Contemporary Thought.

IT is impossible to exclude human nature from history, and the historian dealing with the concrete facts of human activity is sure, sooner or later, to part company with the physicist or biologist who is engaged upon the dissection and classification of facts belonging to inorganic matter, or to organic matter below the order of man. The archæologist, groping about in the cave after the guttural voiced dweller with his club and his little stone chips, trying to make out how the poor devil lived, and what he thought of the world into the light of which he had scarcely crept, may use the same method as his brother-worker who is measuring the wings of a paleozoic cockroach, but he is in a vastly wider range of human sympathy, and may give points to a Shakespeare reflecting upon Caliban and Setebos.—*Atlantic Monthly.*

"IF the universe, as science teaches, be an organism which, by slow degrees, has grown to its form of to-day on its way to its form of to-morrow, with slowly formed habits which we call laws, and a general health which we call the harmony of nature, then, as science also teaches, the life principle or soul of that organism, for which there is no better name than God, pervades and informs it so absolutely that there is no separating God from nature, or religion from science, or things sacred from things secular. This scientific conception of God is, of course, not identical with that held in any organized church; but it is indubitably a religious or spiritual conception. Men who in any good measure accept it, must admit that education cannot be secularized; for since all nature, and particularly all human nature, is instinct with spiritual energy, the minds of children cannot be developed and trained on a system which ignores that energy."—*President Eliot.*

THE Birmingham School Board has had again before it the question of religious instruction in schools. The rule that has obtained for some time has been to allow Bible reading without note or comment. Mr. Greening proposed that this rule should be rescinded, and in future to substitute Bible reading in the classes with grammatical, historical, and geographical explanations by the teacher. The proposal gave rise to a long and able debate; as also to no inconsiderable warmth of expression. In the result the proposal was defeated by eight votes to seven, the division being on strictly party lines. The present condition of the question can be satisfactory to neither party. Even the resolution of Mr. Greening, if carried, could satisfy but few. The question is one which presses for a solution which shall satisfy all reasonable men, if such solution is possible. Unfortunately, it is one with respect to which party feeling runs high. The religious difficulty in past years is chiefly responsible for the delay in the foundation of a national system of education. And yet it is a difficulty which has rarely, if ever, been experienced inside the walls of a schoolroom. If the matter were left in the hands of an independent body of teachers, the difficulty would largely, if not wholly, disappear.—*The Schoolmaster.*

DR. MCLELLAN, in speaking on reading at the East Middlesex Teachers' Association, said the harshness which some critics impute to the English language is not so much its own fault as that of the users of it. He combatted the opinion that reading will come intuitively—which makes the reading lesson a lesson in all the "ologies," instead of a reading lesson pure and simple—an information lesson instead of a reading lesson. The phonic method, which is the best to use with beginners, will correct slovenliness of pronunciation, which is too prevalent a fault. Some say take care of the consonants, and most probably the vowels will take care of themselves. But this is a mistake. The consonant sounds distinctly articulated give force, it is true, but the vowel sounds give the music to speech. The educated and well-trained speaker sounds the unaccented vowels so that the hearer recognizes the sound of the letter almost as distinctly as the reader sees it. He pointed out some commonly heard errors—"git," "tibi" for "to be," multipication," etc. The "u" sound in "duty" and such words is often mutilated. In some of the American schools the pupils are taught to eliminate the "r." He was opposed to this. By examples, the speaker showed that the rate of reading should be suited to the sentiment.

