LITERARY NOTES.

We have received from the publisher of "The Shipping World," of London, a copy of the fifteenth annual edition of "The Shipping World Year Book." It is an admirable compendium, completely comprehensive in scope, and thoroughly well edited. For ship owners, merchants, publicists and students of shipping affairs generally it is an invaluable work of reference.

"Overheard in the Wittington Family" (Life Publishing Company) is a collection of drawings by Charles Allan Gilbert which have appeared in "Life." Mr. Gilbert is a clever draughtsman, whose models are generally drawn from fashionable life. The pictures here gathered together might be printed without any text, simply as portraits of pretty young women and their handsome, well groomed adorers, but each plate, carefully printed on calendered paper, is faced by a legend at once sentimental and humorous.

The Macmillan Company issues a new edition of Mr. John La Farge's "Citations on Painting," the book in which the distinguished artist brought together the lectures which he gave in 1893 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These lectures are deeply thought out, they are, in fact, among the most intellectual and penetrating contributions made to the literature of art in recent years. Although they were primarily intended for art students, the general reader who is at all interested in the subject will derive pleasure and profit from the work.

The Perrien-Keydel Publishing Company, of Detroit, Mich., sends us the first three pages of a serial publication, entitled "Deeds of Valor: How Our Soldier Heroes Won the Medal of Honor." This work, compiled by William F. Beyer and Oscar F. Keydel, assembles personal reminiscences and official records of officers and privates in our army who have been awarded the medal of honor for conspicuous acts of bravery in battle. It is a popular compilation, abundantly illustrated with portraits and sketches of many of the dramatic episodes illustrated in the text. The press work is fair.

The set of twenty-five volumes projected by the Macmillan Company under the title of "The Library of English Classics" is now completed by the publication in one volume of "The Compleat Angler" of Izaak Walton, the lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert and Sanderson being also included. These classical pages, faultlessly edited and printed, fitly close an especially engaging publishing enterprise. We hasten to add, however, that we hope this enterprise will be resumed and that twenty-five more volumes will be arranged for. Certainly no better series of reprints at the price has been put upon the market, and there is no reason why the series should not be almost indefinitely continued.

The Charity Organization Society has just published its "New-York Charities Directory" for 1901. It is, of course, an invaluable compendium. This new edition has a fuller index than has been given to any of the previous volumes. The list of institutions and associations is complete, and there are useful pages which carry the field of observation beyond our own shores and put the reader in full possession of all important facts relating to charitable societies in foreign cities.

McClure, Phillips & Co. publish the E. H. Sothern acting version of "Hamlet" in a decorative octavo, handsomely printed. The cover shows in colors a fragment from a scene in the play. The illustrations scattered through the volume are half-tone reproductions of photographs from Mr. Sothern's presentation of the play. A portrait of the actor in costume is given as frontispiece.

The Macmillan Company issues two more volumes in its "Chiswick Shakespeare," illustrated by Byam Shaw, a well printed and well edited series of pocket volumes. These two latest issues are devoted to "Julius Cæsar" and the first part of "King Henry IV." We like the little books in everything save the pictorial accompaniment. Mr. Shaw's drawings add nothing to the edition which we could not well spare. In its series of "Pocket American and English Classics" the Macmillan Company prints a selection from the prose tales of Poe, and a little anthology of "The Southern Poets," selected and edited by Professor William L. Weber. The latter is an especially admirable textbook. The latest of "The Temple Primers" is "Australasia: The Commonwealth and New-Zealand," by Arthur W. Jose; a workmanlike survey.

Alexander Johnston's "History of the United States for Schools" has borne well the test of constant use since its first publication, in 1885. It was once revised and continued by Winthrop More Daniels, and now is again revised and continued by Professor William MacDonald, of Bowdoin College, and is published by Henry Holt & Co. under the new title of "High School History of the United States," with maps, plans and illustrations. The book has been brought up to date. The treatment of some of the topics dealt with has been expanded, and some new topics have been added. The final chapter is entitled "Expansion," and treats of the salient events of President McKinley's first administration. The bibliographical index has been considerably augmented.

