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# The Reason Why

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It is easy to ask questions and it is right to ask questions. Interrogatories are always elementary. The men who inquire are pathfinders. To find out the reason why is the great business of life. It has been said that "fools can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer." Manifestly, a great many foolish questions are asked, but is it not quite as true that a great many foolish answers are given to very important questions? To ask questions, let it be borne in mind, while it implies a lack of information on the particular point in controversy, does not signify ignorance, in any general sense. On the contrary, it involves considerations diametrically the opposite. To have an inquiring mind, is to have a thirst for knowledge, and those who ask the greatest number of questions, other things being equal, know the most. A question is at the foundation of every enterprise. Investigation is the order. To know is to enquire. Every explorer without regard to the field of his research is a question answerer. It matters not whether he is navigating polar seas, finding his way across the dark continent, reading rocks or stars, he is seeking to solve some problem — to answer some question. In all the sciences, in all the schools of philosophy, in every educational institution from the primary, the kindergartens, to the university, the inspiration is to find the reason why. While one reasons from the cause to the effect, another reasons from the effect to the cause, and thus the sum of human knowledge is daily augmented.

It may be asked, what is knowledge? One answer comes, among many others: "Knowledge is power," it is a maxim. Men no longer question the answer, it is universally accepted. Knowledge is power. It is not given to men to know all things that by searching may be found out. Life is too short for the attainment of universal knowledge by one person, even if it were desirable. The capacity of the best brain is limited, even when the largest opportunities are afforded; and

result, knowledge, in response to inexorable laws, has its departments. Some men know more than others, but no man knows it all, and as a consequence, none are so advanced as to be relieved of the necessity of asking questions, and therefore they are ceaselessly seeking for the reason why.

The present is eminently and preeminently a question asking and a question answering age, and the term “age,” should include the nineteenth century. This is not surprising, since the more the people know the more earnestly the demand, to know more. The present generation knows more than any past generation.

Mr. Sidney Smith, in a prose masterpiece discusses the question of the relative knowledge of past generations, as compared with that of the present and says, “Experience is certainly the mother of wisdom, and the old have, of course, a greater experience than the young; but the question is who are the old, and who are the young? Of individuals living at the same period, the oldest has, of course, the greatest experience; but among generations of men the reverse of this is true. Those who come first (our ancestors) are the young people, and have the least experience. We have added to their experience, the experience of many centuries; and, therefore, as far as experience goes, are wiser, and more capable of forming an opinion, than they were.” If the reason why we of today know more than any past generation is asked, one answer is ready — we know all past generations knew, and have added largely to the sum total. Moreover, it being true that we know more, we are in a position to solve more difficult problems, for knowledge being power, its power is exerted in the accumulation of knowledge — and not only in its accumulation, but in finding means for its preservation and dissemination.

And here, the thoughtful reader will find not only satisfaction in contemplating the vast superiority of the present as compared with the past, in the knowledge possessed but in the means provided for its wide diffusion. As an illustration, take a man whose investigations have resulted in adding to the sum of human knowledge. He concludes to make an enduring record of his researches by writing a book. At this point the modern printing press comes into view. The book is issued in multiplied thousands and the world is benefited. The present is a book-making age, and a reading age to an extent unknown in all the past.

It would be easy to show that the people who have lived in this 19th Century in the matter of knowledge are superior to any and to

all past generations of men since time began. More questions have been asked, more satisfactory answers given, more reasons why, than during any previous century — and now, the human mind is more than ever active.

In all the past the few have ruled the many. Why? The few had the knowledge. The many yielded to the power it exerted. In some lands despotism still continues, but throughout all Christendom the reason why is being asked with ever increasing emphasis. Antiquated theories are no longer accepted. Men may talk of our wise ancestors, the wisdom of old times, of venerable antiquity, etc., but the great majority will not listen, they will not yield, they will not bow down.

In the United States of America the many know more than the few. They read books and papers, all the avenues of information, of knowledge are open to the many, and men, in all the walks of life are estimating the power of knowledge and are preparing to wield it in a way that the greatest good shall be secured to the greatest number.

The wage workers are asking the reason why for strikes, and the answer comes, because wrongs exist — because injustice prevails. The question arises can the wrong be cloven down and the right enthroned? If not, then the die is cast and fate decrees human nature a failure. But such is not the conclusion. The advancement in knowledge and the power which knowledge confers give an affirmative reply. Some wrongs have disappeared and the mighty mustering of the mind forces has but just begun. The fight has been simply skirmishing. In the absence of unification, consolidation, federation, the many have not learned their power. If there is wrong and injustice, want and degradation, the reason why is not fully understood, but it is being grasped. The awakening forces are at work, working perhaps, as the coral builds continents, but certainly at work. It has been said and sung that

Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,  
The eternal years of God are here.<sup>1</sup>

To help the truth to rise again, is the mission of file *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. We do not doubt results. Our faith is the substance of things hoped for. We only ask the cooperation of the Brotherhood.

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<sup>1</sup> From "The Battlefield" (1839), by **William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878).