the doing of his work. There is nothing theatrical about it; no waving of banners or marching to the imminent deadly breach; but just a stern and persistent application of sound principles to the service of the people, day by day, even though, as we now see, the rage and malice which such a course arouses in evil natures may lead to criminal acts of personal vengeance. All this gives one a more vivid idea of the possibility of heroes of peace. An executive engaged in the seemingly humdrum work of reform may really be taking his life in his hands every day, and offering it freely to his country. He does not think of this himself; it is well for him that he should not think of it; yet no one with the stuff of a man in him would hesitate to do his full official duty even if he knew that, as a result, assassins would be dogging his footsteps.

We speak of the assassinations of public officials in the United States as "political," yet strictly they are not. Even the murder of Lincoln was so only in an indirect way. The doing to death of Garfield and McKinley was not a political crime in the sense that the assassination of the Czar or of Russian chiefs of police, for example, is such. That is to say, the murderous attempts upon the lives of American executives do not argue a passionate and desperate sense of outrage, a wild fury of hatred of the political system as such. No open-minded foreign historian would ever think of pointing to the assassination of three American Presidents within fifty years as an indication of political upheaval or even of social unrest. There is implied no mad resistance to despotism, no frenzied hope of striking terror into those in power and leading them to change the whole plan of government. American crimes of this kind are correctly to be set down in the chapter of accidents. We deplore them, but we do not need to be plunged into patriotic shame by them. They are among the perils which our executives have to confront, but they do

not by themselves argue something rotten in the state, and they certainly have no power to sway an honest official from his duty.

PRIVATE SECRETARIES OF PUBLIC MEN.

The position of private secretary to a man in public life has been longer established in England, and has meant more, than in this country. There it has been a recognized stepping-stone to political or governmental promotion. Lord Rowton would never have been the figure he was but for having served so long as Disraeli's private secretary. To mention the names of two living men, of greater eminence, who began as private secretaries to statesmen, we may remind our readers that both Lord Milner and Lord Cromer served in that capacity. It would be hard to match those three names from the list of American private secretaries. Colonel Hay could, of course, hold his own with the Englishmen, though his work for Lincoln at the White House was not the direct means by which he rose to become Ambassador and Secretary of State. From him we have to drop to Mr. Cortelyou, who has now gone into business, and to Mr. Loeb, whose future is as yet on the lap of the gods—though his friends are saying to him, as to another Macbeth, Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be—?

It is easy to see why private secretaries have not with us risen so often or so high as with the English. In the first place, political success has not here depended so much as it does in England upon training. Any man might at any moment get any office. Nominations have been made in such mysterious ways as to give point to Webster's sneer at Taylor, that if he could be named for the Presidency, no man was safe. But a stronger reason lies in the fact that private secretaries have in the United States been so often disposed of as "plums." This method has been employed especially by Congressmen. When you penetrate into Senator Sorghum's office you will probably find that his private secretary is a son named Dolce Farniente Sorghum, while Miss Sacharissa Sorghum is assistant. Somebody else, of course, does the work, but they draw the pay. So long as nepotism or political influence governs such appointments, we cannot

expect to find the average private secretary displaying the knowledge and special aptitudes which promise that he will go far.

At the same time, a growing importance is undeniably attached in this country to the work of private secretaries of men in high office. It springs inevitably out of the increasing amount of public business pressing upon their chiefs, and out of the heightened need for some one to control the way in which it shall be presented, to apportion the great man's time, and to decide who shall see him and what his engagements shall be. One night last week there was a dinner in London of the Parliamentary private secretaries. They had some good stories to tell of their profession and of their varied adventures, and one letter, said to be authentic, was read which illustrates our present point. A constituent who had written to his M. P. earnestly desiring an interview received the following from the member's private secretary:

Dear Sir: I am desired by Mr. ——— to say that if the matter is important he will see you at the House on Thursday next at three, but if it is *really* important, I think you had better come to me direct.

Yours faithfully, ———, private secretary.

A private secretary whom his political superior implicitly trusts has a chance to possess great power. Not only has he to keep the latter's calendar, supervise his coming and going, sift out those who are to be admitted to his presence, while turning away the others, but he has very much to do with the form in which a great deal of routine business is laid before his chief. In other words, he comes with the details of it all arranged to his own mind, and with a decision practically made up in advance. "Here is another letter," he will say, "from Jobson about that supply-contract; I suppose I am to write him as before that you are not yet ready to award it?" It is this power of gentle insinuation that is lodged with the private secretary, this real control under the guise of deferential suggestion, which causes so many eager or despairing men to crowd into the room of the private secretary and beg him to "lay it before the old man." They go upon the unacknowledged but really weighty motto: "Let who will have the favors to dispense provided that I may be on good terms with his private secretary."