I CANNOT conscientiously say that I have found the literary profession—in and for itself—entirely agreeable. Almost everything that I have written has been written from necessity; and there is very little of it that I shall not be glad to see forgotten. The true rewards of literature, for men of limited calibre, are the incidental ones—the valuable friendships and the charming associations which it brings about. For the sake of these I would willingly endure again many passages of a life that has not been all roses. Not that I would appear to belittle my own work: it does not need it. But the present generation (in America at least) does not strike me as containing much literary genius. The number of undersized persons is large and active, and we hardly believe in the possibility of heroic stature. I cannot sufficiently admire the pains we are at to make our work—embodying the aims it does—immaculate in form. Form without idea is nothing, and we have no ideas. If one of us were to get an idea, it would create its own form, as easily as does a flower or a planet. I think we take ourselves too seriously; our posterity will not be nearly so grave over us. For my part, I do not write better than I do, because I have no ideas worth better clothes than they can pick up for themselves. "Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing with your best pains," is a saying which has injured our literature more than any other single thing. How many a lumber closet since the world began has been filled by the results of this purblind and delusive theory! But this is not autobiographical—save that to have written it shows how little prudence my life has taught me.—*Julian Hawthorne, in Lippincott's Magazine for April.*

MR. FRANK GALTON somewhere tells an amusing story, since profusely copied by all the anthropologists, of how, during his South African wanderings, he once wanted to buy a couple of sheep from an unsophisticated heathen Damara. Current coin in that part of the world is usually represented, it seems, by cakes of tobacco, and two cakes were the recognized market-price of a sheep in Damaraland at the time of Mr. Galton's memorable visit. So the unsuspecting purchaser chose a couple of wethers from the flock, and, naturally enough, laid down four pieces of tobacco to pay for them before the observant face of the astonished vendor. The Damara eyed the proffered price with suspicious curiosity. What could be the meaning of this singular precipitancy? He carefully took up two pieces, and placed them in front of one of the sheep; then he took up the other two pieces with much wonder, and placed them in turn in front of the other. Goodness gracious, there must be magic in it! The sum actually came out even. The Damara, for his part, didn't like the look of it. This thing was evidently uncanny. How could the supernaturally clever white man tell beforehand that two and two made four? He felt about it, no doubt, as we ourselves should feel if a great mathematician were suddenly to calculate out for us *a priori* what we were going to have today for dinner, and how much exactly we owed the butcher. After gazing at the pat and delusive symmetry of the two sheep and the four cakes of tobacco for a brief breathing-space, the puzzled savage, overpowered but not convinced, pushed away the cakes with a gesture of alarm, took back his sheep to the bosom of his flock, and began the whole transaction over again *da capo.* He wasn't going to be cheated out of his two sound wethers by a theoretical white man who managed bargains for live sheep on such strictly abstract mathematical principles.—*Grant Allen, in Lippincott's Magazine for April.*

"THE one distinguishing character of all successful men," says the *New York School Journal* in a leading article of a recent issue, "is their terrible earnestness. They go at what they have to do with uncompromising directness. It is not necessary to specify instances. They will suggest themselves to all our intelligent readers. The namby-pamby orator who speaks in mortal terror of offending 'culture,' and qualifies his sentence with numerous 'perhapses,' will move nobody. The ungrammatical, country-trained, home-made stump speaker, with a *conviction* does far more good. He goes at his work with a will and a purpose. Moody was advised not to preach, but he preached, nevertheless. He couldn't help it. Gough went at his work from his shop, with no education except his terrible experience, and a burning desire, absorbing his whole soul, to keep all other young men from a similar experience. He had to speak. He couldn't help it. We may laugh at such men as John Brown, Garrison, and Phillips, as much as we please, but the fact remains the same; just such men are the ones who move the world. There are thousands of teachers who are too much afraid of offending somebody to do much good work. The course of study must be followed, the book must be learned, the parent must be pleased, the examiner must be satisfied, and when all these various persons are appeased there is no time left for free, original, unimpeded action. A conviction amounts to nothing unless it is acted out. We must be moved from an impulse within, if we expect to do anything worth doing. It doesn't pay to be 'dumb driven cattle' in the work of this world. The ability of doing as we please is exceedingly exhilarating. Very proper teachers please nobody, and do no good. It is said that all really great men have been eccentric. Very likely! He who doesn't do what is right because he believes it to be right, and *cannot help doing it,* is not really enjoying life, and is certainly doing little good."