

which fiction occupies in our modern magazine literature is startling to contemplate; for though the tide of innovation has flowed in by waves which have their rebounds, these have been both slight and ineffective; and the magazines most in favour may now be said, on the whole, to be not doing but contrivances for the circulation of tales in weekly or monthly portions; these tales being kept in countenance by an addendum of other matter, which is vulgarly denominated "padding"; and that not one reader in ten ever troubles to glance at this may be safely affirmed. In truth, so excessive has become the demand for tales, and so superfluous have ordinary compositions of an historical or descriptive cast come to be, that it is expressly announced by the editors of some magazines that they will look at nothing but fiction; while others, who do not go quite so far, state that they only pay for fiction. It is said, in commerce, that when an article is scarce, and therefore valuable in the market, it deteriorates, because its adulteration is profitable; in literature, especially of the imaginative sort, the case is just the reverse; when there is a plethora, the quality becomes inferior; for owing to the difficulty of competing with those who can improvise rapidly, those whose innate powers are not prolific resort to various expedients in order to turn out the quantity of literary matter which is required in a limited time. Therefore we find that, in addition to defects of a moral character which attach to the stories to be found in not a few current magazines, there are numerous faults of style which are avoidable, and due to haste or carelessness. A host of modern novels and novelettes, also, are only *réchauffés* of those which have had their run in other days, the incidents being transposed, or differently draped.

Indeed, it is surprising—and yet again not surprising—how much of old literary matter of every description is dished up by the ingenious and the unscrupulous, and presented for editorial inspection; so that the office of an editor, as years go on, is rendered more and more arduous, through the need there is of carefully ascertaining, not the merits of a composition merely, but also its originality. With all caution mishaps must sometimes occur, and palpable repetitions get into print; fortunately, however, the bulk of readers, especially readers of magazines, have short memories.

The predominance of fiction in most modern magazines, and the peculiarities of that species or form of it which is largely approved, affects injuriously both the matter and manner of the portion which is assigned to other prose compositions. With a view to make these readable, and not too great a contrast to the sensational tale, the essay, the biographical or historical sketch, is worked up in as exciting and startling a manner as possible; the object being, very frequently, not to say a thing in the best and clearest way, with such elegance or rhetorical adornment as is admissible and practicable, but to produce an impression of a pleasurable nature on the reader's mind. The author throughout is thinking not so much of his subject as of himself, and of those who are to read or criticise what he writes.

Compare the prose and verse contents of the best periodicals which had a respectable circulation amongst families in the days of our grandfathers, and a dozen of modern highly estimated magazines, in purity and correctness of style and diction the former will be found superior; though of course here and there amongst the pages of the latter, passages may be selected of manifest superiority to the literature of the past.

If modern editors of magazines were to devote themselves to the work of selecting and revising, with a conviction that the prevailing taste in literature is a bad one, and needs to be changed, they might achieve much, for it is through them, as well as through public opinion, that a revolution must be wrought.

THE CLASSICS IN ENGLAND.

It is significant that the attacks on the policy of allowing the study of Latin and Greek to occupy the first place in school and college courses are daily growing bolder in England. Lord Coleridge, who eloquently defended the study of the dead languages, both as mental training and literary culture, to the students of Yale the other day, made a rather unfortunate blunder (for his own argument), when he cited John Bright in

connection with classical education. The great English orator, has self-confessedly derived the finish and brilliancy of his eloquence from a profound study of the English classics. But it is not alone from the mistakes of the supporters of classics, that the advocates of educational progress are gaining ground, for some of the ablest men in England have been dealing some effective blows against a system which, although in its decay, is dying hard. At the inaugural dinner of the Bristol University College Club lately, Sir John Lubbock gave expression to his views, those of a representative British scientist, upon the ever varying and ever interesting problem of education. He said that the first public school commission, which sat in 1861, to enquire into the condition of the great public schools, reported with regret that too little time was devoted to modern languages and that science was practically excluded altogether. Later commissions reported to the same effect, and one in 1875 said that the omission of these subjects from the training of the upper and middle classes was "little less than a national misfortune." The result of these commissions was the adoption of natural science in school examinations to the extent of not less than one-tenth, and not more than one-fourth, according to the discretion of the governing body. Many then hoped that science and modern languages would receive a fair share of attention. But according to a Parliamentary return in 1879, the reverse proved the case. No doubt since then, some progress had been gained. He estimated that now the time was taken up about as follows:—taking 40 to 42 as about the number of hours devoted to study, two hours a week for science, three to modern languages, four to geography, and mathematics, leaving thirty for Latin and Greek. He feared they might still echo the complaint of Milton in his letter to Master Hartill more than two centuries ago, "We do amiss to spend seven or eight years merely in scraping together as much miserable Latin and Greek as might be learnt otherwise easily and delightfully in one year." Why could not six hours be devoted to mathematics, six to science, six to modern languages and history, and two to geography. There would still be left more than twenty hours for Latin and Greek, and if a boy could not learn Latin and Greek in twenty hours a week, spread over ten years, he would certainly never learn them at all. Sir John Lubbock went on to show that Englishmen had special need to be familiar with modern languages and science, on account of England's vast foreign financial and commercial enterprises. He showed how unsatisfactory the present system was when it resulted in a young man being able to pass creditably, even with distinction, through school and college, and yet find himself unable to speak any language but his own, and ignorant of any branch of science, though perhaps proficient in mathematics, Latin and Greek. Such an education, they might say with Locke, fitted a man for the University rather than the world. Of course, Sir John Lubbock's statistics are his own, and may be taken exception to, but his views will be widely read, and reflected upon too, for his claims upon the attention of his countrymen are great, as he has lent a fascination to the pursuit of science, which no other Englishman of his day has done.

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MCGILL VS. TORONTO UNIVERSITY.

To the Editors of the MCGILL UNIVERSITY GAZETTE.

DEAR SIRS:—I have read with some surprise the account of the above match in the last number of the *University Gazette*. The tone of the article is not, in my opinion, such as should be used towards a sister University, and more especially towards the University of Toronto, from whose hands we have always received the utmost kindness and hospitality. As umpire for McGill during the match, I must take exception to some statements made in the article, which imply that the referee was unduly biased in favour of the Varsity team. His rulings were, in many cases, in favour of McGill, and the only time I believe his decision wrong, was in the case of the "fair catch" made by A. W. Smith, in the last half of the game. Here,