

back-ground to any inland view in these parts. There is a mystery about their long, undulating outline, so often wreathed in grey mist. They seem to shut us out from the world beyond—that world of hurry and unrest which we have left for a time. Only for a time, alas! The day will come, too soon, when we shall see the other side of those hills, and pass from their shelter to our work and to an unknown future. E.L.M.

POETIC ART IN CANADA.

THERE has been some very foolish writing upon the unfitness of our surroundings here in Canada to produce poetic art. Wherever mankind is with his joys and sorrows; wherever nature spreads her changing panorama of sky, field and flood, there will be a theme for the poet. Nature is not at fault, but perhaps the seer is yet wanting. "Every man sees in nature that which he brings eyes to see." Nature is indeed a divine palimpsest re-written by the hand of man, underneath which scrawl a mystic writing may be traced by honest study. Some critics seem almost to lament the lack of great national disasters, the absence of great wars, as if the drama of life and history were only unfolded to furnish a theme for the poetaster. Canada too has had her wars, not perhaps of world wide importance; there has been no shaking of dynasties, no tumbling of despots from their thrones; but if the poet desires a subject for martial verses, the smallest skirmish will as well afford him thrilling incidents as the most earth shaking of Marathon's or Waterloo's.

The maxim that *poeta nascitur non fit* is only true in a limited sense. No doubt the gift of harmony is a present from the gods; but in poetry, as in everything else, hard work, and hard work only, will develop the talent that was given as a fairy gift at birth. Only by long years of work, by much burning of the midnight oil, will any man learn "to build the lofty rhyme," and even if, in the end, failure and obscurity be his portion, let him remember "not failure but low aim is crime." Art is a hard task mistress, and only by much striving can we so much as grasp the hem of her skirts. Poetry is confessedly the highest of the arts, how then should one expect to excel "as by right divine?" In the sister arts of music and painting, how much is required of the aspirant for fame? How many are content to live for their art alone, through many weary years, content if in the end they earn some small meed of praise? Above all let no man prostitute his art for gold or passing *kîdas*; remember what Milton received for "Paradise Lost," and be sure that if a man does good work the world will recognize it in the end and repay him well.

Nor must we expect much at first from a young country; a great man is the result of an accumulation of thought, for him other men have laboured and he has reaped the reward. Let no man presume to say, "Alone and unaided I did it," for all the minds of all the ages have prepared a way for him, and he, the king, comes into the enjoyment of his sovereignty by the acts of many unconscious helpers. That is why one would say, "Work for the art's sake," and if any man demurs to this, let him go and carry bricks or post a ledger, for assuredly he will never be a poet. If he is a true artist he will be content to work for "some divine far off event to which the whole creation moves."

Perhaps, if there be a lack of poetical feeling amongst Canadians, the fact may be partly due to their up-bringing and not to any inherent sterility. Amongst the older nations the youth of a child of educated parents is largely fed with the tales of fairy and sprite. The nurse adds her quota of folk lore, and thus the child's fancy is stimulated, and its youth is spent in dreams that coming years will indeed dispel, but which leave memories and fancies never to be wholly lost amidst the great battle of life. And is it not the better way? Hard and bitter knowledge, sorrow and prosaic anxieties, come soon enough; let children, at least, be surrounded by sweet and graceful fancies, however unsubstantial the dreams may be. I know no better food for a child's mind than those tales of Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, the gambols of Robin Goodfellow and Oberon, Bayard sounding his horn with dying lips at Roncesvalles. What Shakespeare and Tennyson have embalmed in immortal verse may not a child learn? Then too the Northern mythology, Thor and the Jotuns; Baldur the Beautiful and the fatal Mistletoe, and hundreds of other legendary tales. Such stories pleased the childhood of nations from which sprang warrior, poet and philosopher. Are they not also good for the youth of the individual?

There is one irreparable loss for which the people of a new country are not responsible. Not for them the romance which hangs round ruined castle and heather from historic battle fields; their steps are not forever on an empire's dust, nor does the twilight of history half discover and half conceal a gorgeous pageant of the past.

In Canada, if not in the whole of the modern world, the practical powers of the mind are often developed at the expense of the imaginative. Whether this atrophy of the fancy is a necessary concomitant of the increase of the practical power, it is not within the scope of this article to discuss; but the fact remains that the cultivation of the imaginative powers is neglected, and I feel confident that nothing moulds the taste so certainly and ineradicably as a child's early reading.

