

sand dollar 32 foot pipe organ to a tin whistle, we have men here in our very midst, (I could put my finger on three, of course not literally) who would hardly even hold the rushlight, or play second fiddle to any of the living or dead masters, composers, musicians or conductors—Jubal, Handel, Wagner, Sullivan or—well in fact, any one from Jubal to the cock that crowed in the morn or the headless rooster.

Of all the conceits that of the musician is the worst. We do not require a crack organist from London to inform us through the English papers (as was done lately) of the less than mediocrity of our musical performances; they are too apparent. I am well aware that we have as fine—that is, costly—organs in our churches as there are on the continent; but expensive organs do not constitute organists. And though after considerable persuasion and persecution we might be tempted to admit rather negatively that our organists are fair, yet the said organists keep their fairness to themselves, and very seldom show it. Let me ask the question, How many of our churches have choirs really worth listening to? how many organists are there who understand and can manage their instruments? True, the choirs are supposed to practise every week, but if the organist, who is generally the leader, knows nothing about leadership, and next to nothing about his organ, what can be expected but that the choir shall be but a mere dummy show. On the other hand, we have a Philharmonic Society and a jealous Choral Society, but however proficient they may be, the public is kept in ignorance—of a good thing, Conceit is not able to judge, but will discriminate in favour of a sham. Every congregation claims for its choir and bogus organist the palm, and of course the objects of this adulation accept the flattery, consequent upon which follows the conceited egotism so much to be deplored. This musical mania has spread all over the city like an epidemic, and is the property of all creeds and classes of society; there is a taint in the social atmosphere like the odour of too much physic.

Second in the aggravating programme is the conceit of painting. Every house must have its oil painting; the meanest mechanic goes into raptures over the most wretched daub the commonest house painter's apprentice ever turned out. Fiftieth-rate art vendors and picture hawkers ply a brisk and abominable trade. This sort of thing would not be so bad if it were confined to mechanics and labourers; but when it aspires to the lofty, the elevated, the elite, the tony, almost refined and nearly—but not quite—aristocratic portion of the population, it is truly a sight for the gods. People of the ascendant in the social colonial scale appear to be about as good critics in painting as the old Indian was of the tree of which he said, "It was that straight it leaned back"; they seem to imagine that Canada has actually excelled herself—even Venice ("And who has not heard of Venice," some one said, "that great hall of painting in Athens in Italy"), even Venice must take a back seat, and perhaps ultimately step down and out. Well, "if ignorance is bliss," &c. What are most of our society exhibitions but so much lath and plaster in the way of canvas and Windsor and Newton? True, the frames of some are excellent, but we must remember that picture-framing is farther advanced than the fine arts in Toronto. Alas, alas for the school of art in Canada when criticism descends upon the canvas! With a solitary exception, or thereabouts, the walls of our academies (but we have no academy) would look more satisfactory, blank, except so far as the growth of Canadian art is concerned, so that we may see our progress. What does it signify if an artist exhausts hour after hour over his pictures? Does that give them value? It is like throwing water into the sea to freshen it—labour thrown away; piling on the colour never made a picture, and never will. Study upon study is required, and we have no examples to study from; it is to be doubted if there is an authentic picture of any consequence in the settlement, certainly not available to the public. I am not finding fault, therefore, with the pictures so much as the conceit that imagines we have in our midst painters who can vie with the grand old masters of the Old World and the English R. A.s of the present day. Those who know nothing—and their name is legion, both ancient and juvenile—are positive that our painters and musicians are unsurpassable. The mistake is ungenerous, and the idea, however comfortable, is without the slightest foundation.

A word about our poets—for we have poets here; and oh! it would make an angel weep to read the doggerel daily inflicted upon a guileless and unsuspecting public, and for which there is no sort of redress. We are beginning to be truly thankful that Dante and Homer are dead, for we would have been very sorry to have seen them grieved. Of course it is understood that all cities have their poetasters and their penny-a-liners, but not such as we have, who bare-facedly thrust their trash before the credulous, blinding the eyes of the municipal authorities, frightening the mayor and corporation, and recklessly pulling the wool over the eyes of the critics and cowering my Lord Campbell and H. R. H. with the bland remark, "Purely Canadian, my Lord; I admit slightly—very slightly—plagiarised, but still Torontonians." We have a thin suspicion that Boston must shortly throw up the sponge, for we are rather confident we are going to be the Hub of the universe ere long. What with our politicians (slightly over-done and somewhat rural), our musicians, our orators, painters, poets and the most remarkable water-works, next to that of Glasgow, in the whole of the civilized world, we are fast approaching that state of perfection so long sought after by the saints.

