of the island where the climate is at all wholesome is in the extreme interior; and access to that has always been strenuously resisted by the natives, and especially by the Hovas, the most warlike and the controlling tribe in the island. So bitter and determined has been this opposition, especially since King Radama —an enlightened monarch—was poisoned by his queen, who succeeded him in 1828, and whose policy of exclusion has been carried out by her successors, that it has been almost impossible to explore the island to any extent. The missionaries, even, who had made considerable progress in the work of converting the natives, were driven out and the native Christians unmercifully persecuted. The strength of the Hovas was shown in 1846, when they repulsed, with great loss, a combined attempt of the French and English to humble them and to punish them for their conduct toward the whites who had fallen into their hands. The consequence of this state of things has been that very vague and widely differing accounts of the interior of the island have been published from time to time; and, as now appears, they were almost all equally incorrect. In 1865 Mr. Alfred Grandidier, a French gentleman, who appears to have been endowed with an abundance of pluck and perseverance, made an attempt to explore Madagascar from north to south, and from east to west, a task the magnitude of which may be estimated when it is remembered that the island is about a thousand miles long by an average breadth of about two hundred and forty miles; containing an area greater than that of the British Isles, and inhabited by nearly five millions of people nearly unanimous in their hostility to explorations of their country by whites, though constantly at war among themselves. It was on the existence of these internal dissensions that Mr. Grandidier chiefly relied for success in his projects, and the result showed that his calculations had not been altogether amiss. We have neither time nor space to follow him in all his wanderings; suffice it to say that after several repulses, which would have disheartened a less stout-hearted and persevering traveler, he succeeded in accomplishing all or nearly all he had set himself to do, and succeeded in making the most thorough exploration of the island ever yet made. In particular, he was able to push his way through to the capital of the Hova country, Tananarivo, on the road to which place the sketch was taken from which our engraving is made.

The inhabitants are by no means all black, although some of them are, but vary from black to a light olive color, the complexion of the Hovas, who have thin lips and finely shaped forms. It is a curious fact that one of Mr. Grandidier's chief troubles arose from the opposition of the natives to and their dread of sorcery. They could not understand why a white man should desire to travel in their country when he avowedly did not want to trade with them; and they not unnaturally suspected him of some sinister motives—suspicions which were strengthened by his scientific instruments and the mysterious observations he was constantly taking with them, as well as by his note and sketch books, the uses of which were dimly imagined to be something very horrible indeed by the terrified natives. He succeeded, however, as we have said, and has ascertained more about the geography and topography of the island than all his predecessors. He reports, generally, that there are five mountain chains in the island, all running more or less in the same direction—from north-northeast to south-southwest—and that the northern and western portions of the island are altogether mountainous, while the southern and eastern are relatively flat. —*P. A. Davids.*

THE MAGIC CARDS.

WHO first conceived the plan of using playing cards for the purpose of "telling fortunes" is one of those facts which are so securely locked up in the bosom of an impenetrable past that they will probably never come to light, unless it may be at that great settling day to which so many things have been postponed; and even then it may be questioned whether the greater portion of mankind will not be too busy with other affairs to spend much time over a matter of so little consequence. Whoever first thought of it, it was not an unnatural conception to use those bits of pasteboard which have always been considered, from the very beginning of their use, as the especial ministers of chance, for the purpose of trying to find out the decrees of fate in advance of their promulgation. There is, probably, no desire more strongly implanted in human nature than that of peering into the future; nor has there ever been found any one so indifferent or so wise as to be entirely free from it. It is in vain that we reason on the impossibility of ascertaining anything about futurity; or that we argue that, if it were possible, it would be only a constant source of vexation and misery were we to be informed of what was to befall us in the course of our lives. Such reasoning may abundantly satisfy the mind, but it can never do away with the feeling of which even the most strong-minded are occasionally conscious, a lingering curiosity as to how near death may be, or what will be the result of some undertaking. To be sure, most of us would be rather ashamed to acknowledge even this small amount of superstition; but we may be very sure that the feeling exists in all our breasts, and will occasionally manifest itself in spite of any amount of reasoning, of sneering, or of religious scruple. For it has come to pass that that which was originally born of religion has come to be frowned on by the religious and denounced as sinful. The art of divination, the attempt to look into futurity, was originally confined to the priestly class, and was a purely religious ceremony. Did the monarch desire to wage war against a neighbor, or to send an embassy, or to fit out a naval expedition, or undertake any other great enterprise, he sent straightway for his priests and soothsayers, and bade them question the gods to ascertain whether or not he might expect success to attend his undertaking. Was an heir born to the throne, the fates were at once interrogated as to his future, and what course should be pursued to make his life a fortunate and a happy one; and curious are the tales which have come down to us of the replies obtained in many instances to those questionings, and the actions to which they gave rise. It was the firm belief of the old pagans of all nations that the gods mingled intimately in all the affairs of life, directing by personal supervision every event from the most important to the most trivial; and not only this, but that they were perfectly willing, under certain circumstances and when properly interrogated, to reveal their purposes to mankind. The Jews, too, had much of the same faith; and, if we may interpret literally the Bible accounts, they were not without encouragement from Deity for their belief. Nor did the advent of Christianity by any means lead at once to the entire doing away with this belief from the minds of men. The faith in a special providence was but little different from the pagan creed, except that the Christian recognized only one instead of many gods. He still retained the belief that God watched every action, and ordered every, even the most trivial occurrence of life; and that it was his will to sometimes reveal his purposes.

