

WRITING ENGLISH.

HOW IT IS TAUGHT IN THE GRAMMAR SCHOOLS OF THIS CITY TO-DAY—
RAPID PROGRESS MADE BY CHILDREN OF FOREIGN PARENTS.

Among the new commandments of modern education are two of supreme importance, and these two are, first, to make study natural and interesting, and, second, to make one subject fit in with another. Aforetime one learned geography and history and wrote compositions, but none of these had anything to do with the others. The child was in Asia one minute, transported to America of the seventeenth century immediately afterward, and obliged to turn his mind to the abstract consideration of "truth" or some such subject as soon as the Indians had been disposed of. His left hand did not know what his right hand did, so to speak. But now the writing of the once dreaded "compositions" is in line with something that the children have been studying, and it is made as natural for them to put their thoughts down on paper as it is to go home and batter the ears of the family with it. The very word "composition" is avoided. It all comes in with the teaching of other subjects, and is not a bogie any longer.

Each month the children of the higher grammar grades write four or five compositions. But it takes some little time to make them sufficiently familiar with the use of the language to do this, whether they are American or of foreign birth or parentage. They begin to write what for want of a better word must be called compositions when they are not more than seven or eight years old. The work is given them to copy at this stage of the course, but it familiarizes them with sentence construction. The little ones write laboriously "Papa planted a tree" or "A tree grew by a brook." They write the sentence four or five times. The teacher has already told them the story of the planting of the tree or of what grew on the banks of the brook, so that it is not a mere meaningless phrase. There is interest, which was conspicuously absent from the wisdom of the old copybook. They find that it is just as easy to write about the tree as to tell about it. So self-consciousness does not come with the very touch of the pen.

That is the first stage. Then comes original work, and very original some of it is. The teacher tells a story of some birds that sang in a tree and made everybody happy with their sweet songs. The children listen, of course, and a day or so later the teacher will call upon them to write something about it. She will put on the board the word "sweetly" and tell the children to write something about the song of the birds that shall bring in the word "sweetly." The children have no difficulty in putting down the fact that the bluebird in the tree sang sweetly, or that the robin sang sweetly, or that all birds sing sweetly. The bluebird and the robin and the pleasure of the birds' songs have all been gone over in the class a day or a week before. When the subject is a little more complicated the work becomes very interesting. Under the word "blacksmith" there were some bold attempts. "The blacksmith is a pony show maker," "The blacksmith wears a heavy apron," "The blacksmith works all day long," and so forth.

Further preparation for the writing of correct English is given by dictation and copying. The old style copybooks have been superseded, of course. Nothing but the best English is given to the children as a model. In one school last week, for instance, the children were copying the description of early Manhattan from Irving's "Knickerbocker History." It interested them, taught them something about the place they live in, gave them the needed exercise in penmanship, familiarized them with the clear expression of thoughts, and made them accustomed to seeing written on paper things that they found also in books. At this period, too, the children have letters as models, and these are copied for an exercise in writing and also as preparation for the writing of original letters, which is to come soon. When a child is ten years old he is writing simple letters on such topics as the coming promotion, a subject on which he is sure to have plenty to say and to express himself with considerable clearness.

In this way the idea of writing as something entirely distinct from talking is done away with. It seems a not unnatural process, and when the children are ten or eleven years old they are prepared to write simple abstracts (only no such forbidding title is given to them) on the work done in the history, geography and literature classes. A ten-year-old Italian who hears not a word of English at home writes of "Hiawatha," which he has been studying: "Henry W. Longfellow the poet wrote the song of Hiawatha, an Indian legend. Hiawatha had two close friends whom he loved very much. They were Chibabos and Kwasind. Chibabos was the best singer and musician of all. Kwasind was the strongest man. I like Chibabos best because he sang so sweetly and he had such a lovely disposition. He was gentle and child-like. Hiawatha loved him also."