Two new volumes have appeared in the series of "Bell's Handbooks to Continental Churches," circulated in this country by the Macmillan Company. One of these is devoted to Chartres, and is by Mr. H. J. Masse; the other, by the Rev. Thomas Perkins, is about Rouen. We have previously testified to the excellence of these compact little manuals. The text is excellent in both the examples before us, at once comprehensive and concise, and the numerous illustrations, chiefly in half tone, are exactly suited to the purpose. The salient merit of this series is its practicality.

Paul N. Hasluck's "Practical Gas Fitting," published by Cassell & Co., Limited, is clearly an English work. In the introductory chapter the writer confines his attention to the making of coal gas, and devotes only a paragraph to water gas. Nor is there any reference to the use of acetylene for enriching purposes. Again, the closing chapter, which relates to heating houses and cooking, would have been a trifle more complete if the author had lived in America. However, the main part of his book deals with piping of gas, from the retort to the holder, from holder to house, and through a building, and also with meters and burners, and special fitting in workshops. And all of this is fairly up to date. The book is well illustrated.

The value of a text book depends largely on the method which it employs in presenting the subject in hand. In this respect Dr. Lassar-Cohn's "Introduction to Modern Chemistry" is particularly felicitous. The work of both instructor and student is thus greatly facilitated. The author devotes a good deal of space to the description of experiments, and these are so chosen as to familiarize the reader with the underlying principles of chemistry before he knows it. Incidentally, many practical hints are offered concerning the dangers to be avoided while pursuing this fascinating line of study. Dr. Pattison Muir, of Cambridge, England, has translated the book from the German for the D. Van Nostrand Company.

A remarkable series of articles prepared by a British engineer who had visited this country appeared in "The London Times" last spring. They related to the supremacy which the United States has recently achieved in the steel industry. The writer offered an interesting array of facts and figures for the consideration of his fellow countrymen, describing not only the more progressive processes and machinery employed in America in producing steel, but also our machine tools, stationary engines and locomotives. His last contribution discussed some aspects of the labor question in both countries. These papers, which were commented upon at length by The Tribune at the time, have now been published by Harper & Bros., in a volume entitled "American Engineering Competition." The book will prove instructive on this side of the Atlantic, as well as the other, and of value to other manufacturers than those whose triumphs it records.

The commercial value of pig iron and steel is dependent upon the presence or absence of certain impurities that often occur in the ore and which cannot easily be eliminated. Owing to the variety of substances that are occasionally associated with iron in the earth or are mingled with it in the blast furnace, a treatise like Blair's "Chemical Analysis of Iron" must needs be an elaborate one. A fourth edition of this excellent work has just been brought out by the J. B. Lippincott Company. The author has made a thorough revision; in fact, he has entirely rewritten the book. Mr. Blair, it may be added, was chief chemist of the United States board appointed to test iron, steel and other metals in 1875, and chief chemist of the United States Geological Survey and Tenth Census in 1880, and is a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Professor Francis B. Crocker's "Electric Lighting" includes two volumes. The first came out a year or more ago, and was devoted to dynamos and the other equipment of a generating station. The second, which has just issued from the press of the D. Van Nostrand Company, relates to the conductors for transmitting the requisite current—the "distribution system," so-called—to the lamps and the numerous accessories of this mode of illumination. Professor Crocker has gone sufficiently into detail to serve the purposes of technical schools and the practising engineer. At the same time he has avoided abstruse theory as far as possible. The appendix contains the national electrical code and the report of the Committee on Standardization, embodying the rules that should govern the construction and operation of any electrical system.

T. W. Hammond, of Tacoma, Wash., is an old whaler himself, so his book "On Board a Whaler" should have the imprint of reality, as well as the vividness and adventuresome quality ascribed to it by Messrs. Putnam, the publishers who are going to bring it out. It is especially for boys, and will have many illustrations.

The Rev. Hubert D. Astley is the author of "My Birds in Freedom and Captivity"—English birds—which the Duttons will publish in this country at once. He says that his book is "not intended to treat of birds scientifically, but rather chattily, with a hope that many who would not read a learned book on ornithology will perhaps dip into what is simply a homely account of some of the birds I have kept." The author has made many drawings of the birds he describes, which are handsomely reproduced.

