

TRUTH.

OLD SERIES.—21st YEAR.

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NEW SERIES.—VOL. X. NO. 505.

WHAT TRUTH SAYS

The complaint is frequently made in all though the present is an age of readers the character of the books most generally preferred indicates a low popular literary taste. The records of public libraries show that the preponderating choice of the patrons is in favor of works of fiction, and fiction of a relatively low order. The masterpieces of fiction while they have many admirers are not generally sought after. The proportion of readers who prefer Dickens, Scott, Thackeray and authors of this class, is small compared with the armies that select the sensational novel, or the sentimental love story. That this condition of things is a result goes without dispute. Considering its untold importance in relation to society and the intelligence and morals of society, the study of the cause or causes that have contributed to produce this state of things, cannot be esteemed a matter of indifference. To this work Charles Dudley Warner, whose line as a literateur has gone out to the ends of the earth, lends himself in the *Atlantic* for June. To the common school, as at present conducted, he attributes in a large measure the low intellectual taste. No that he condemns unqualifiedly the common school "as a nurse of superficiality, mediocrity and conceit," but that in respect to the study of literature it is sadly at fault, and greatly in need of radical modification. "What," he asks, "does the common school usually do for literary taste? Generally there is no thought about it. It is not in the minds of the majority of teachers. The business is to teach the pupil to read; how they shall use the art of reading is little considered." He continues, "if we examine the reading-books from the lowest grade to the highest, we shall find that their prime object is to teach words, not literature. There is an endeavor to teach how to call the words of a reading book, but not how to read; for reading involves the combination of known words to form new ideas. And lacking this the taste for good literature is not developed; the habit of continuous pursuit of a subject, with comprehension of its relations, is not acquired, and no conception is gained of the entirety of literature or its importance to human life. Consequently there is no power of judgment or faculty of discrimination."

The supposition upon which the text books generally used in Public schools are graded is, that children are incapable of understanding anything that requires any exercise of thought or play of imagination. Hence the series usually begins with such inanities as this: "Little Jimmy had a little white pig." "Did the little pig know Jimmy?" "Yes, the little pig knew Jimmy and would come when he called." "How did little Jimmy know his pig from the other little pigs?" "By the twist in his tail." "Jimmy liked to stroke the little pig's back." "Would the little pig let him?" "Yes, when he was absorbed eating his dinner." The consequences of teaching children such empty nothings is, that they become only languidly interested, their minds are not awakened, their imaginations are

not appealed to; and when the lesson is over they have learned nothing, except probably some new words, which are learned as signs. This supposition that the youthful mind requires to be fed upon such "slops" Mr. Warner characterizes as a cardinal blunder. "It has been demonstrated," he says, "by experience that it is as easy to begin with good literature as with the sort of reading described. It makes little difference where the beginning is made (except that it is better to begin with the ancients in order to gain a proper perspective). Any good book, any real book, is an open door into the wide field of literature; that is to say of history, that is to say of interest in the entire human race. Read to children of tender years, the same day, the story of Jimmy and a Greek myth, or an episode from *Odyssey* or any genuine bit of human nature and life; and ask the children next day which they wish to hear again. Almost all of them will call for the repetition of the real thing, the verity of which they recognize and which has appealed to their imagination." The conclusion to which Mr. Warner comes is, that "it requires little more pains to create a good taste in reading than a bad taste."

The cure which Mr. Warner proposes for the evil is two fold. First there must be a juster conception of the place which literature should occupy in the curriculum. Instead of considering it a branch of education to be taken up at an age when the average child is obliged to exchange the school room for the labor arena, the accumulated thought and experience of all the ages which forms our present life and explains it, which exists partly in tradition and training, but more largely in books, this should be the atmosphere in which the child should live and move and have his being, intellectually. Into it he should be ushered with the first dawn of intellectual activity and play of imagination. Secondly there must be a clearer conception on the part of the teacher that everything read to or by the child should tend to put him in relation with the world and the thought of the world. This can only be done by the teacher who is really alive, who perceives that in the best literature we find truth about the world, about human nature, and hence that if children read this, they read what their experience will verify. Of course this implies considerable latitude to be given to the teacher in the choice of reading matter. And just here is where Mr. Warner's scheme is in danger of going to pieces. It is not clear that the best interests of the children, that is of society, would be promoted by giving such a free rein. No doubt the danger from this source would be greatly lessened if the true place and object of literature were once clearly apprehended by the teachers themselves. But until there is such a general recognition of the true function of literature on the part of those who teach, the work of selection cannot be safely left in hands so unskilled and incompetent and must be made by those who are more capable.

