

A SONG OF DEGREES.

MANY people love to wear distinctions. Everywhere are to be found those who strive for pre-eminence. The athlete struggles to be first, or to stand near the first in his own line of endeavour. Numerous are the candidates for high places in social rank. The schoolboy aims at securing the prizes open to competition. Even the learned divine is not in every case devoid of desire for the possession of a couple or more capital letters to place after the name he has received in infancy from his respected parents. A university degree is a coveted honour. In many cases academic degrees are worthily bestowed and worthily worn. In other cases the special merits thus marked are nor generally clearly discerned and in some instances, the possession of a doctorate is to all but a very few, a positive mystery.

All reputable educational institutions invested with degree conferring powers are not usually forgetful of the responsibility attaching to the exercise of the trust committed to them. There may be instances where the importunity of friends may prevail over the better judgment of a university faculty, and they may be persuaded to issue a parchment to a man whose scholarship is scarcely of the quality that merits such recognition. Again, there are institutions of learning whose financial resources are hardly equal to their zeal for the promotion of higher education, that in a sense may be said to place a mercantile value on the distinctions they are ready to confer on men whose aspirations are not quite so slender as are their attainments. While Dr. Samuel Johnson made his Hebridean tour, he visited an ancient seat of learning, whose faculty bestowed on him the degree of LL.D. The College at the time was suffering from an insufficiently filled treasury, and the inconsiderable revenue derived from recipients of its honorary degrees was not to be despised. This coming to the knowledge of Boswell's hero, he yielded to the temptation of indulging in a pun and remarked that the College would get rid of its debts by degrees.

In these days we move at a quicker pace than they did in Johnson's generation. People are not content to wait for results from gradual natural development. Nature has to be assisted, even forced, that results may be anticipated. Processes are accelerated by invention and discovery. Chickens are hatched by machinery, and learned bipeds are hastily turned out, both by artifice and artificial means. Many people are ready to take short cuts to distinction, and wherever they are, persons willing to aid them for a consideration are sure to be found. This weakness of would-be learned humanity has given rise to a modern industry that borders on infamy. These are irreverently designated degree factories, which do not languish for lack of support. People destitute of scholarship can, for certain stipulated rates and nominal conditions, obtain degrees in arts, medicine, literature and theology, which they may wear without a blush. An idea of this desecration of merited and honourable distinctions may be gained by a brief reference to an instance of the kind which has just come to light. A recent press dispatch reads thus:—

For some time past certain English newspapers have contained imposing advertisements stating that degrees of the "National University of the State of Illinois" could be had at prices ranging from ten to sixty guineas. These advertisements are signed "Professor Vanangelbach, Secretary," and give the name of Broughton Rouse, of Christ College, Cambridge University, as the English agent.

Now there is no such National University as is above designated, but there have been many applicants for the coveted degrees. Two or three adventurers have wrought the scheme by which alleged learned individuals have been defrauded of their money and innocent people imposed upon. A clever but unscrupulous Dutchman settled down in an insignificant little town in Iowa, where he astonished the inhabitants with his extensive linguistic acquirements, and soon gained their trustful confidence by being a shining light in local society and taking part in prayer meetings, and frequently occupying pulpits in the place. This gentleman was the titular examiner for the so-called degrees which the stipulated fees were certain to secure. The fraud has at length been discovered and from appearances it is probable that the police authorities will lay their ruthless hands on this National University, blast its fame and render it more shadowy than it really was.

It is needless to moralize over what this educational episode reveals. It in no wise affects repu-

table seats of learning. They are not chargeable with an undue use of the powers conferred upon them by their charters. Neither does it lessen the value of academic degrees conferred on those who deserve them, but surely such incidents will strengthen in the hearts of all honest people that indignant hatred of sham and pretence which unhappily are only too prevalent. The eager desire to obtain results by unscrupulous means, and not by genuine merit and faithful work, is an unmitigated evil which the strongest language is too feeble to adequately condemn.

ON READING SERMONS.

