

the fraternities tell why it is that they are never represented in the oratorical contests? But perhaps oratorical prizes are too small game for those whose highest ambition it seems is to hold offices in the various classes. Moreover there is never danger of defeat for those who do not enter the contest. Perhaps the fraternities may not receive such extended notice in our columns as they did last year. But they should not feel discouraged on this account. They shall receive as much notice as they desire.

LITERARY.

The *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift*, May 3, 1890, contains the following interesting item: "At Bloomington, Missouri, there exists a Plato club whose members (the same in number as the muses) are women alone. Representatives of the bearded sex are allowed to appear only as guests. Annually on the 7th of "Thargelion" (the 7th of November), they celebrate the "coming of Plato to the earth" by a "symposion." The last banquet speech was delivered by a Dr. Hiram Jones, in which he explained that each person in Plato's symposion represented a principle: Socrates represents wisdom; Pausanias, temperance; Phaidros, the beautiful; Aristophanes, good appearance. The lecture moved the Platonic dames to tears."

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To few men has a more unenviable place been assigned in history than to Robespierre; no man, perhaps, deserves more unqualified condemnation than he. Abhorred by all but a few of his contemporaries, condemned by the unanimous voice of subsequent generations, his apologists are to be found nowhere. But in the excess of justifiable hatred for the man it is possible to overlook the fact that even from his life there are lessons to be learned which have an interest, not alone for those who wish to know the past, but also for those who would understand in all their phases questions that are still of vital interest to the state.

It is first of all essential to observe that the enormities of his last days were the outcome of a logical development, and were not instituted, as would appear at first glance, by misanthropy or by merely personal ambition. It would be paradoxical to assert that it was merely his love for mankind that prompted his judicial massacre of his countrymen; but, extraordinary as it may seem, it was his devotion to the welfare of men, or of that ideal race which supplanted in his dazed vision the real men around him, that gained him the power he wielded with such malignant energy.

It is seldom that unswerving devotion to an ideal has raised mediocrity to such an eminence. Robespierre's chief aim was to apply to the government of his native land those precepts which his teacher, Rousseau, had said should be observed in the government of a community. Robespierre believed in the natural good of the peasant when not oppressed by tyrants, in the possibility of a people being governed under a constitution superimposed, as it were, upon them by some irresponsible person; and he had faith in the notion that a form of government that had succeeded in so small a community as Sparta or Attica could be endured by a nation so vast as France. The few curt maxims of Rousseau found ready credence in the mind of Robespierre, trained in the method then used by the majority of French thinkers,

consisting in the analysis of terms rather than the investigation of actual facts. In his younger days Robespierre resigned a lucrative position to avoid responsibility for the execution of a criminal; unswerving devotion to the realization of Rousseau's prophecies of future bliss for mankind led Robespierre before his death to the pitiless immolation of his fellows. He was a fanatic, and his fanaticism made him what he became, the arbiter of the destinies of France. Unattractive in appearance, having none of the qualities that make the orator or the statesman, his repeated assertions of confidence in "the people" and his indefatigable labor for what he believed, sincerely, no doubt, to be for the welfare of the masses, deluded them and him also into believing that he, of all men, was to be the saviour of France. But his mission was far otherwise. His life is a glaring proof of the fact that the millennium is not to be reached in a moment, but by slow, long continued advance.

The woes he inflicted on France are not due ultimately to his personal ambition, or to an inherent callousness to human suffering, but are traceable to the substitution in his thought of terms for ideas; of an ideal race for the one living about him. True he had ambition; but his talents were so mediocre that it is doubtful whether he could ever have become dictator of France without the aid of fanaticism, his own and his followers'. That fanaticism led him to sacrifice the lives of his contemporaries in order that mankind might the sooner attain the ideal he held constantly in view; it led him to slaughter by the wholesale the enemies of the cause he advocated, whereas, as before shown, he dreaded responsibility for the death of a single man, guilty of any other crime than betrayal of "the people."

It is sad to consider that a man entering public life, professing to be guided by principles, that, although not applicable to his age, exhibit a certain desire for the welfare of humanity, should so deviate from the course he claimed to follow as to become a human monster. But if his life resulted in any good to humanity it was in proving conclusively a fact, seemingly not recognized by all his contemporaries, their political life having been crushed out by centuries of oppression, namely, that eloquence and flattery of the masses are not the safest instruments in the hands of one who would rule.

His life, furthermore, furnishes an additional proof, if any be needed, of the utility of the critical method of historical study so much decried by those that can see little benefit derivable from an accurate knowledge of past events. It is well known that the theory of philosophers whom Robespierre took as his guide, is based on the assumption of the existence somewhere in the past of a golden age, wherein the vices and injustice so rife in civilized communities were unknown. Nothing was offered to justify this assumption: it was taken as a matter of course. Rousseau urged an immediate return to that age, no matter what should be the result to existing institutions. The Romans had the same belief in a former happy age, but so conservative were they that this theory produced with them beneficial results, while in France anarchy resulted. Thus it is seen that Robespierre was chasing after a phantom, was willing to sacrifice a whole nation to regain that happy state, of which, as he might have learned by perusing the records of the past, authentic history makes no mention.

One is surprised in reading the speeches of the legislators of France during the revolution, to find so many and so pedantic references to ancient history. It is amusing to note the complaint of one of the deputies that none of the libraries of Paris contained a copy of the laws of Minos. These men