That such a radical change of opinion

is contemplated and advocated in Mr. Warner's excellent article, will take place suddenly, few will contend, but that he is on the right track, and that the adoption of his views in the main would tend to elevate the literary taste, there is little room to doubt. "When," as he says, "literature is given its proper place, not only for the development of the mind, but as the most easily opened door to history, art, science, general intelligence, we shall see the taste of the reading public undergo a mighty change. It will not care for the fiction it likes at present and which does little more than enfeeble its powers, and then there can be no doubt that fiction will rise to supply the demand for some thing better. When people know how to read authors will need to know how to write."

The Port Lambton Quarterly Board of the Methodist Church has been doing a little figuring recently. The result at which they have arrived is, that the Dominion Government is manifesting unwarrantable and provoking favoritism in the matter of grants to Indian schools, that the schools under the care of the Methodist Church receive only \$235 per school, while the Roman Catholic Indian schools are granted \$2,582 each on an average. Assuming the correctness of this estimate it raises an interesting question concerning the politicians of our country. What, one is led to ask, will be the conduct of those electors whose feelings are so outraged at present by the action of the Mowat government in relation to the Roman Catholic Church, when Sir John's day of reckoning arrives? Will they give evidence of the genuineness of their recent conversion, or shall we have the spectacle of a nation of backsliders? Echo answers which.

On another page will be found the list of rewards to be given in connection with TRUTH Bible Competition, No. 20. As an illustration of the satisfaction which these competitions give we subjoin in the following letter just received:

BELLEFVILLE, May 24th, '90.

To the Editor—

DEAR SIR— I have received the books, Dickens' works, and am delighted with them, for to tell the truth, I did not expect much.

I have shown them to many of my friends who all congratulate me and say they will compete for a prize should you offer another competition.

Thanking you very much for your promptness and fairness, and wishing you future success, I remain,

Yours, very truly,

M. E. HAZARD

The above letter is only one of the thousands that have been received in the same strain of satisfaction which these competitions given may be attributed to the bona fide the competition, the impartiality and the promptness with which the rewards have been distributed.

The same is true of the things in the same line.

organization designed to promote temperance principles among the children and youth of the land. It is an institution associated and vitally connected with the Sons of Temperance in America, of which organization the five senior officers of the local company of crusaders must be members, except in certain specified cases. As its name implies the new organization is constructed according to military ideas and forms. The ritual, rules and regulations were prepared by a lady member of the Order who received a prize of one hundred dollars for the manuscript. Each company is provided with a satin banner with an enlarged badge in lithographic colors, also a national flag. There are five senior officers and fifteen junior officers in each company. The boys constitute one section of each company and the girls a separate section. Each section has three ranks, and each rank is in charge of a sergeant. Those between 12 and 15 years of age constitute the first rank; those between 8 and 12 the second rank, and all under eight years of age are in the third rank.

The emblem of the Loyal Crusaders is a shield, bearing as a device a sword and water lily, with the words "DEATH TO ALCOHOL." The purpose of the organization is stated to be to pledge young people to abstain from the use of intoxicating drinks; to instruct them concerning the nature and effects of alcoholic beverages, and narcotics; to teach them to regard the saloon and liquor traffic as evils to be hated and destroyed. Boys and girls over five years of age and under fifteen years of age, shall be eligible to membership. The pledge is: "I solemnly promise that I will not knowingly taste or touch any Wine, Beer, Cider, Brandy, Whisky, or any other drink that contains Alcohol." Those who desire to do so may take an additional pledge of hostility to tobacco and profanity. It is the desire of the promoters of the new organization to organize a company of Loyal Crusaders in connection with each and every Division of Sons of Temperance. Where there is no Division, the National Superintendent desires to correspond with the formation of local divisions.

This new organization is a very child should be formed. If it is to be of any use, it should be formed in a way that will be of benefit to the children and youth of the land.