VOLUMES of sermons, save in exceptional cases are not in these days much sought after. The discourses of Frederick W. Robertson, Archer Butler in other days, and the sermons of John Ker and Alexander Maclaren, of Manchester, not to mention other instances that readily suggest themselves, have commanded a wide circle of readers. But in general the discourses of average preachers, instructing and edifying though they are when addressed by living voice to hearers, awaken but little interest among the reading public. It is not, however, in this aspect of the subject suggested by the line that heads these remarks that we now intend to speak. Most people are familiar with the piquant anecdotes that circulate, mostly at the expense of the ministers who preach from manuscript. The popular preference is decidedly in favour of sermons that are delivered, not read. In Scotland the practice of oral address was very common, but it is not so now. The occupants of the more prominent city pulpits make free use of their manuscript, and to a considerable extent they set the fashion for their brethren, a fashion that at present is largely followed. It is worthy of note that in one branch of the Scottish Church, where the reading of sermons was positively forbidden, the practice may now be said to be general. It would be needless to enquire how this custom has so rapidly spread. There have been remonstrances, and the advantages and disadvantages of read sermons have been freely discussed, but the habit has been continued.

Drs. Chalmers, Candlish and William Anderson could only preach effectively from manuscript, and those who heard these great occupants of the Scottish pulpit, whatever their individual preferences, had no thought to spare on the manner of address peculiar to these distinguished preachers. Dr. Caird and Dr. Cairns preached without manuscript, and had they resorted to that mode of address, they would have found themselves sadly hampered, and the audiences that felt the powerful spell of their great personality would have been deprived of the magnetic touch that bound speaker and hearer. A conclusive argument from the practice followed by exceptionally able and brilliant men cannot be drawn. This much at least may be taken for granted, that a faithful and conscientious ambassador of Christ will follow the method that enables him to present his message of saving truth most persuasively and effectively to the congregation he addresses. At the same time it appears to us, that the preaching best fitted to influence average hearers should be the most direct, and there can hardly be a question that spoken, not read, sermons are by far the most acceptable to the common people. The idea that a sermon if fully written out is a proof of careful preparation cannot be entertained absolutely, for unhappily it is known that manuscript sermons can be obtained at regular market rates, and a dishonest man may palm off his purchased wares as his own. The honest man may be able to save time by reading his sermons. One who has facility in composition may dash off a very thin sermon in a short time and neither he nor his hearers may be much the better for it. The minister who preaches extempore may bestow far more care in the preparation of his discourse than does his brother who is an adept at the use of his pen, and the result may be in every way more satisfactory. The temptation the extempore preacher has to resolutely avoid is neglecting the work of thorough preparation. Ease of expression is all very well, but if there is not thorough study and diligent work, the glib exhorter will soon become a worse failure than the humdrum and monotonous reader. The average young minister can readily accustom himself to ease and freedom in direct spoken address. He will by practice soon acquire confidence, and thus he will be best qualified to perform the principal part of his sacred calling with general acceptance and great usefulness.

Books and Magazines.

THE MANITOBA COLLEGE JOURNAL has reappeared, and is full of intellectual life and vigour.

The ably written and interesting work by J. Cawdor B.H., "Two Knapsacks," which appeared as a serial in the pages of the *Week*, has just been issued in volume form by Williamson & Co.

THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL. (Philadelphia: The Curtis Publishing Co.)—Woman has never had her Christmas needs so marvelously well anticipated and so completely met as in the new and fresh Christmas issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, which comes robed in one of the most beautiful and artistic of magazine covers. Few better illustrations have been given of the possibility of combining the practical and the entertaining between the covers of a single magazine.

THE ARENA. (Boston: The Arena Publishing Co.)—The success that has marked the career of this stalwart monthly shows that intelligent and thoughtful readers appreciate full, free and open discussion of all questions vitally affecting human interests. The December number shows great strength, and the announcement for the coming year indicates that no effort will be spared to make it still more eagerly sought for by all who wish to know what leading minds in the world of thought, think on subjects in which all are interested. While giving special prominence to these features, poetry, fiction and entertaining reading will be found in its richly freighted pages.

