

LIBRARIES OF THE UNITED STATES.

We are indebted to the author, William J. Rhees, chief clerk of the Smithsonian Institution, for a copy of a large octavo volume of 687 pages, which is filled with an account of the libraries of the United States and British possessions in North America. We find a few things in it which will interest many of our readers. The following is the general summary of the public libraries in the United States:—

|                                     | No.    | Vols.      |
|-------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Libraries with volumes reported.... | 1,297  | 4,220,686  |
| Libraries with volumes estimated..  | 1,593  | 500,000    |
| Libraries of common schools.....    | 18,000 | 2,000,000  |
| Libraries of Sunday schools.....    | 30,000 | 6,000,000  |
| Grand aggregate.....                | 50,890 | 12,720,686 |

As showing the character of the books most read, we make the following extract:—

The librarian of the Providence Athenæum has paid particular attention to collecting information as to the number and character of books read. From his reports for 1855 and 1857, the following facts are taken as illustrations:—

|   | 1855.  | 1857.  |
|---|--------|--------|
| Shares used.....                              | 552    | 546    |
| Volumes delivered.....                        | 17,846 | 19,289 |
| Average number of volumes to a share,         | 32     | 35     |
| Fiction.....                                  | 8,971  | 9,214  |
| Biography and History.....                    | 2,158  | 2,971  |
| Voyages and Travels.....                      | 1,481  | 1,865  |
| Poetry and Belles-Lettres.....                | 1,733  | 1,774  |
| Art, Science and Law.....                     | 972    | 1,087  |
| Religion and Philosophy.....                  | 843    | 873    |
| Periodical and Miscellaneous Literature ..... | 1,688  | 1,505  |

From an estimate by the delivery of their works, the following is the order in which the authors here mentioned are ranked by our reading community or rather, we should say, by those who use the books in the Athenæum Library. First, Sir Walter Scott; next, Simms, Cooper and Dickens, with not ten volumes difference between them; Irving stands next; then Mrs. Stowe; after her, Prescott, the historian, Charlotte Bronte and Mrs. Henz; then Bulwer, Longfellow, Willis, Kingsley, Thackeray, Abbott, Macaulay, James, Bayard Taylor, Curtis, Hawthorne and Bancroft, in the order in which we have placed them. As some consolation to those who stand last in this list, it is proper to state that Shakspeare, if enumerated, would have to take his stand after the last of them. This apparent anomaly is only to be accounted for by the supposition that this author is to be found on the shelves of almost every one.

It should be remembered, in connection with the classes of books taken out, in which that of fiction so greatly preponderates, that many proprietors of shares possess very considerable private collections of books; and perhaps the larger number of the actual readers, although not owning large libraries, do possess more or less of the standard works. These are not often the buyers of works of fiction or ephemeral literature, and rely upon the library of the Athenæum for them. This sufficiently accounts for the limited demand from the Athenæum for standard works in history, biography, and other higher departments of literature.

A very slight circumstance will serve to turn the current of taste of our reading public into a particular channel; and a newspaper discussion or a popular lecturer sensibly influences the demands for the books on our shelves. The publication of Dr. Kane's travels, and the discussion about the 'cold term,' gave a great impulse to the demand for Arctic adventures; and the course of lectures given by a celebrated astronomer, during the last winter, kept our shelves bare, for a time, of all astronomical works. The reading year commenced simultaneously with the publication of 'Dred,' by Mrs. Stowe; and for a month or two the demand for the works of that authoress was commensurate with that for the works of Scott; but before the close of the year it had dwindled below that of the lowest on our list; while, on the other hand, the demand for the works of Charlotte Bronte, owing to the publication of her life by Mrs. Gaskell, has increased in nearly the same ratio. Such writers as Scott and Cooper, Irving and Dickens, are the general favorites, and the call for them appears to be about as great at one time as another."

The work is published by Lippincott & Co., of Philadelphia, and is sold by H. Balliere, No. 290 Broadway, this city.

THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE.

On the evening of the 5th instant, the Rev. Dr. Bethune delivered an interesting lecture on the above subject in the hall of the Mechanics' Library, this city. He proceeded to show how we received historical knowledge by transmission from man to man. Allowing 80 years to be the average age of man, from the Creation, 5,860 years ago, it would have taken but eighty-four men to connect us with that event. But we are not led to depend on tradition alone, for we have the inspired records of the Bible. Dr. Bethune then briefly explained the origin of idolatry, which first existed in the Persian or Chaldee nation. The doctrine of this idolatry was that of emanation, first of the world, next of the gods, then of matter, and lastly of heroes. The different ideas in the heathen minds caused a division among them. One part went to India, proof of which we find in the Hindoo mythology. Another part traveled southward to the Nile, under the leadership of Ham. The philosophy of this colony was also that of emanation, but became materially changed in process of time. Thus they worshiped the crocodile as the god of the river Nile, and as Egypt was a very fertile country, they worshiped Agriculture under the sign of an ox, or some animal similar to an ox. Still later they deified Production, under forms the most revolting. From Egypt the light of civilization—if such it might be termed—extended to Greece, under Cecrops. Greece in turn established colonies in Egypt, and it was in Alexandria that the Scriptures were translated into Greek. In Alexandria several schools arose. Pythagoras studied there, whence he went to Crotona and founded a school, the doctrines of which were adopted by Plato, and it was the Platonic philosophy that first went to Rome. Throughout the ancient writings there is no philosophy so seductive as the Platonic. It was the origin of the modern Rationalism. About the second century of the Christian era, the Alexandrian school was founded, and from its corruptions nearly all the heresies of the Christian Church have arisen. As the seat of empire was changed to Byzantium, the modern Constantinople, philosophy went with it. This the lecturer deemed a complete refutation of the hypothesis of the French schools that man was originally a savage. God did not make man one remove from a monkey. He made him in his own image. When Adam came forth from the hand of God, he came, if the expression might be allowed, a highly civilized man. Barbarism is a late state of man; civilization is the original. It was while the shepherds of Judea were watching their flocks by night and looking up into the heavens, that astronomy began. They were not savages who marked out the zodiac and calculated eclipses. Yet Rousseau tells us that man was originally a savage. Rousseau was far more of a savage than the first man. Dr. Bethune did not believe in indigenous civilization. On the contrary, civilization is, like fruit, propagated by grafts. We have a civilization that was in the garden of Eden, or at least was taught at its gates by our first parents.

