

Here is another sentence :—

"The country made steady progress during this period."

It is simply impossible to say what this means. Were the people more prosperous? Were some trades reviving, and others holding their own? Was the British Empire growing?—and so on, and so on. The fact is, this kind of statement goes in at one ear and out at the other.

Here is another, which I take from "Epochs of English History," edited by Bishop Creighton :—

"George IV. had hoped to keep the same Ministry in office, and to carry on public business with as little change as possible. Lord Goderich, who was considered a moderate man, was therefore made Prime Minister; but Mr. Herries, and the Duke of Wellington, who were both Tories, were received into the Cabinet."

If a man is studying the political history and the political gossip of the century, this kind of thing is not without its value; but I maintain, at the same time, that, for educational purposes, at least for the education of young people below the age of sixteen, it is of no value at all. Even grown-up people have entirely forgotten all about Lord Goderich and Mr. Herries, and very properly, as they were merely temporary politicians and transitory figures. Oblivion is, with regard to many persons and things, quite as valuable as the power of memory. Lord Goderich has merged into the Marquisate of Ripon, Mr. Herries into the Earldom of Malmesbury; but neither of these persons need be known by any one who does not care to study the British peerage.

The next three sentences go far to prove my point :—

"This was enough to bring about its destruction. A quarrel broke out between Herries and Huskisson, and Lord Goderich, not wishing to get rid of either of them, preferred to re-

sign himself. The administration had scarcely lasted six months."

Now all this gossip—I maintain it is only gossip—might have been entirely omitted, and room kept for more detailed life of the Duke of Wellington, for an account of the conduct of Sir Walter Scott during the panic of 1825, or for the agitation in Ireland on the subject of Catholic Emancipation; but these writers suppose that they must give you their history step by step, *secundum artem*, through every petty change of administration or personal substitution; and they fancy that these things are interesting, or can be made interesting, to young people who are below the age of thirty.

Now let us contrast with all these specimens of vagueness a few passages from histories which have been written at first-hand by spectators of, or actors in, the various events. I take my examples from an excellent series published by Mr. Nutt, "English History from Contemporary Writers"; and this series contains extracts from contemporary letters, persons who kept diaries, chroniclers and other such observers. Here is an account of the execution of Sir Harry Vane :—

PEPY'S DIARY. June 14th, 1662.
—"About eleven o'clock, having a room got ready for us, we all went out to the Tower Hill, and there, over against the scaffold, made on purpose this day, saw Sir H. Vane brought. A very great press of people. He made a long speech, many times interrupted by the sheriff and others there; and they would have taken his paper out of his hand, but he would not let it go. But they caused all the books of those that writ after him (*i.e.*, the reporters) to be given to the sheriff; and the trumpets were brought under the scaffold, that he might not be heard. Then he prayed, and so fitted himself and received the blow."

This extract brings up the image