Sometime ago I knew a little girl (herself a fairy for

beauty) living with her parents on the border of a lovely lake in Assiniboia. The child was accustomed to roam along the strand, through the woods, and over the flower prairie. To my astonishment I found she knew nothing of fairy lore, and I set myself to enlighten her ignorance, taking especial care to dwell on the friendliness of the "good people"; but the lesson came too late. Imagine my mortification when shortly afterwards I found that I had literally frightened my little friend from all her accustomed haunts; and yet I remember the day when in every dell the fairies held their midnight revels; when down the glades rode Sir Launcelot, his heavily caparisoned war horse shaking the ground at every tread, while the sun flashed back from plumed helmet and trenchant lance point, when the "shattering trumpet" shrilled high from many a mouldering wall, and in every wood bold Robin drew his bow or woo'd maid Marian in the shade.

The race for wealth and position is not all in all; let us sometimes pause in the grateful shade of wayside fancies, to renew our courage for the fray, and wipe the dust of the world from our parched and blackened lips with the sweet waters of forgetfulness; so at least we shall not always be hard and unlovely men and women.

Higher than all graceful fancies and pleasing versification is the necessity for the poet—the seer—the prophet, to search always and strenuously for truth. I am aware that Edgar Poe, in his dissertation on the Poetic principal, makes the beautiful and not the true the proper object of the poet; but it seems to me that Poe—acute reasoner as he was—has here fallen into a confusion of terms. He would seem to have confounded the true with the didactic, and the latter, certainly, should be avoided in poetry. In spite of some brilliant examples to the contrary, the poet, as poet, should be a singer and not a philosophical reasoner. Browning was both by turns, but not both together, I think.

Goethe, again, says that the beautiful includes the good—a difficult saying; but I conceive that in the good he included the true. Let us then take the message of the Greek Vase in Keat's beautiful lines:—

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Shall not those who possess the divine gift be careful of those wings of thought which lift them high above the storm and stress of the world to that rare altitude from whence they can signal to the dwellers in the valley the first sight of the "advancing spears" of the luminary of a larger day.

BASIL TEMPEST.

FRENCH SPELLING.

THE Minister of Public Instruction in France has thus addressed the "recteurs" of "l'Université"; and pleased some of the leading French papers. In three matters especially correction ought to be indulgent:—

1. Give up being rigorous whenever there is doubt or division in opinion, whenever usage is not yet fixed, or has been only recently, when common practice varies, when authors differ, and when the Academy itself takes note of these hesitations in opinion. Up to 1878 one had to write *consonnance*; the Academy now admits *consonance*, by analogy with *disonance*. Up to 1878 it had to be *phthisie* and *rythme*; since that date the Academy suppresses an *h* in each, but the second in *phthisie*, the first in *rythme*! Up to 1878 *collège* was a bad fault, one had to write *collége*; now it is just the opposite. The Academy authorizes *agendas*, *alnéas*, and seems not to admit *duplicatas*. It prefers *des accessit* without condemning *des accessits*. About a number of ordinary words no one can, without pedantry, pretend to be infallible; the Academy confesses that one may write *clef* or *clé*, *sofa* or *sopha*, *des entre-sol* or *des entresols*, *dévouement* or *dévoûment*, *il paye* or *il paie*, *payement* or *paiement*, or even *païment*, etc. In this case, and in all like cases, whatever be the corrector's personal opinion, he cannot ask the pupil to be more sure of the ground than the masters themselves are.

2. The Minister claims the same indulgence for the pupil when logic declares the latter is right, though usage is against him, and when the fault he commits proves that better than the language itself, he respects the natural laws of analogy. "One of the first things taught to children," says one who is a master in philological matters, "is a list of seven nouns in *ou*, which take *x* instead of *s* in the plural; *genoux*, *bijoux*, etc.; yet no one has ever discovered any reason why these will not submit to the ordinary rule." Is it just to count as so many faults certain spelling rule-breakings, when these are simply proofs of attention on the pupil's part? (The italics are mine.) For instance, it is not because he is scatter-brained or ignorant, but because he reflects, that he wants to write either *dixième* like *dizanie* or else *dixamè* like *dixième*; logic will hinder him too from admitting *imbécile* and *imbécillité*, *siffler* with two *f*'s, and *persifler* with one. So he will write *assoïr* without an *e* in spite of the *e* in *séance*, because everyone has come to write *déchoïr* without an *e*, notwithstanding *déchéance*. What master could give a good reason to justify the difference between *apercevoir* and *apparaître*, between *alourdi* and *allonger*, between *abatage* and *abbatteur*, *abatis* and *abbatoir*, *agregation* and *agglomération*?

