

# SCIENCE.

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1885.

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## COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

THAT a wide-spread dissatisfaction with the past management of the U. S. department of agriculture exists, is obvious; but, beyond the somewhat puerile scheme for improving the department by a change of name and an access of official dignity to its chief, public discussion has been mainly confined to a consideration of the merits of various candidates for the position. A noteworthy exception to this rule is to be found in an article in the *Pacific rural press* of Jan. 3, by Prof. E. W. Hilgard of the University of California. This article is an abstract of a longer article by the same author in the *Atlantic monthly* for May, 1882, and is especially timely at the present moment. The gist of Professor Hilgard's proposition is to make the office of commissioner of agriculture less, and not more, of a 'political' office, than at present, or rather to remove it from politics altogether. Instead of a cabinet officer, changing with each administration, if not oftener, he would have him "a technical expert, not only responsible to the government, but amenable to that rigorous and incorruptible tribunal constituted of his scientific and technical compeers, and under the standing menace of a loss of his professional reputation, which no whitewashing committees, in or out of congress, could in any manner condone or undo."

We pass over Professor Hilgard's many other excellent suggestions regarding the management of the department, because this one appears to us to be the one fundamental reform which is needed, and which, if once secured, would be followed by the others as naturally as daylight follows the dawn. The coast and geodetic survey, and the geological surveys, have shown what government or-

ganizations can accomplish when divorced from politics, and directed by competent professional men holding office during 'good behavior.' The interests of agriculture are second to none in our country in magnitude, or in the novelty and difficulty of the problems presented. In no direction could a thorough knowledge of the art and science of agriculture find a wider or more attractive field for its exercise. In the interest alike of agricultural science and of practical agriculture, we hope that Professor Hilgard's suggestions may be speedily realized, and that the office may be rendered attractive to the class of experts from among whom it ought to be filled, but who, under the present condition of affairs, are neither thought of for the position, nor could afford to accept it if asked.

WE have a prize offered by an American, one who would be known as a Good Samaritan, no doubt; and this prize, offered as it is for the discovery of a new comet or asteroid, has two singular conditions attached. First, the discoverer may not be of the continent of Europe. This condition is singular. Does not the European buy the wares of the Good Samaritan, or is it that the most successful seeker for little planets is a resident of the European mainland? It would seem that in the community of scientific men it would be as well that a Frenchman or an Austrian should have the honor, and should be encouraged as much in the discovery of a little ball of wandering rock, or of a comet, as that an Englishman, or an American, or a South-Sea Islander should have his ambition for scientific glory stimulated by the hope of a prize. Still there can be no serious objection to the giver limiting the competitors for a prize as he may see fit.

A second condition carries with it some dangers. The discoverer must, without notice to others, send word to the director of the ob-

servatory which our Good Samaritan has seen fit to establish; and only then shall the discoverer make his observation generally known, when he shall have received acknowledgment from the director mentioned. Now, it is important for the proper observation of any new wanderer that the news of it should be sent about the world without delay. The earliest observations of a comet are of especial value in fixing its orbit, and may, with bad weather or other mishap, be the only ones. A well-organized system for the collecting and transmitting of such information exists, and it is surely to be regretted that any condition should be attached to a reward which shall interfere with the benefits to be derived from the success of the worthy investigator. Such a condition is that which requires the competitor for a Warner prize to send word to Rochester before he can give the information to the International association of observatories.

EVERY WORKER in a special field of scientific or technical study must from time to time feel depressed under the difficulty, indeed too often the impossibility, of keeping himself well informed on what the world is accomplishing even in his own narrow department; so rapid is the succession, and so wide the separation, of papers and books treating of his subject. At such times he can appreciate the value of well-prepared current bibliographic records. The geographer turns to the monthly lists in *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, or to the annual one published by the Berlin geographical society; the geologist has the *Neues Jahrbuch*, and would gladly refer to the *Geological Record* if it would only continue to appear in as good form as it began a few years ago; the zoölogist has his *Anzeiger*, *Record*, and *Jahresbericht*; and the chemist and the physicist are equally well cared for. But these extended lists are matters of provocation to many persons who cannot reach the books they name: for them a record is better suited that limits its selections by place instead of by subject, and gives a list of all kinds of publications on a certain geographic field. Two of these are

mentioned in our notes, and both suggest the value of a similar work for our own country. The scope of such a volume would be sufficient for the purposes of many of our readers, if it included a record of the title, and a brief mention of the contents, of every thing written concerning our physical and natural history year by year. If undertaken by a number of specialists, the work would not be too laborious, and it would surely find publisher and purchasers. Why should not the Smithsonian institution undertake it?

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*\* \* \* Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

#### Anthropos and anthropopithecus.

I AM glad that Professor Haynes, availing himself of my references, has refreshed his memory on de Mortillet. He will not again confound the age of St. Acheul with the axe of St. Acheul; and he and other readers of *Science* will now be aware that de Mortillet teaches that not man (the *anthropos*), but the man-ape (the *anthropopithecus*), was the representative of our species during most of the paleolithic period.

But why does the learned reviewer confine himself to the passages I pointed out to him? Why did he not turn to de Mortillet's work (p. 104), where he says, "*L'homme quaternaire ancien n'était pas le même que l'homme actuel*"? And where in the geologic horizon does de Mortillet place the arrival of *l'homme actuel*? Let any reader turn to the table of contents of the volume, and he will find that it is divided into three parts: 1. *L'homme tertiaire*; 2. *L'homme quaternaire*; 3. *L'homme actuel*. The last mentioned arrived, says the author, after a long and unexplained hiatus, *with the period of Robenhausen* (p. 485). Only in that period does de Mortillet concede to man his distinctive psychological traits of a language and a religion. Speaking of the very last of the Magdalenian period, he says, "*L'homme quaternaire était complètement dépourvu du sentiment de la religiosité.*"

D. G. BRINTON, M.D.

Dr. Brinton seems to be unfortunate in understanding de Mortillet's opinions, as well as in quoting his language correctly. Owing to the exigencies of space, 'the readers of *Science*' must be referred to the book itself, where they will find it stated that there is no conclusive proof that funeral practices prevailed in western Europe in quaternary times, and that such usages came into vogue there in the neolithic period. *Hinc illae lacrymae!* This is the sole foundation for Dr. Brinton's monstrous assertion "that de Mortillet teaches that not *man*, but the *man-ape*, was the representative of our species during most of the paleolithic period." De Mortillet's real views will be found summed up on the last page of his work, in twelve 'general conclusions,' so clearly and tersely 'that he who runs may read.'

HENRY W. HAYNES.

[A translation of this summary will appear in our next issue. — Ed.]