

Contemporary Thought.

IN this age of the world new ideas will come fast enough and be accepted readily enough; the danger is lest they be not properly weighed, appreciated, and applied. An idea is of little value to the world until it gets age enough to make its permanency hopeful. The first year's trial of any educational experiment is almost invariably at the expense of the school. The new must wear off before its value is a definable quantity. We usually see the virtue of the new idea, and become weary with the old. The days of too great conservatism are fast passing; there is danger of too great fickleness now. We need to heed the warning to hold fast that which is good.—*New England Journal of Education.*

It was asked of the *New York School Journal*: How is it expected that we can make teaching a profession when we—that is, the most of us—merely get enough salary to keep us meagrely? To make it a profession we must have more money—not to make us rich, but to enable us to live comfortably, so that we can devote all our time to the work. May the day hasten when we shall get more salary! The *Journal* well answered: Why is it that teachers get such small salaries? It is because Tom, Dick, and Harry are allowed to teach. And why are they so allowed? Because public opinion says they can do it just as well as Ben, who has studied the science of teaching and been specially trained for the work. The public must be shown that it isn't so. Its attention must be called, clearly, forcibly, and persistently to the difference in the work of the two classes. Every teacher who is able to do this will increase his own salary and help along the establishment of the profession.

WHAT could Sidney Lanier have meant, when he wrote to his friend Hayne that a wicked fairy seemed to have given Robert Browning "a constitutional twist i' the neck," whereby his windpipe has become a "tortuous passage," "a glottolabyrinth," out of which "his words won't and can't come straight"? He was speaking at the moment of "The Ring and the Book," for parts of which he expressed a tremendous admiration, although the poet's "jerkiness" sadly marred his enjoyment of the work. But there are two Brownings—two Robert Brownings, I should say—one a lyrist, the other a metaphysician. The philosopher may have a twisted windpipe, but the throat of the singer is as free of involution as that of a nightingale. No poet has written in the English language "straighter" songs than some of Browning's—"Prospice," "Evelyn Hope," the "Cavalier Songs," "You'll Love me Yet," "Give Her but a Least Excuse," "The Lost Leader," "Over the Sea our Galleys Went," "Wanting is—What?" "Never the Time and the Place," etc. If the singer of these songs had a confirmed "twist i' the neck," I should like to twist the necks of some of our younger song-writers in just the same way.—"Lounger," in the *Critic*.

IN many of the (American) newspaper offices lady reporters are engaged; but not for court or shorthand work. They usually take charge of the "Society" news column, and attend weddings,

balls, evening parties, and receptions. Their employment is certainly most advantageous for the newspapers, for there is scarcely a reporter who will not admit the difficulties he has experienced, and the misgivings he has felt, in writing anything like a satisfactory descriptive account of a wedding, particularly if he has been called upon to note with anything like detail the dresses and toilettes of the ladies in attendance. American women seem to have a stronger appetite for details of this kind than have English women. It frequently falls to the lot of the lady reporters of an American paper to write a two-or-three-column report of a ball, describing the dress of almost every lady present. I have known instances where a corps of lady reporters has in this way described the dresses of four or five hundred ladies who have been at a ball. If a corps of ordinary reporters had been deputed to undertake such a task they would have given it up in despair. And what newspaper man, who has had any experience in this kind of work, would have blamed them?—*Phonetic Journal.*

THE new Professor of Poetry at Oxford (Mr. F. T. Palgrave) as befitted the nominee of Mr. Matthew Arnold, takes a serious view of poetry—regarding it, however, not as his predecessor in the chair used to do, as the handmaid of religion, but rather as the handmaid of Imperial policy. Above the reproaches so often made against it and so often justified by those who love it unwisely, "poetry is lifted most"—says Professor Palgrave—"when performing its imperial function." Mr. Palgrave has, as we all know, put into practice as a poet what he preaches as a professor; and his "Visions of England" is an attempt to discharge the imperial function in a criticism of the past. But who and where is the poet, it is interesting to ask, who discharges that duty in the England of to-day and for the England of to-morrow? Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, were not, to carry on Mr. Palgrave's figure, writers so much as makers of history; and Dante, as he showed yesterday, was a prime mover in the unification of Italy. There are fragmentary snatches of political song in Lord Tennyson; but where, unless it be in Mr. William Morris' "Chants for Socialists," is there any serious and consistent discharge of imperial function in English poetry to-day?—*The Pall Mall Gazette.*