Hence came the belief in astrology, which long pervaded all classes. It can hardly be considered an unnatural belief; for, granted that God directed every movement of every one of his creatures—as well the inanimate as the animate—it was not at all impossible or incongruous that there should be such a correspondence between the different parts or members of the creation that they should mutually influence one another; and such interdependence that the movements of one part might reveal those of another. The Greeks and Romans believed that the will of the gods was revealed, to those who were competent to read it, in the aspect of the entrails of certain fowls or animals, or in the mode of flight of certain birds; but the astrologers certainly had very much the advantage of the pagan soothsayers in that they consulted only the stars, and it was apparently much more rational to suppose that the Creator might have linked man's destiny with the stars than to imagine that he would choose such puerile and undignified means of promulgating his will as that furnished by any action or appearance whatever of any animal inferior to man. Moreover, the state of human knowledge in regard to the stars was so meagre, and the accepted theories regarding them, their positions and movements were so conflicting, and—as we now know—so erroneous, that it is not at all to be wondered at that those who paid most attention to astronomy should most readily deceive themselves and others into the belief that, if the stars did not actually, of their own power, control man's destinies, they at least served to make manifest the purposes of the Almighty to those who were capable of reading correctly the language in which those decrees were written. Where all was so obscure, not only did mystification become easy, but to avoid it was almost impossible. So the astrologer flourished

for ages, and that with the countenance and support of many of the wisest, most pious, and best of mankind; indeed, there were those who were ready to condemn unbelievers in this sort of divination as being no better than infidels. In fact, the Church, always conservative, was inclined then—as it has been in more modern times—to throw the ægis of its protecting authority over not only the theological tenets which it put forth or sanctioned, but also over certain scientific dogmas which it had decided in its infallibility were divinely true, and therefore neither to be disputed nor investigated. We all know what befell Galileo; what would probably have been the fate of Copernicus had he not died when he did; and what was meted out to scores of men of less consequence in the world who ventured to hold opinions similar to those entertained by the two celebrated men mentioned. To be sure, not every skeptic as to the received theory of the creation was punished; for none of us can forget the witty though somewhat profane remark of Charles V., who, when the Aristotelian theory of the universe was explained to him, exclaimed: "If this be true, then I could have given the Almighty some good advice!"

But the astrologers did not enjoy a monopoly of the business of fortune-telling, nor were the stars alone consulted as to what was to come to pass. Somebody invented, among other methods, the consultation of ordinary playing cards; and this soon became popular not only with professional wizards, but with young people, who found in the manipulation of the cards, according to the rules provided for such cases, a pleasant game as well as a means of getting from the fates a mass of information of which they could believe as much as suited them. It is not necessary to give the rules governing this sort of investigation, as most of our readers are doubtless more or less familiar with them, and have probably more than once sought to find out whether it was the "dark complected" or the "light complected" man or woman whom they were to marry, and from what sources trouble or fortune were to be expected. In the picture by Mr. Gaisser, of which we publish an engraving, the artist has told the story of one of these consultations in the clearest and most striking manner. The merry damsels have been shuffling the cards to ascertain the fate of their sister, and have just reached the decision that she is to marry an officer; when, greatly to their amusement and that of their mamma, as well as to the confusion of the fair seeker herself, an officer, evidently a favored suitor, presents himself at the door of the apartment. The picture is one of the artist's best efforts, on account both of the clearness with which the story is told and the perfection with which the details of the picture are worked up. The countenances and attitudes of the group are in perfect keeping, as is the pleased and somewhat self-satisfied expression on the countenance of the young man, who evidently does not understand the joke of which he is the object, and is not yet aware that he is posing as an illustration of the proverb, so current in continental Europe, "Speak of the wolf, and he appears." —*C. I. Bailey.*

IN THE CLOISTER.

