

*Competitive Examinations.*

Modern competitive examinations are but slightly in advance of the system of recitations and lectures. They seem to have been invented by some one who wished to torture rather than benefit mankind, and whose philosophy was, that whatever is disagreeable is useful, and that the temporary accumulation of facts is true wisdom, and an accurate measure of cerebral force. Crammed-knowledge is ignorance; in Montaigne's words, "Knowing by heart is not knowing;" the greatest fool may often pass the best examination; no wise man can always tell what he knows; ideas come by suggestion rather than by order; you must wait for their appearing at their own time and not at ours; we may be ready to shoot them when they fly, like birds on the wing, but we cannot tell when they will rise; he who can always tell what he knows, knows little worth knowing.

*Recent Improvement in the American Physique.*

Herein is the partial, though not the entire elucidation of the observed fact that, during the last two decades, the well-to-do classes of America have been visibly growing stronger, fuller, healthier. We weigh more than our fathers; the women in all our great centres of population are yearly becoming more plump and more beautiful; and in the lead-

ing brain-working occupations our men also are acquiring robustness, amplitude, quantity of being. On all sides there is a visible reversion to the better physical appearance of our English and German ancestors. A thousand girls and boys, a thousand men in the prime of years, taken by accident in any of our large cities, are heavier and more substantial than were the same number of the same age and walk of life twenty-five years ago.

Many years of careful study of the physical appearance of our higher classes, in those places where representative types from all parts of the country are constantly seen — in our leading churches and concert halls, on Fifth Avenue and Broadway — have convinced me long ago that the combined influences of wealth and culture, of better manners and better diet, are already bringing fulness and freshness to the angular cheek of the traditional Yankee; the American race is filling out; the next generation, as the experience of the late war gives us reason to hope, may equal our European ancestors in strength, in solidity, and endurance, as our women have long surpassed them in personal attractiveness and beauty.

This improvement in the *physique* of the Americans of the most favored classes during the last quarter of a century is a fact more and more compelling the inspection both of the physician and the

sociologist. Of old it was said that the choicest samples of manly form were to be found in the busy hours of the Exchange at Liverpool; their equals, at least, now walk Broadway and Fifth Avenue. The one need for the perfection of the beauty of the American women — increase of fat — is now supplied.

It could not, in fact, be different, for we have better homes, more suitable clothing, less anxiety, greater ease, and more variety of healthful activity than even the best situated of our immediate ancestors. So inevitable was this result, that had it been otherwise, one might well suspect that the law of causation had been suspended.

The first signs of ascension, as of declension, in nations are seen in women. As the foliage of delicate plants first show the early warmth of spring and the earliest frosts of autumn, so the impressible, susceptible organization of woman appreciates and exhibits far sooner than that of man the manifestations of national progress or decay.

Not long since I had occasion to take a train at Providence on my way to Boston. It was a very stormy morning, and I was surprised to see a large number of ladies in the cars. I observed that the majority of them were, if not handsome, at least strong and vigorous, as though they lived well, and were equal to a long walk or, if necessary, a hard

day's work. Still further, I noticed that many of them were of an intellectual cast of feature; various ages were represented, but nearly all were mature. On inquiring what had called out such a host of brave females on so disagreeable a day, I learned that a Woman's Congress had just closed its sessions in Providence, and that the members were returning to their homes. On subsequently reading the reports of the congress, as published in the Providence papers, I was both interested and mildly surprised to find that the essays were of a far higher order in topics and in treatment than I had been accustomed to expect in organizations sustained wholly by women; the subjects selected being more closely related to science, in its various branches, and the discussions were carried on in the scientific spirit; far less was said of politics, and far more of what requires higher and broader intellect than politics—the difficult and complex problems of psychology, physiology, sociology, and educational reform.

A well-trained intellect is itself medicine and hygiene, enabling its possessor to guard successfully against the appeals of passion and the storms of emotion, keeping the mind constantly supplied with the fresh and varied material for thought and action, and rendering the avoidance of exhausting pleasures at once spontaneous and intelligent. The nervous female patients of our time do not come

from the most intellectual of the sex. The pioneers in feminine development are often sturdy and patient of physical and mental toil — capable of enduring the fatigue of travel, of public speaking, of literary and philanthropic activity; and if, like George Eliot, of a sensitive frame, yet able to keep themselves out of helpless invalidism and in fair working order.

This improvement in the physical appearance of our women is not equally distributed through all classes, nor has it reached all sections. The late Centennial gave an unusual opportunity to study American physique such as we have not had for a century, since there it was possible to see, on any day, every phase of American society, and from every State. It was observed that the women from many distant country places represented, in size, color, and features, the type that twenty-five years ago was national, almost universal; the wave of physical improvement had not yet reached their class of neighborhood; they were thin, angular, stooping, anxious, pale, and, in not a few cases, emaciated. The wives and daughters of farmers are often in some respects less favored hygienically than the fashionable classes of our great cities; they give far too little thought and care to the preparation and mastication of food; they labor oftentimes out of proportion to their strength, and, in want of temptation to walk out