THIS is true, inasmuch as it is not the child who is encouraged to talk continually who in the end learns how to arrange and express his ideas. Nor does the fretful desire to be told at once what everything means imply the active mind which parents so fondly suppose; but rather a languid percipience, unable to decipher the simplest causes for itself. Yet where shall we turn to look for the "observant silence," so highly recommended? The young people who observed and were silent have passed away—little John Ruskin being assuredly the last of the species—and their places are filled by those to whom observation and silence are alike unknown. This is the children's age, and all things are subservient to their wishes. Masses of juvenile literature are published annually for their amusement; conversation is reduced steadily to their level while they are present; meals are arranged to suit their hours, and the dishes thereof to suit their palates; studies are

made simpler and toys more elaborate with each succeeding year. The hardships they once suffered are now happily ended, the decorum once exacted is fading rapidly away. We accept the situation with philosophy, and only now and then, under the pressure of some new development, startled into asking ourselves where is it likely to end.—*Atlantic Monthly.*

OF the three methods of historical writing which answer to these demands of the student and writer—the philosophical, the scientific, and the literary—there can be little doubt that the scientific method is now at the front. It agrees most perfectly with the spirit which dominates all departments of intellectual activity. George Eliot in her *Middlemarch* turned restlessly from one to another of her characters, in the hope of finding one that was built upon an unyielding foundation. Caleb Garth was the only one whom she heartily admired and respected. He was wont to speak of business, as many of religion, with reverence and a profound sense of its reality and comprehensive power. His character is built from this idea and for the expression of it. He is the incarnation of that consciousness of reality in one's self and firm fulfilment of the end of one's being which is the cry of *Middlemarch*. The historian is impelled by the same spirit which drove George Eliot. He wishes to get down to hard pan. He is skeptical, not as one who doubts from choice, but from necessity must push his inquiries until he comes upon the last analysis. Hence the historical student of the day is after facts, and he is ready to put his hook into any unlikely dust heap, on the chance of laying bare a precious bit. There is patience in the sifting of historical evidence, steadfastness in the following of clues, and a high estimate of the value of accurate statement.—*Atlantic Monthly.*

WHILE word-music appeals to our intellect through its force of representation, instrumental music appeals directly to the emotions. The former appears clad in shadowy generalities, and the latter arises in its primitive life-giving power. Music is of a lyrical nature, and therefore remains all-powerful where the expression of poetry ceases. Music can be an aid to poetry and can increase its effect on the ear and heart by means of melody, but it can also act independently, forming its theme from its own resources. In the former case it is hampered by the text and must conform itself to the pace of the stream of words. Its compass of tone is prescribed and its liberty restricted thereby. Instrumental music stands alone in its unapproachable sovereignty. In its lyric nature it unfolds the most tender, mysterious feelings hidden in the inmost depths of the human heart. The orchestral instruments are the highest means through which the composer expresses his genius as well as the purest utterances of his soul in tender or powerful strains, representing the same in the form of a symphony. While in the opera the combination of song, poetry, decoration, acting, costumes, and orchestral effects produce an impression on the listener, and through their union take possession of the senses by their representations of the outer world, it is the sphere of pure instrumental music, of the symphony itself, to enter the recesses of the heart, and find an echo there where love, joy, friendship, sorrow, hope, and earnest striving reign supreme.—*M. Steinert, in Musical Items.*