3. Lastly, since the beginning of this century a certain number of rules have come into French spelling founded on distinctions which grammarians think decisive, but which

modern philology, with more respect for the history of the language, confirms only after many restrictions, and never grants them a bit of that superstitious respect we have been asked to surround them with. Those are the points the examiners and masters must be invited to pass over lightly, instead of taking pleasure in dwelling on them: that sort of thing is just where the burden can be made easier. How absolutely useless for education of the mind are all the hours that have been given up even in the very primary schools to searching into rules of *tout* and *même*, *vingt* and *cent*, *nee*, and *demi*, to the discussion of innumerable exceptions, and exceptions to exceptions, concerning the spelling of compound words, which is nothing but a history of perpetual variation: the newspapers have more than once drawn attention to the inane folly of endless debate which arise out of dictations, in connection with expressions like *des habits d'homme* or *d'hommes*, *la gelée de groseille* or *groselles*, *de pomme* or *de pommes*, *des moines en bonnet carré* or *en bonnets carrés*.

The Minister ends by saying that pupils are simply turned aside from what is beautiful or true in thought, or even prevented from understanding the sense of what is written, by their picking to pieces of words.

Is it not worth noticing another example of high authority rebelling against the routine which has been the terrible tyrant, even if the inevitable one, of the modern organization of popular instruction? Perhaps in England (where there is so large a class comparatively free), men going to universities, for instance, hardly realize the woes of their humble brethren; but in countries where with the advantages of greater regularity in teaching methods, there are felt its disadvantages. Most people have passed under the yoke: if this is true of France it is more true of North America when it has produced what Mr. Lowell himself called "the best common-schooled and the least cultivated people in the world." But everywhere it is time to shake off the yoke pressing more or less heavily. What is written above cries to the pity of some examiners, even at the risk of leaving them no work to do, or only some more honest sort of work. And about a foreign language we are inclined to be even more foolish than about our own. Is it possible a few more teachers of French will cease to begin with the nouns in *x* when they find they are wishing to be more French than the French themselves? Littre, as many must have noticed, constantly puts the grammarians aside by appealing to usage to prove that rightly or wrongly the best authors mix up *sembler* and *paraître*, *commencer à* and *commencer de* and *il semble* (though impersonal) with indicative and with subjunctive—even though one may see a possible distinction in every one of these instances. But children, set on their way with grammatical exceptions, are passed on to this sort of doubtful syntax: are not the edited books full of it? Certainly they may be useful as reference books, but there ought to be warning as to use with discretion. An abbreviated edition of *Les Misérables* not long ago published in England is very strong on *commencer à* and *commencer de*, and carefully calls attention to V. Hugo's use of the distinction, but passes in silence the passages where the author's practice does not fall in with the editor's theory: it is the same in this book with *il semble*.

Perhaps if English teachers of French heard a French professor of English, at the Sorbonne, putting an end to too German-minded pupils' discussions of the distinctions in "Adam Bede" between "yes, thank you, sir," and "thank you, sir," between "I felt a few drops of rain fall on my nose," and "I felt a few drops of rain falling on my nose," they would desire to imitate M. Baret's wisdom, which comes of a real knowledge of the foreign language.

But this ministerial circular with its revolutionary second paragraph suggests not only being merciful to offences, but also taking away some of the causes for offence. If freedom as to two *b*'s or two *p*'s, or our *l* or our *t*, in French leads to uniformity—as it probably will—why should not English spelling, even if still holding *theater* and *color* in horror (*sic*), be ready to follow American in such a rule as doubling final consonants of dissyllabic verbs before participial endings only when the accent is on the second syllable? True, that would bring us all to *traveled* as we are already at *galloped*. And another following of American dictionaries or of French Ministers would make Englishmen say they were *thankfull*, when the new-coiners write *praise-full*, does it look so extraordinary?

Paris, 1891.

W. F. STOCKLEY.

THE excavations conducted at Eretria, in Eubœa, under the directions of the American school at Athens, have been very successful. The theatre has been opened and throws considerable light on the construction of the stage. Before the stage building is a low, narrow platform, with an arch through the middle. We have opened a large number of tombs in what appears to be a city of tombs. Of these the finest show elegant marble architecture. The only epitaph mentions a "daughter of Aristotle." Dr. Waldenstein, the permanent director of the American school, distinctly disclaims the identification of this as the tomb of the philosopher Aristotle. Much gold has been found in the tombs, including six diadems, an immense wreath of wrought gold, a seal ring and ear-rings in the form of doves, set with jewels. Nothing finer in the way of ancient jewellery has ever been discovered. Besides these may be mentioned white lekythoi, or vases for unguents. The walls excavated show New Eretria was founded upon Old Eretria.