In the higher grades, when the children are twelve or thirteen, there is much work done with current events. Every month there is a composition about something that has happened in that month. When the President was killed, every child in the New-York public schools of composition writing age wrote something about

McKinley's life and work. In a case like this, when the subject is large, the teacher will not attempt to give much idea of the whole of a man's life. Some special epoch is made to stand out clearly, while the rest is filled in sketchily. In one school of foreign born children McKinley's boyhood was made especially interesting. One essay had a good deal of original thought in it: "We could see that he was a good man by the last words he spoke. Some of the words are 'Do not hurt the man,' 'It is God's will.' We could see that the people cared for McKinley, for that they decorated their windows, their stores and schools and buildings and other things. When McKinley was sixteen years of age Abraham Lincoln asked who will volunteer to save our flag, and William McKinley was first to volunteer. William McKinley went home and told his mother. She was very sad, but she said all right. She gave him so many blessings. God saved him. He was a soldier, Congressman and President." This child was twelve and heard English only at school.

In addition to the work in connection with literature, history and current events, the children write what will help them in their geography. In their study of Asia the teacher tells them about Mahomet, and a twelve-year-old Jewish girl on the lower East Side writes a typical composition as follows:

In Arabia there were many religions, and because of this there were many people who had no religion. Mohammed was born in Mecca in the year 570. He was a poor camel driver, but married a rich woman and could give himself to study. When forty years of age he gave himself up to teach a new religion. Mohammed began to claim that he must receive a book of laws from God called the Koran. Mohammed was persecuted and had to leave Arabia. Mohammed returned to Mecca in the year 630 and destroyed idols, and became the religious leader of Arabia. His motto was that there is no god but God and Mohammed is the prophet of God. Mohammed elevated the women of Arabia to their highest position. Mohammed died in Medina in the year 632. He was sixty-five years old.

An excellent idea is developed about this time of having the children write letters of application for places, and simple business letters such as every one has to write at one time or another. The teacher will sometimes tell them to cut any advertisement for help wanted from a newspaper and to answer it suitably. In districts where the children are obliged to leave the grammar school to go to work this is naturally a great help to them. Any child of poor parents who has attended school until fourteen years of age should be able to write a correctly expressed letter applying for a place. When, as is sometimes done, the girls and boys are asked to explain what they wish to become in after life, the need for this sort of thing is made evident, if the school is situated in a poor district. A bundle of such compositions will show the ever present desire to secure a "steady job," significant comment on what occurs at home when the father is "laid off."

Perhaps it is this great need to forge ahead in the struggle that makes the children of immigrants so soon keep pace with those of American birth. The compositions quoted have been taken from schools at which the attendance is made up of children of Italian, German, Irish and Jewish parents, but they are, except for an occasional incorrect use of idiom, quite equal to those of American children. In fact, it is not unfair to say that the average immigrant child in the public schools is slightly ahead of the average American of the same age. This is not due, however, to any superiority of intellect, but to the fact that foreigners and the very poor send their children to school before it is customary for American mothers to let their little ones go away from home. In an overcrowded tenement house big boys and girls of five must go out into the world and leave the mother time for the babies! Then the foreigners send their children with the utmost regularity, and even when the mother is sick she will, if the child desires it, make it possible to dispense with service for a few hours, at least. There is no staying at home for trifling ailments or stormy weather.

In these circumstances the children soon learn to write English about as well as do those who have always heard it spoken. There is no trouble in weaning them from the old ways. The difficulty is to see that they do not cast aside all that was noble in the old life as readily as they do all that was ignorant, and that they are real, true hearted "Americans" before they cease to be genuine Italians or Germans or Russians—personages distinctly estimable in their way. It would be an unpleasant state of affairs if the country found itself with a crop of young people who were "not fish, flesh, fowl, or good red herring." The public school teachers realize this, and one of the pleasantest features of school life is the hearty admiration and respect which the teachers have for what is best in the child's home life. They soon see the folly of the too contemptuous attitude of most Americans, and labor to eliminate only the bad, preserving the noble characteristics of these foreigners toward the further enriching of American life.

ITALIAN POSTAGE STAMPS.

From The Pall Mall Gazette.

