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A GLANCE BACKWARD AND FORWARD.

As we approach the end of another twelvemonth the usual questions arise: What has been the character of the year's events? What its progress? What its promises?

Naturally those things which bear most directly and forcefully upon a man's life and study and daily labor will seem to him to be the most important.

But there are events, achievements of labor, discoveries, inventions, and the like, which all men make note of sooner or later, and which give to the year its historic character.

The task would not be so hard if each year stood alone in its work or measurably distinct, like the links of a simple chain; or if it were possible for men to pick out infallibly from the complicated tissue of current events those most worthy of commemoration.

Of some things, however, we may be sure; and, though we may forget them next year, they have played a prominent part in the current history of the past four seasons.

Of one thing we can speak with confidence. Though not the best of years, 1881 will go down to history as certainly not an empty or a bad one.

Our industries, on the whole, were probably never more flourishing, more varied, or more reasonably hopeful as to the future.

The rapid extension of our railway system, in the older States as well as in the newer Territories, has given and doubtless will continue to give employment to vast armies of out-door laborers and scarcely smaller armies of machinists, mechanics, iron and steel makers, and workmen in all the arts tributary to the railway system.

The industrial development of the South, Southwest, and Northwest during the year has been unprecedented, vast acres of virgin and long neglected soil having been brought under cultivation, vast stores of natural wealth in forest and mine having been newly opened up and made accessible by new roads.

As the commercial and financial center of the country, and now, as the late census has shown, the manufacturing center also, New York naturally feels intensely the quickening pulse of general activity.

The lighting of our streets and squares by electric lamps was officially begun less than a year ago.

The great bridge across the East River is nearing completion. The year has seen the approaches substantially finished and the work on the superstructure begun.

The tunnel under the Hudson is progressing rapidly and securely by improved methods, work going on from both shores.

In marine engineering the most notable progress has been seen in the building of steamships exceeding 5,000 tons and up to 8,000 tons, and in the substitution of steel for iron, as in the construction of the Servia.

Besides the work of civil engineering already noticed are several more or less important ones, begun or completed, which should not be forgotten. Another line of railway communication across the great West has been completed in the Southern Pacific road, and rapid progress has been made toward the completion of the Northern Pacific.

Not the least notable characteristic feature of the year has been the increasing attention given to useful applications of electricity, due partly to rapid advances in electric lighting, but more perhaps to the prominence given to electrical affairs by the successful exhibition at Paris.

The researches of Pasteur among the lower forms of life, especially those associated with certain malignant diseases, have given results which are perhaps more pregnant of benefits to come to humanity than any other work of the century.

Enough has been said to remind us of some of the more notable results and promises of the year. A multitude of perhaps equally important topics crowd upon us for recognition—progress in the industrial arts; Arctic research; comets; archaeological discoveries in Egypt, Mexico, and elsewhere;

PATENTS AS INVESTMENTS.

It has been said that the introduction of useful inventions seems to hold by far the most excellent place among human actions. Unfortunately this, like many other truths, is not sufficient of itself to incite the inventive faculty.