Mr. Henry Holt, in his "Talks on Civics," has undertaken to "do something to develop in young people the character of mind which is proof against political quackery—especially the quackery that proposes immediate cures by legislation for the abiding ills resulting from human weakness and ignorance." He has cast his book in the form of questions and answers, traversing a great variety of subjects. It is to be published at once by the Macmillan Company.

IMPOVERISHING THE LANGUAGE.

A POPULAR WRITER'S PROTEST AGAINST SLIPSHOD HABITS OF SPEECH AMONG EVEN EDUCATED AMERICANS.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: It is a pleasure—and not an every day one—to find an American newspaper coming to the defence of good English, as The Tribune recently did in explaining to a puzzled correspondent why "an historian" is a preferable form to "a historian." That a reader capable of observing such nicetles should yet be unacquainted with one of the most familiar rules of English euphony speaks volumes for the way in which English is taught in this country, but will surprise no one familiar with the grammatical standards of the average American writer on syntax and composition.

Such shades of speech are, however, mainly literary, and much as the language must suffer in losing them it is in far greater danger from the impoverishment of our spoken vocabulary. The American language is, in fact, rapidly differentiating itself from the English, and not always to the profit of the younger branch. Thus we have practically lost the subjunctive, "may" and "can" are regarded as synonymous, the interchangeable use of "shall" and "will" has passed from Irish-English speech to our own, and is finding its way into newspapers and books, and past participles manufactured out of nouns are weakening the few inflected verbs we have left.

It is inevitable that time and altered surroundings should modify the language, and such changes as enrich it are welcome, whatever their source. Unfortunately, however, the tendency of American speech (and not only that of the uneducated) is to impoverish rather than to enrich the mother tongue. We are continually replacing some good word with a definite and familiar meaning by another of quite different significance, and in no way better adapted to the service into which it is suddenly impressed. In this way hundreds of useful distinctions have been lost—not the pedantic shades of meaning with which speech has no time to reckon, but the kind of distinction that helps the average man to express his meaning more quickly and precisely.

Such losses, it is true, originate among the uneducated, but owing to our lax habits of speech and imitative tendencies they spread rapidly from the street to the newspaper and from the newspaper to the book. It is not only in the street that one hears "back of" used for behind, "cunning" for "pretty" or "engaging," to "fix" for to "set right" or to "arrange." The two latter words have, in fact, been so successfully wrenched from their true meaning that those who would not think of using them in their perverted sense instinctively avoid them in speaking, so that it has become almost pedantic to talk of a man's cunning or of fixing a tablet to a wall.

In other cases the word may be studied in various degrees of deterioration. Thus "team" has come to mean one horse to the man in the street, while it apparently stands in newspaper parlance for a pair, and preserves only in cultivated speech and in the vocabulary of the sport (where the need of definiteness is felt) its specific sense of four. A curious instance of the perversion of this word is to be seen on several roads near Lenox, where the public is warned that "loaded teams are forbidden," etc. "Loaded" for "laden" is a good example of the loss of a fine inflection, and it is distressing to learn that many of the works of art in the Metropolitan Museum are "loaned" instead of being "lent" to that institution.

Oddly enough, it is in the domestic branches that our spoken language has suffered some of its most needless perversions. Is this because women are less sensitive than men to shades of meaning and less accustomed to the necessity of expressing themselves with precision? There is no reason why such distinctive words as "mercer" and "haberdasher," for instance, should have been lost in the general term "drygoods," or why "shop" should have been sacrificed to "store," which wears on its very face its inappropriateness to such a purpose. Why, again, should so good a word as "bodice" be in danger of extermination through the senseless and vulgar "waist," which, in its most ridiculous form, "shirt waist," has already passed into the language? "Petticoat" (perhaps through some prudish euphuism) is being rapidly discarded for "skirt," another instance of one word being forced to serve two distinct purposes, since no substitute has yet been provided for "skirt." The use of the word "laundry," to signify washing or the wash, has not yet reached polite speech, but is on its way thither via the advertisement and the newspaper, and such a euphuism is sure to appeal to the order of mind which prefers "elevator" to "lift" and "mucilage" to "gum."

Such changes as I have cited are to be deplored, since they weaken and blur the language, and they are taking place among us with such rapidity that the vocabulary of the average American is now distinctly poorer than it was a generation ago.

EDITH WHARTON.

New-York, April 20, 1901.

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