The postage stamps of 20 centissimi, 25 centissimi and 40 centissimi, for the new issue of Victor Emmanuel II, of which six millions have been already printed, bear the King's head. The printing of the stamps of smaller value is proceeding rapidly. These will bear an eagle of varying size instead of the King's head. The designs were made by Signor Colletti, a Venetian artist. The engraving is on steel by Alberto Repettati, who has also been chosen to cut the new dies for the coupons of the public debt.

"PERCY" NAGLE.

ONE OF CROKER'S FAVORITES WHO HAS UNDONE MUCH OF COLONEL WARING'S GOOD WORK.

When Mayor Van Wyck distributed the political plums in the form of municipal offices according to the dictates of Croker, Percival E. Nagle, Tammany leader in the southern half of the XXXIVth Assembly District, was overlooked. But a man of Nagle's proportions—6 feet 3 inches and weighing nearly three hundred pounds—cannot be lost sight of, even in a Tammany crowd, and when James McCartney died the recognition came in the form of an appointment as Commissioner of Street Cleaning. By this appointment a Tammany ruffian of the worst kind took possession of the office in which Waring had won his laurels. The appointment was spoken of by the good citizens of New-York as one of the very worst that could have been made, and it was well understood that Nagle was chosen because of his congenial relations with Croker and because of his influence in "the ring." McCartney had been his friend, they



PERCIVAL E. NAGLE.

Commissioner, Department of Street Cleaning, City of New-York.

had been members of the same rowing association and pulled together, in politics also, but when McCartney's health began to fail Nagle's eyes became fixed on the street cleaning job, and his associates knew that he was waiting for a dead man's shoes.

When McCartney died the ruler of New-York was in Europe, and in his absence "Johnny" Carroll distributed Croker's prizes through the medium of Mayor Van Wyck. He had big "Percy" Nagle appointed to the vacant commissionership, and the better element of New-York stood aghast at Carroll's audacity. Some of the conservative Tammany men thought that Carroll had gone too far, and his tool, Van Wyck, was charged by good party men with having elevated a man of the lowest type, whom even the chief, much as he might have admired him as a "nervy" gambler and good book-maker, would not have placed in an important municipal office. But these fears were groundless. Croker approved the appointment, and the man whose associates had been gamblers, racetrack hangers on and Tammany heelers of the lowest grade was branded "O. K." by Boss Croker, and since that time he has been a power in the Tammany camp, and, as such, one of the rulers of New-York.

He was born in Cork, Ireland, about forty years ago, came to New-York as a child, and what little schooling he had received in this city. When he took charge of his office he said that he had been in the freight and transportation business. Some of his friends said that he had been a builder, but it was clear that at the time of his going into the Tammany office he was not actually engaged in any business—unless gambling be counted among the legitimate vocations. The directory gave his business as "real estate" and his office No. 122 East One-hundred-and-twenty-fifth-st. That place was a low resort known as the "Golden Oar," of which his brother, "Jack" Nagle, was the nominal proprietor. On the ground floor of this place were a barroom, a shuffleboard and a few tables and chairs. From this room a door led to a hall by which one could reach a stairway leading to the second story. The way was barred, however, to any one who had no pass from "Jack" Nagle or who was unknown to the man on guard. The second floor contained roulette, faro, and other gambling layouts. This gambling den, "Percy" Nagle's "real estate office," was one of the worst of its class. It masqueraded under the name Winona Club. The fact that Nagle was a gambler and the leader of a gang of racetrack and gambling house ruffians probably gave him high standing with the Tammany leaders and aided him in his political aspirations, but he had other points in his favor. He had formerly lived in Westchester County, and the archives of the County Clerk's office show that two indictments for felony had been found against Nagle before he developed a liking for politics.

His misdeeds were not as high in the list as those of Scannell and some others, but they were sufficient to make him eligible to high rank in the

inner circle of Tammany Hall. The indictments had been found against Nagle for gross violation of the statutes against pool selling and gambling. The place with which he was connected in Westchester was known as "Little Monte Carlo." It flourished at a time when the reform movement made New-York uncomfortable for the criminal classes. Gamblers, swindlers, confidence men, poolroom proprietors and sharpers fled before the arm of the law, and much of this riffraff settled in Westchester County, and places like "Little Monte Carlo" flourished. They became the meeting places of New-York "crooks" and thieves, and the residents saw with alarm the danger to which the youth of the places was exposed. "Little Monte Carlo" was finally wiped out, but was well remembered and much spoken of when Nagle appeared in the new part of Commissioner of Street Cleaning under the Croker government.

