

THE VALUE OF SCIENCE.

Many persons have been deterred from pursuing scientific studies on account of the cry of utilitarianism and the reproach that attends upon anything practical. There is something quite unworthy of the age in which we live in any such notion as the progress of society, and the advance of civilization in modern times depend chiefly upon the application of the discoveries of scientific men. We never know what use may ultimately be made of a discovery. What appears to us at the time as a trivial and insignificant fact, may become one of the links in a great chain of practical application.

When Orsted observed the deflection of the needle produced by the galvanic current, he could not have anticipated that a telegraph would grow out of so slight a circumstance. Faraday's discovery of induction gave us the present form of the telegraph, and also electroplating and electro-chemistry. The black powder in the alkali manufacturer's vat in Paris, to which the name of iodine was given, was of no consequence when first discovered, but now we know that the grand application of photography depends upon it.

A few years ago a German chemist announced the discovery of sugar in the beet. The account was received, like a vast number of other announcements, as a useless fact, and rather disgraceful to the man, who wasted his time in such insignificant labors. Now we know that the beet sugar industry is one of the most important on the continent of Europe, involving millions of capital, and giving occupation to thousands of men.

The illustrious philosopher, Faraday, succeeded in condensing a number of gases. It was an interesting experiment, but certainly no one could have predicted that some day the question of furnishing cheap food to large cities would depend upon the application of this discovery, but such appears likely to be the fact. The best refrigerating machines, and the most practical methods of producing artificial cold, are founded upon the condensation of gases, especially of ammonia, by means of which we shall be enabled to transport frozen meat any distance.

But not only in the production of cold is Faraday's discovery available; we have it in the germ of a valuable motive power, that is capable of extensive application. Faraday also discovered benzol, and for many years no use could be devised for it; we now know the whole aniline industry, with its magnificent array of colors, rests upon what appeared to be a useless discovery; and yet Faraday, who gave us our present form of telegraph, who enabled us to produce the richest colors, who put cheap food within our reach, and gave us a motive power available at all times, himself worked in poverty, and died a poor man.

Professor Tyndall has just aroused the attention of the world to the great question of haze and dust, and out of the agitation of this subject will eventually grow true methods of ventilation, the suppression of cholera, and fevers, the proper care of the poor in tenement houses, and many improvements in the sanitary condition of mankind.

De la Rive of Geneva, while experimenting in electricity, found that a bit of zinc would prevent the oxidation of iron, and he at once suggested its employment for this purpose. Out of this simple fact has grown the immense industry of galvanizing iron; but that is not all, for in the same battery, De la Rive observed that the minute scratchings on one of the cups was accurately copied on the copper deposited upon it. He mentioned the circumstance, Jacob took it up, and we now have electroplating and galvanoplastic carried to complete success.

Pasteur has been devoting years to the study of fermentation, and as a result of his experiments, we are taught to know the true causes of disease and decay, and to invent the proper remedy.

The workers in copper were found to be exempt from cholera, and one investigation it was found that they breathed considerable sulphurous acid; and it was at once seen that this gas, which prevents fermentation and destroys the cholera germs, was what had afforded protection to the coppermiths; and the same remedy was applied with success in cholera districts and in hospitals.

Sir Isaac Newton discovered the solar spectrum. It was an insignificant thing to throw a beam of light on to a screen through a hole in the shutter, and his neighbors thought he ought to have been better employed; but what a wealth of invention has grown out of this one fact. We now dissect our light, and apply each part as we want it. We can shut out the light and admit the heat. We can concentrate the chemical rays and take a picture. We can examine the spectrum and determine the composition of the sun, moon, and stars, and we shall, before long, separate the light and chemical rays from the heat, and shall store up the heat of the sun as our great motive power, after our coal and fuel have been exhausted. We cannot tell to what vast uses this discovery is destined to be applied.

Professor Schrotter, of Vienna, found that he could convert phosphorus into a red powder, which had many peculiar properties: It was not so poisonous to the workmen in the match factory, it did not unite on friction, and could be easily transported from one place to another; it was not soluble in the same reagents as the ordinary phosphorus, and it had powerful reducing properties. It was a trifling matter at first, but has since saved the lives of many a poor person in match factories, and served an important use in the extermination of vermin.

The catalogue of trifling discoveries is almost endless, and we have mentioned enough to show the importance of appreciating the labors of those whose whole life is devoted to the good of their fellow men.

In ancient times it was said, "The proper study of mankind is man," and acting upon that, the world stood still for centuries. The study of mankind led to metaphysical mysteries and superstitions, and it is only since science has dispelled these clouds and let in the light of observation, perception, and judgment, that man has begun to enjoy freedom from such thralldom as our early philosophers imposed upon him. One superstition after another passes

away before the clear light of scientific inquiry, and it is not the man of science, but the metaphysician and inductive philosopher, who throws doubt and distrust and unbelief into our ranks. The value of scientific study is therefore two-fold; it gives us the comforts of civilized life, and overthrows all doubt and superstition; "It proves all things and holds fast that which is good."—Scientific American.

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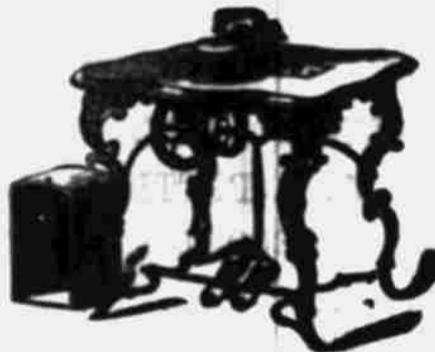
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