THE STORY OF JOHN G. PATON. Told for Young Folks; or thirty years among South Sea Cannibals. By the Rev. James Paton, B.A. With forty-five full page illustrations by James Fennimore. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, Toronto: The Willard Tract Depository.) The author of this most attractive and interesting work says in his preface "Ever since the story of my brother's life first appeared it has been constantly pressed upon me that a Young Folks edition would be highly prized. The Autobiography has therefore been recast and illustrated, in the hope and prayer that the Lord will use it to inspire the boys and girls of Christendom with a whole-hearted enthusiasm for the conversion of the heathen world to Jesus Christ. A few fresh incidents have been introduced; the whole contents have been rearranged to suit a new class of readers; and the service of a gifted artist has been employed to make the book every way attractive to the young." The devoted earnestness, the unaffected simplicity and the fervent spirit of Dr. Paton are stamped on every page of this fascinating narrative. It is one of the best books that can be put into the hands of young people, who will read with avidity the grand story of John G. Paton, and the impressions for good they will receive from its pages will be deep and lasting.

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.)—In the December number of the *Atlantic* Mr. Crawford brings his serial story, "Don Orsino," to an unexpected and striking close; and in the final passages of his novel tells us that in his hero we see a sketch of the young man of the transition period in Italian life. The chief attraction of this number is a collection of letters that James Russell Lowell addressed to W. J. Sullivan, which are very delightful reading, full of the genial, sunny disposition, and the quick touches of humour and feeling which were so characteristic of the man. Frank Bolles has a sketch entitled "Alone on Chocorua at Night;" and Edward Everett Hale's graphic papers on "A New England Boyhood" are continued, and are as interesting as ever in their intimate personal sketches of men and landmarks of old Boston days. In a travel sketch, "A Morning at Serrione," Ellen Olney Kirk describes the quaint old Italian town where Catullus once had his country villa. Mr. William Henry Bishop's papers on "An American at Home in Europe" give a further account of house-hunting, and his description of apartments at Venice is particularly interesting and amusing. Agnes Repplier's article on "Wit and Humour" is full of good things, and is written with brightness and vivacity. A more serious contribution, Professor Andrew C. McLaughlin's article on "Mississippi and the Negro Question," discusses the manner in which Mississippi has undertaken to regulate the rights of negroes within her borders. A striking poem by Lilla Cabot Perry entitled "At Night," the conclusion of Margaret C. Graham's story, "The Withrow Water Right," and John Vance Cheney's verses on December, together with critical articles on recent books, close a thorough, creditable number.

THE TREASURY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT FOR PASTOR AND PEOPLE. (New York: E. B. Treat.)—The number for December closes the year richly freighted with good things. Its full Sermons, Timely Service Sermons and Sermons in Leading Thoughts are excellent, and admirably adapted to aid the host of readers of this magazine. "Heaven Without a Sea," is by Dr. Kneeland, of Boston whose portrait, sketch of life and view of church are given. "God Revealed in Christ," by Dr. Tindall, of Omaha, is worthy of careful study. "Aged People's Service," by Rev. George H. Hubbard. The Christmas Day Sermon, The Birth of the Wonderful, by Rev. B. F. Grenoble, New Year's Day Sermon and "Prayer for Divine Instruction in Arithmetic," by Dr. David Gregg, successor to Dr. T. L. Cuyler, are first-rate in every respect. Leading Sermonic Thoughts are by Dr. Joseph Parker, Rev. F. W. Brown, Rev. P. Ainslie and Rev. J. S. Stanton. An Exegesis of the twenty-third Psalm, by Professor T. H. Rich, is a very thorough, scholarly production, and President Gates' article on "The Training for Citizens," is both timely and important. Everyone will read Dr. Cuyler's Pen Picture of Professor Roswell D. Hitchcock, and also Professor A. H. Sayce on "Old Testaments and Ancient Monuments," "How to Conduct the Prayer-Meeting," by H. M. Scudder, is full of suggestions. "The Gospel and the Age," is ably discussed by Rev. S. McComb, B.D., Rev. J. G. Kitchen explaining "The Sign on the Door-Post." Jewish Life in Europe and Palestine is described by Dr. Stone. Light is thrown on the S. S. Lessons by Dr. Moment. Good editorials and the other features make an excellent number for closing the year.