He is the kind of man whom Croker would naturally select as a district leader, and he was not slow to make good use of his influence. His brother "Jack" was made warden of the City District Prison at a salary of \$2,500; his brother "Garry" got a fat job as commissioner to adjudicate real estate claims, and another relative was appointed superintendent of the city's house for homeless men. The Nagle family was under obligations to the chief, and it could be relied upon to do the work laid out for it by the boss in England. The Street Cleaning Department, according to Nagle, had two objects—to clean the streets and to promote the interests of Tammany Hall, and, while Captain Gibson, who was Colonel Waring's assistant and who managed the department when McCartney was at its head, took care of the street cleaning, Nagle used the department in the interest of Tammany Hall.

His methods were illustrated recently by his treatment of James Wilson, a clerk in his department. Wilson was a Divver man and opposed Foley in his fight for the leadership of his district. Nagle was with Sullivan and Foley and "agin" any one who worked or spoke in the interest of Divver. Wilson held his place under the Civil Service law, and, believing himself free to act as he pleased on that account, took sides with the man whom Nagle opposed. The big street cleaner will not "stand for" independence on the part of men who work under him, and in order to bring that fact home to them the clerk was deprived of his place, and as a further punishment was detailed to drive an ashcart, although he was receiving pay at the rate of \$1,500 a year. The clerk had to wear a hat-piece like the ordinary ashcart men, and this plate, bearing the number "500," he showed at a meeting while a friend gave a history of his case. "This dirty trick was done at the suggestion of Foley," said the speaker. "When he found he could not throw Wilson out he got Nagle to take him out of his regular work and put him on an ashcart."

This action was characteristic of Nagle, who rose from the place of an ordinary "cheap sport" to that of district ruler in a short time. He was content at one time to exercise his pull with the men who patrolled the district in which favorite gambling resorts were situated, while now he rules the police and is the power behind the police captain in his part of the city. More than a year ago his influence with Tammany was so great that merchants and business men in the northern part of the city were afraid to demand their own plain rights if they found that their claims clashed with "Percy" Nagle.

The fact that Nagle's department is organized in the interest of Tammany Hall was shown last month, when it became known that the "shakedown" system had been introduced in the street cleaning service, and that poor laborers who received pay at the rate of \$7.50 a year were compelled to pay 50 cents a week into the Tammany pool. One of the foremen also declared that in addition to this Tammany tax the sweepers had to pay \$50 a year to one of Nagle's uniformed employees. There are about thirty-three hundred names on the payroll of the Street Cleaning Department, and assessments such as were mentioned by the men who complained about the "shakedown" system instituted by the Nagle administration give Tammany Hall a neat little working capital.

Under orders from the District Attorney investigations have been made as to the management of the Street Cleaning Department, and it has been found that large sums of money have been squandered since Nagle's administration began. Under Colonel Waring scows were towed to the sea at an average cost of about \$18, while under Nagle the price has gone up to \$79. About \$135,000 of the city money has been thrown away on this item alone. In addition to this mismanagement, it has been known for some time that Nagle puts the city to unnecessary expense by employing scows from friends while the city property, purchased and maintained for service in his department, is allowed to remain idle and to deteriorate because of its not being used. Daly & Ivins receive contracts without competition because the commissioner fails to advertise. John D. Daly, of the favored firm, is a friend of the commissioner, who, like his chief at the Democratic Club, shows that the way to keep friends is to help them.

THE SOUVENIR POSTAL CARD CRAZE.

From The London News.

The souvenir postal card craze has reached its height in Germany. The Imperial Postoffice instituted a check for a week, and discovered that the daily average of these pictorial mementos of travel reached the enormous total of 1,446,938. The postage paid on these cards averaged £3,450 a day!