

the old units. These things being so, to "challenge" the metric system is like challenging the rising tide. Nothing more futile can well be proposed, unless it be a change in the length of the inch. Nevertheless, there is a goodly company of writers to keep the Hon. Capt. Noel in countenance in conjoining these two sapient projects. None of these gentlemen supports the constructive parts of the other's propositions; but they are unanimous against the metric system and the existing inch.

Mr. Noel's system is nearly as complicated and hard to learn as our present one, with which it would be fearfully confused, owing to its retaining the old names of measures while altering their ratios. Thus we should have to learn that 2½ feet would make a yard, 4 miles a league, 5 feet a fathom, 625 acres a square mile, 1,953,125 cubic ells a cubic yard, 216 cubic inches a gallon, 24 ounces a pound; etc. But it is not intended that this complication shall last for ever, for this lesson, once digested, is to be followed by a clean sweeping away of the decimal numeration and the substitution of duo-decimals. Mr. Noel enumerates sixty-eight advantages of his proposal, among them the following: "Mile, one-quarter hour's walk, better than kilometre"; "cubic foot worthier base than cubic decimetre"; "old London mile restored." The scheme is not without merit, and might have been useful to Edward I. Even at this day it must at least have afforded some agreeable occupation to its ingenious and noble author, not to speak of the arithmetical practice.

#### 50 (27 March 1890) 265

##### Epitome of the Synthetic Philosophy.

By F. Howard Collins. With a preface by Herbert Spencer. D. Appleton & Co. 1889.

CSP, identification: MS 1365. See also: Burks, *Bibliography*. This note is unassigned in Haskell's *Index to The Nation*, vol. 1.

A more admirably executed second-hand synopsis of a system of philosophy never was. Considered simply as an index to Spencer's systematic works, this 'Epitome' is invaluable; and to persons who read and reread those thick volumes, not because they believe in them, but only because they want to know what it is that so many others believe, and to whom the writings of the dreariest scholastic doctor are less heartbreakingly tedious, this one volume of 500 pages in place of a library of 5,000 pages is like balm of Gilead. Would it only embraced an introduction boiling the whole thing down to 50 pages! It is printed uniformly with Spencer's works, upon agreeable paper with clear type, and published by the same eminent firm which, by the dissemination of those writings, has contributed so much to the culture and thought of our people.

#### 50 (19 June 1890) 492-493

##### RIBOT'S PSYCHOLOGY OF ATTENTION

###### The Psychology of Attention.

By Th. Ribot. Authorized translation. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company. 1890. 8vo, pp. 121.

CSP, identification: MS 1365; Haskell, *Index to The Nation*. See also: Burks, *Bibliography*; *List of Articles*.

Every educated man wants to know something of the new psychology. Those who have still to make acquaintance with it may well begin with Ribot's little book on 'Attention,' which all who have made progress in the new science will certainly wish to read. It is the *chef d'œuvre* of one of the best of those students who have at length erected psychology into a science.

Ribot regards the doctrine of attention as "the counterpart, the necessary complement, of the theory of association." He means that attention is related to suggestion as inhibition to muscular contraction. Physiologists, however, would scarcely rank *inhibitibility* with contractility as an elementary property of protoplasm. Besides, though suggestion by association may be likened to muscular action, how can the analogy be extended to the process of association itself, or the welding together of feelings? This welding seems to be the only law of mental action; and upon it suggestion and inhibition of suggestion alike depend. Attention is said by Ribot to modify reverie's train of thought by inhibiting certain suggestions, and thereby diverting their energy to suggestions not inhibited. This makes the positive element of attention quite secondary. At the same time, we are told that the sole incitement to attention is interest. That is to say, a preconceived desire prepares us to seize promptly any occasion for satisfying it. A child's cry, drowned in clatter of talk for others' ears, attracts the mother's attention because she is in some state of preparation for it. Ribot, however, does not remark that to say the mind acts in a prepared way is simply to say it acts from a formed association, such action not being inhibitory. If interest be the sole incitement to attention, it is that the energy spent upon the interesting suggestion leaves none for others, rather than that a positive inhibition of the latter throws waste energy into the former. This only happens when attention is controlled for a conscious purpose. If, in the beginning of his inquiry, Ribot had discarded the unscientific word "attention," and with it his feeble antithesis of association and attention, the truth would have shone out that the main phenomenon is emotional association, aided in certain cases by acts of inhibition.

The most interesting and valuable parts of the book are those devoted to corporeal concomitants of attention. Evidence is that in this act parts of the brain receive increase of blood. This must be due to stimulation of the vaso-motor nerves, belonging to the sympathetic system, under the influence of the desire in the interest of which attention is excited. Moreover, in intense attention the breath is held, and in every case respiration is slackened. There are, besides, certain muscular actions: in external attention, the eyebrows and the skin of the forehead over them are drawn up, the eyes opened wide and directed to the