If the functions of the private secre-

tary have become more important, certainly the appreciation of him has become more warm. How deep is the indebtedness which many an executive feels for the man who has stood at his elbow, not only to give advice and carry out orders, but to save from worries! The relation is often one of great intimacy. When the fullest confidence is justified and given on either side, the result is a sort of mixed pride and dependence which brings two men as closely together as any experience in life. No wonder that private secretaries of Mayors and Governors and Presidents are sometimes thought of as a privileged class, who have to be "taken care of" when the term of public office ceases. Their employers, on such occasions, may well contend that they are but giving back something of the care that has so long been taken of them.

ON READING BOOKS THROUGH.

In the face of the unending stream of new books which pours from the press, and of the marvellously cheap editions of "standard writers" which crowd the shelves of department stores, it is difficult to believe that Americans are not a reading people. Books, like other commodities, are produced because there are customers to buy them; and while some, doubtless, are bought merely for display, on the theory that it is a good thing to have books in the house, the larger number are bought to be read.

In one respect, however, the reading habit is developing in a way which does not bode well for either culture or popular education. We refer to the apparently growing disinclination to read a book through. From the summer girl who skims the pages of the latest novel "just to get the story," to the lawyer searching for authorities, or the university student gathering material for a thesis, there seems to be a widespread impression that books, especially those of the larger or more serious sort, need not be read from cover to cover, but are quite sufficiently known when one has dipped into them for this or that bit of information, or glanced at their contents for a general notion of what the author has to say. Historians, of course, must have their introductions, novelists their descriptions of scenery, philosophers their summaries of previous systems; but it is rather old-fashioned to

think of reading carefully all this stuff; and, besides, it takes time, and there are a great many other books to be examined.

There are, of course, vast numbers of books which are worthy of no more attention than this, as there are others whose main value lies simply in the facts which they chronicle. Readers, too, differ so widely in their powers and needs that no uniform rule can be applied to all. But the practice of skimming, or of using nearly all books as though they were encyclopædias or dictionaries, entails a peril both intellectual and artistic. It is almost certain to do the author an injustice; and even an author may fairly ask to be treated with respect. A really good history or biography, for example, is something much more than a collection of materials. It represents the writer's conception of a great period or a notable career, and his effort to treat it as a whole; and we may no more neglect a part of it than we may wash out certain details of a picture and still have a work of art. Similarly with books of speculation, theory, or exposition; if they are anything more than a mere recital of facts or conclusions already familiar, their statements on particular points are likely to be of limited value unless we observe how they fit into the larger treatment of the subject as a whole.

Illustrations of the neglect of which we have been speaking are readily to be found. A copy of Morley's three-volume "Life of Gladstone," picked from among the discarded duplicates of a circulating library, shows the first volume thumbed and loose-leaved, the second only moderately worn, and the third virtually as good as new. Three recent doctors of philosophy of one of our oldest universities, specialists in English history, economics, and philosophy, respectively, confessed without apparent chagrin that they had never read the whole of Green's "Short History" or Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," or Mill's "Logic"; and this notwithstanding that their theses showed bristling bibliographies in which these several works were cited. In the field of history, particularly, the use of the so-called "library method" of instruction, emphasizing the use of many books rather than the thorough study of a few, seems positively to have discouraged the reading

of anything save "extracts" and "selections"; while more than one contemporary reference manual for history classes shows little beyond such scrappy and unsatisfying indications as "On this topic read Macaulay, Vol. III, pp. 195-207."

One cannot help suspecting, also, that in this perversion of the reading habit we have a partial explanation of the mediocre literary quality of much contemporary scholarly writing, and of the overwhelming preponderance of monographs and special studies. To write a learned work which shall also be readable would be, in the eyes of more than one American scholar, little short of a crime, a sort of overt act of treason to science; while to attempt a definitive treatment of a large subject is to disregard the demands of "accuracy," and bow before the altar of literary effectiveness. Moreover, to read a book through requires a distinct measure of mental concentration and intellectual repose, joined to artistic interest; qualities in contrast to the feverish concern for details and for rapid publications which has come to beset the path of learning. Yet we are confident that he who always has at hand some large and worthy book, and who sets himself patiently and cheerfully to the task of reading the whole of it, is laying a sounder foundation of culture than he who ransacks his hundred authorities for bits and scraps. For the books which, surviving the competition of time, still stand as landmarks of intellectual progress, are those which unite learning with artistic completeness and literary attractiveness; and such books are not to be mastered, or their nutriment assimilated, save by reading them as a whole.

FRENCH HISTORY.

PARIS, August 5.

"La Révolution et l'église" (Armand Colin: 320 pages—3.50 francs) and "Le Club des Cordeliers" (H. Champion: 400 pages, 8vo.—7.50 francs), both by Albert Mathiez, are important researches at first hand in the history of the French Revolution. It is not without passing significance that their author is president of the Society of "Etudes Robespierriennes." An attempt has been made to set down all writers on such subjects either with Aulard, who accepts the Revolution as far as Danton, or with Taine, who rejects it altogether. M. Mathiez promises to rank with both,