MR. WEBER has chosen for the subject of his excellent picture a scene which was sufficiently common during the Middle Ages, and which is yet extremely suggestive. We have alluded in a former article on the subject of old manuscripts and illuminations, to the labors of the monks in this line, and Mr. Weber shows us one of them actually engaged in the work. There is no doubt that the cultivation of this branch of art furnished a very welcome and much-needed occupation and relaxation to the poor victims of that pernicious monastic system which dominated Europe for so many centuries, which, indeed, has but just now really lost its grip, the late King Victor Emmanuel of Italy having, more than almost any one else, hastened its downfall by his bold course in secularizing the church property in his kingdom. We have called the system pernicious, and so we believe it was in its effect on both the monks themselves and the communities in which the monasteries were; and yet, so far as concerned the world at large, the monastic system, like most other things, was by no means an unmixed evil.

Had there been no such plan in operation whereby men were forced to seclude themselves from the world, we should have waited very much longer than we did for many of the inventions and much of the learning which helped on the march of intellect and improvement, and which made the nineteenth century possible. Narrow and distorted were the views these recluses were compelled to take of the whole range of human life and human duty, and very much did their seclusion and the discipline they were obliged to undergo, tend to dwarf their intellects; but, notwithstanding all this, they retained more of their mental activity and vigor than would have been deemed possible, and so they were driven in very weariness and in self-defense to employ themselves at some labor either mental or physical. So, while they produced much that was worthless and not a little that was positively deleterious to mankind, they must be thanked for much which has been of lasting benefit to the race. We must thank them for many useful inventions, for much that was, if not great, of the essence of greatness, for the preservation of the great mass of human learning, for the establishment of universities, and in general for bridging over the dark gulf between the enlightenment of the past and that of recent times into which manlier and better men had plunged. Let us, then, while we blame monasticism for all the evil it wrought, thank it for the good it did us.