THE STOMACH AND THE MIND.—Much of our conduct depends, no doubt, upon the character of the food we eat. Perhaps, indeed, the nature of our meals governs the nature of our impulses more than we are inclined to admit, because none of us relish well the abandonment of our idea of free agency. Bonaparte used to attribute the loss of one of his battles to a poor dinner, which, at the time, disturbed his digestion: how many of our misjudgments—how many of our deliberate errors—how many of our unkindnesses, our cruelties, our acts of thoughtlessness and recklessness, may be actually owing to a cause of the same character? We eat something that deranges the condition of the system. Through the stomachic nerve that derangement immediately affects the brain. Moroseness succeeds amiability; and under its influence we do that which would shock our sensibility at any other moment. Or, perhaps, a gastric irregularity is the common result of an over-indulgence in wholesome food, or a moderate indulgence in unsuitable food. The liver is afflicted. In this affliction the brain profoundly sympathizes. The temper is soured; the understanding is narrowed; prejudices are strengthened; generous impulses are subdued; selfishness, originated by physical disturbances which perpetually distract the mind's attention, becomes a chronic mental disorder; the feeling of charity dies out; we live for ourselves alone; we have no care for others. And all this change of nature is the consequence of an injudicious diet.

A COLUMN OF INTERESTING VARIETIES.

Samuel F. Holbrook, of Boston, writes that he is very busy in raising the big ships which were sunk in the harbor of Sevastopol. Eleven ships-of-the-line and twenty-four smaller ships have been raised, and he assures his countrymen that it is hard work. He gives a sad account of the immorality of the people now inhabiting that city, and is anxious to get away from it. One year more will be required to accomplish the undertaking of the company.....The price of coal-oil has been reduced in this market 50 cents per gallon in the last five months. A good article is now sold for \$1 per gallon.....One of the viaducts of the Glasgow and South Western Railway has one arch, in masonry, of 180 feet span.....D. K. Clark, of England, has found that, in locomotive boilers which, just after having been blown off, evaporated 8½ lbs. of water per pound of coal, the apparent evaporation was increased to 9½ lbs. of water by allowing the boiler to become dirty. In the latter condition there was more priming, and a considerable quantity of water must have been carried over bodily without having been converted into steam.....The nominal horse-power of a steam-engine is found by the English Admiralty rule, by multiplying the square of the cylinder's diameter, in inches, by the velocity of the piston, in feet, per minute, and dividing the product by 6,000.....There are, in all, 2,624 locomotives used on the railroads in France.....Governor Seward was presented, in Alexandria, Egypt, with three superb Arabian horses, which will be shipped to this country. Two of them will be presented to the New York State Agricultural Society..... All the dogs killed in Cleveland, Ohio, last season, were skinned and the skins sent to a glove manufactory in Litchfield, Medina county, where they were converted into kid and buckskins.....Persimmon beer and brandy is being manufactured in considerable quantities. Mr. Schleider, of Louisville, Ky., has made two barrels of brandy from the product of one tree..... Arrangements have been made at Prairie du Chien to launch the steam-ice-boat on the closing of the river. No doubts are entertained by the proprietor as to the success of the enterprise. The boat is to make semi-weekly trips to St. Paul. The engine is of sufficient force to draw sixteen loaded cars. Grain dealers are stationed at all important points up river, and will have a hundred thousand bushels of wheat ready for shipment on the first arrival of the boat.....The falling of the wire suspension bridge over the Scioto river, at Portsmouth, Ohio, was caused by the quicksand in the bed of the river, which undermined and let down one of the piers. Two men, undertaking to cross upon it against the remonstrances of the crowd on the bank, were instantly killed in the crash. The bridge originally cost \$40,000.....A popular author says: "I have no propensity to envy any one, least of all the rich and the great; but if I were disposed to this weakness, the subject of my envy would be a healthy young man, in full possession of his strength and faculties, going forth in a morning to work for his wife and children, or bringing them home his wages at night.".....The momentum of a pound of steam moving with a given velocity is the same as that of a pound of water moving with the same velocity..... Glue, or gluten, which constitutes most of the mass of the skins of animals, is soluble in water; tannic acid is also soluble in water; but if solutions of these two substances are mixed together, they immediately combine chemically and produce a substance which is insoluble; this is the chemistry of tanning.....Among the scions of the house of Bonaparte is a son of old Lucien, the Prince de Canino. The young man is a priest of the Romish church, and being the personal protegee and favorite relative of his imperial cousin at Paris, has seen himself raised from one clerical dignity to another, till at last, the influential post of private secretary and almoner to Pio Nono himself had to be accorded to him. Nothing else stands between him and the purple of the cardinal, but the fact that he is not yet thirty. It is thought, however, that the law may be varied to suit the case, and that, on the decease of Pio IX., he may be made pope, through the influence of Napoleon III.....Lippincott, of Philadelphia, has bought the copyright lately held by Phillips, Sampson & Co., and will hereafter be the exclusive publisher of the Prescott histories.....The Spanish mackerel, a "game fish" of the southern waters, has appeared in the Hudson river, and furnished sport for fly fishermen.