Herbert G. Paull.

GOSSIPS.

The dictionary definition of the term "gossip" is "a prater, a chatterer!" and in common talk the *genus* gossip is treated in a similarly disparaging style. Yet as the ancient Egyptians made use of the services of the embalmers of the dead, although they drove them from the house when their disagreeable task was completed, so many persons who most denounce "gossip" in theory, enjoy it extremely in practice. Gossips are often useful people. Take away all the gossiping historians, and what a dreary task it would be to study history. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that it is to the gossiping chroniclers that we owe our clearest ideas of the life of bygone ages. The stately author discourses learnedly on the public events of the era about which he writes, tells us of wars and treaties, of changes of dynasties and the fall of empires, but it is in the pages of the chattering chronicler of trifling events that the dead past truly lives again. In the little everyday affairs of life, beneath the notice of the professed historian, we see the men and women of past ages, not as shadows, but as living realities. Does not Pepys bring the seventeenth century before us far more vividly than Clarendon? Would any mere statement of the ravages of the Great Plague of 1664-5 equal the gossiping diarist's chronicle; his countless trivial anecdotes of the events of that fatal year; the grass springing in the deserted streets, the allusions of the "new periwig exceeding fine" which he durst not wear lest it should be formed with infected hair; the terrible story of the "dismal cry which made my blood run cold" from one of the shut-up houses—do not trifling incidents like these bring the past before us in a manner no mere list of names and dates could do? Old chroniclers are nearly always gossips; the monkish historians notably so, and even Froissart, De Joinville, and others of a later time record a vast amount of what would be called "irrelevant matter" in a court of justice. The chief gossips, however, are generally to be found among the writers of private memoirs. What stories of Court scandals and petty incidents fill up Madame de Sevigné's amusing letters. St. Simon is hardly behind her in his love for recording similar trifles. But the king of all gossips lived in the last century. Horace Walpole, not satisfied with gathering up all the Court and social chitchat of the day for the edification of his friends at a distance (especially for that of Dr. Mann), devoted the last years of his life to the composition of his "Reminiscences," an avowed collection of gossip picked up in his earlier years. It is amusing to read his description of the "extremely pleasant evenings" he passed with Lady Suffolk, while the pair of veteran gossips carefully recalled and pieced together some nearly forgotten tale of scandal or intrigue. Yet what an interesting picture of the Court life of the eighteenth century has been thus preserved to us. Many an incident, trivial and even uninteresting at the time it is recorded, acquired importance when it stands as a specimen of the manners and customs of a bygone age. The attention to petty details which characterises the gossip renders him valuable when years have passed over his work. Amid much trumpery his pages generally contain some lifelike pictures of the past that we could ill spare. We are sometimes apt to look on our ancestors of long ago as beings of an entirely different race from ourselves, but the petty details a gossiping historian will preserve for us show that life, even centuries ago, was no grand romance or stage pageant in which all the actors talked and moved in "King Cambyzes' vein." Life had its prosaic and practical side even in the romantic Middle Ages, and human nature is much the same in camp and in cloister, clad in the armour of a mediæval baron or in the dress of the nineteenth century.

Having acknowledged our obligations to the gossip collectors of the past, there is something to be said in favour of those of the present. In Brittany, at the present day, the travelling tailor acts as a sort of local newspaper, and enlivens his sojourn at each farmhouse where he stays to exercise his craft by accounts of all the affairs of the neighbourhood. Some while ago in England the barber acted in a similar capacity, and was expected to entertain his patrons with the last gossip of the town or village when he paid his daily professional visit. The licensed beggar, the Scotch "blue gown," was also a great retailer of local news, and the pedlar carried his gossip as regularly as his other wares from hamlet to hamlet. Dwellers in remote country districts would have found life unbearably dull save for these friendly chatterboxes, who did for the poorer classes what the "London correspondent" did for the squire and his family, and brought them tidings of the outer world. In these days of cheap and multitudinous newspapers we can afford to despise such old-world channels for gossip, especially as those who love to read disagreeable stories of well-known members of society can generally gratify their curiosity in a way that was impossible a century ago, which newspapers, if they alluded to such matters at all, so discreetly veiled under blank lines and initials that they rather tantalised than satisfied inquisitive readers.

There are, of course, gossips of a malignant type, who deserve all the reprobation that can be lavished on them—persons who remind one of the child's definition of slander, "Nobody did nothing, and somebody went and told it." Happily these are not universal, and a gossip need not always be ill-natured.—*London Globe.*