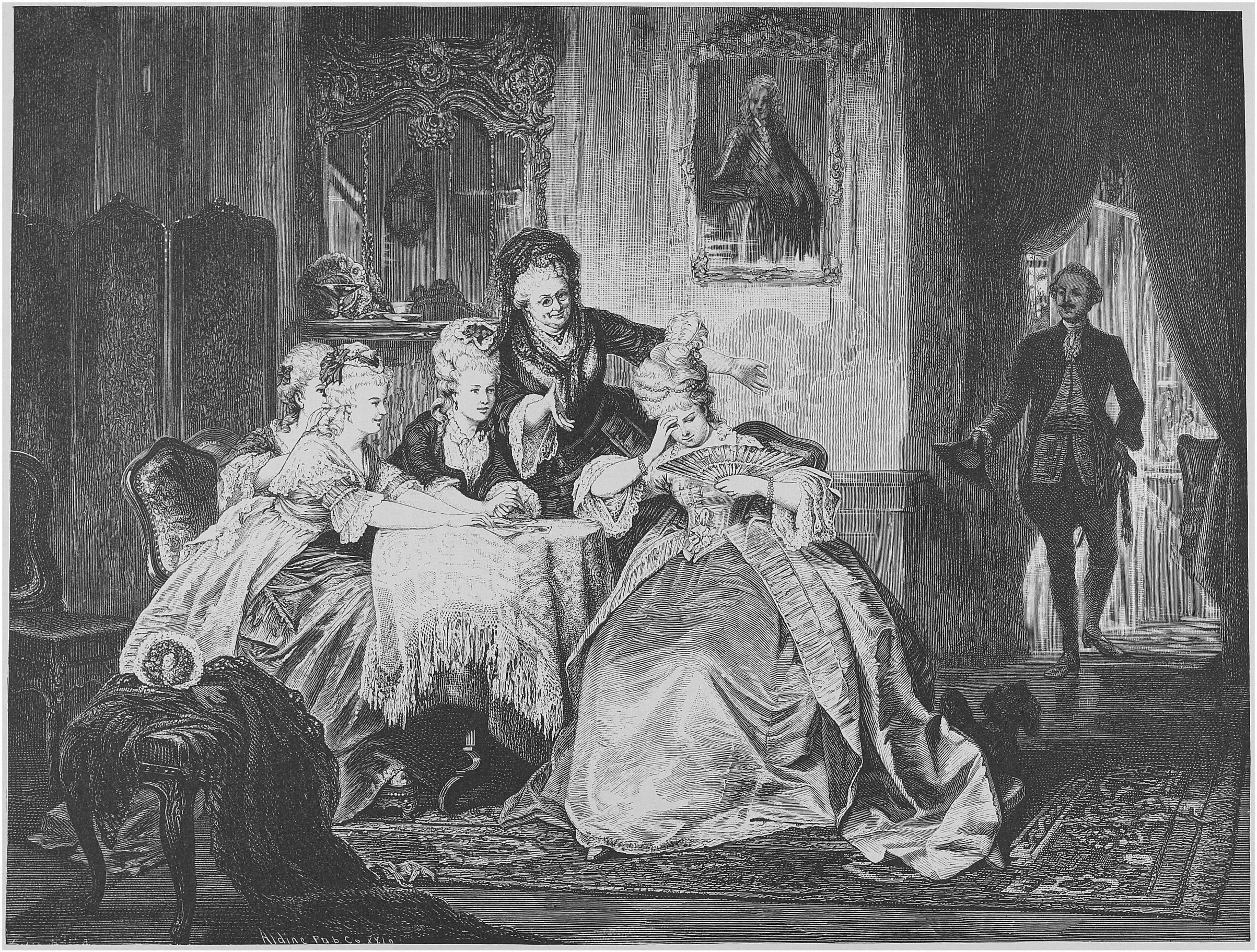
Mr. Weber's picture is a striking and vividly real portrayal of the scene in a cell in one of those old monasteries once so common, but now crumbling into dust beneath the twin forces of time and neglect. Every detail of the picture, from the tonsured head of the old monk absorbed in his work to the volume thrown on the floor and the clock ticking on the wall, is worthy of careful consideration, as it has been the fruit of patient and persistent study and labor. The strong points of the picture in our mind are the head of the monk, with its venerable appearance and absorbed expression, and the management of the light whereby these features and expressions are brought vividly out, while unimportant details are judiciously left in shadow. We are conscious of a carefully and correctly painted interior, but our attention is not drawn from the main subject by wasted mason-work.

ART ECHOES FROM PARIS.—I.

NOTHING can be more appropriate as a commencement to an art letter than the recital of the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of the greatest glory of the Flemish school of art—a celebration which transformed the old city of Antwerp (or Anvers, as it is called) into one grand *fête* ground—the houses decorated with flags and banners, and lights at night. ALDINE readers are already familiar with the outlines of the history of this celebrated man, who, like Michael Angelo, was almost as much statesman as artist, and will be able to appreciate the enthusiasm of the good people of Antwerp, where the artist died in 1640.

That which characterizes particularly the genius of Rubens is movement, force, passion, carried to the highest degree. With him is never hesitation nor half-doing. His drawing is always learned, rapid, accentuated; his color resplendent; his gesture energetic almost to violence. Far from resting within his aim, his boiling ardor often carries him beyond it, and places in equal relief his sublime qualities and his imperfections. If one does not find in his works that delicate sentiment of fitness of things, of which the French artists before all others show themselves the religious observers; if the need of that supreme elegance, object of the constant research of the Italians, is sometimes felt, the richness of invention is unlimited, a hand for which the execution of the greatest difficulties is but play. So the number of his works, as pictures and sketches, designs, etc., is immense.

The admirable organization of Rubens, seconded by the extreme regularity of his manner of living, permitted him to bring to the front, to the same perfection, the most profound studies of science, of letters, of archæology, of painting, and of politics. He excelled in all that he undertook, and he divided with Raphael and Titian the very rare privilege of having exhausted as a man and as artist, all the favors of glory and fortune. Rubens formed many pupils, most of whom became justly celebrated. It will suffice to cite Anthony van Dyck, Justus van Egmont, Theodore van Thulden, Abraham van Diepenbeck, Jacob Jordaens, Pieter van Mol, Cornelius Schut, Johan van Hoeck, Simon van Vos, Francis van Wonters, David Teniers *le vieux* (the old) and the



THE MAGIC CARDS. — After J. E. Gaisser.