Literary News and Criticism.

A Study of Poverty in Relation to Childhood and Education.

Under the title of "The Bitter Cry of the Children" (The Macmillan Company) Mr. John Spargo has made a useful contribution to a subject involving problems that every year press with the more urgency upon the attention of the public. The immediate cause of the book would appear to have been the excitement aroused by the statement made by Robert Hunter last year, in his volume on "Poverty," that there are probably no fewer than from 60,000 to 70,000 children in New-York City alone "who often arrive at school hungry and unfitted to do well the work required." The statement was understood to mean that so many children went "breakfastless" to school every day, a not unnatural inference. "In that form," as Mr. Spargo allows, "the statement was naturally and very justly criticised, for, of course, nothing like that number of children go absolutely without breakfast," and Mr. Hunter, in the introduction he has written to Mr. Spargo's volume, has seen fit to substitute the word "underfed" for "hungry," as used in his own book. The Salvation Army at the time undertook to supply breakfasts for the starving children, and the Board of Education instituted an investigation. The results of both movements appeared to disprove Mr. Hunter's somewhat loosely stated opinion.

In the mean time, however, Mr. Spargo had begun a personal investigation in the schools and in pupils' homes, which, while far from exhaustive, tended largely to bear out Mr. Hunter's contention, at least in its modified form. So far as it went, the author's inquiry was much more intimate and searching than that made by the teachers, who mostly contented themselves, he declares, with asking "those children who have not had breakfast this morning, stand up"—a method as lazy as it was likely to defeat the purposes of the investigation. It is impossible to go into Mr. Spargo's statistics, which are admittedly incomplete and inconclusive, but they are sufficiently startling to recall public attention to the subject, and to raise anew the problem of poverty in its relation to childhood and education. Some of the individual instances that came under the author's observation were pitiful in the extreme, and the number of children he actually encountered who were living on only one or two meals a day, and those consisting almost entirely of bread and tea or coffee, were such as to give pause to those who lightly dismissed Mr. Hunter's hasty generalization.

The facts and the conclusions that he drew from them in regard to underfed school children led Mr. Spargo to extend his inquiry into the condition of working children, and to go further back into an investigation of the general subject of the nourishment of the children of the poor from their very birth. The results of these studies and the remedial measures which he suggests are embodied in the present volume. It is to be regretted that the author has shown an inclination to jump at conclusions from the meagre data at his disposal and a tendency to fall into the slipshod methods that characterize so much of the half-baked sociological literature of the day; for the conditions which he treats are real enough and the problem is vital enough to demand the best powers of the ablest minds and the united energy of the whole people to bring about its solution. Mr. Spargo at least deserves credit for the individual work he has accomplished and for the interesting manner in which he has presented it. He has, so to speak, blazed a way into the jungle, and even if the path that he marks out is not the one that will ultimately be followed, he has nevertheless succeeded in revealing more than a little of the end to be gained and of the difficulties to be encountered.

Since compulsory education has been established in the United States as a purely self-protective measure, in order that the children of the country shall be fitted to become good citizens, he urges that the same argument equally prevails to render the children fit to receive the education already provided for them; underfed children are unable to keep up with their classes, apt to become discouraged, and to leave school to assume tasks which they are equally unfitted to perform, and pauperization is the almost inevitable result. State-supplied meals accordingly, he contends, would in no way increase the tendency to pauperization, but would, on the other hand, enable those who are now condemned to lives of misery, poverty and crime to become healthy, strong and self-supporting men and women. There is no more reason, he claims, why the state or city fed child should thereby feel pauperized than by receiving his education gratis or by availing himself of the privileges of a free library. It is a large subject, and Mr. Spargo is far from claiming that he has said the last word on it. Many of his words are random and appear to be self-contradictory. Yet, if his book shall serve, as it doubtless will, to stir up an agitation of these significant questions, it cannot be regarded as having been written in vain. His tone and his purpose are earnest, and if his figures are often unsatisfactory and his percentages largely guesswork, he has at least pointed the need of better statistics, which others may be moved to supply.

The meek and humble attitude of wives toward husbands will be canvassed in Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler's forthcoming book, "In Subjection." In this novel the heroine of a former story, Isabel Carnaby, will reappear as a married woman.

A pretty little book, full of extremely obvious sentiment, is M. Maurice Maeterlinck's "Old Fashioned Flowers and Other Out-of-Door Studies" (Dodd, Mead & Co.). What would humanity be if it did not know the flowers? —and how much more delightful are the oldtime flowers than their stiff, modern supplanters—these are matters discussed in more or less fine language by the "Belgian shakespeare." How far he is from the knowledge of "that inward eye, Which is the bliss of Solitude" his pages on the Alpine valleys behind Mentone reveal. He, at least, is not the poet to sing aright those wild, bewitching rifts above the blue Mediterranean. An excellent example of his style is this description of chrysanthemums:

Here, for instance, is the marvellous family of the stars: flat stars, bursting stars, diaphanous stars, solid and fleshly stars, milky ways and constellations of the earth that correspond with those of the firmament. Here are the proud plumes that await the diamonds of the dew; here, to put our dreams to shame, the fascinating poem of unreal tresses: wise, precise and meticulous tresses; mad and miraculous tresses; honeyed moonbeams, golden bushes and flaming whirlpools; curls of fair and smiling maidens, of fleeing nymphs, of passionate bacchantes, of swooning sirens, of cold virgins, of frolicsome children, whom angels, mothers, fauns, lovers have caressed with their calm or quivering hands. And, then, here, pell mell, are the monsters that cannot be classed: hedgehogs, spiders, curly endives, pineapples, pomfitts of Tudor roses, shells, vapors, breaths, stalactites of ice and falling snow, a throbbing hail of sparks, wings, flashes, fluffy, pulpy, fleshy things, warlike, bristles, funeral piles and skyrockets, bursts of light, a stream of fire and sulphur.

The eleven unimportant notices of French and German books which Thackeray once contributed to "The Foreign Quarterly Review" make up the material of the volume lately published in London, with much blowing of trumpets, as "The New Sketch Book." They served their purpose well enough—they were useful to the editors and readers of the periodical and they were to Thackeray mildly remunerative pot-boilers. He did not choose to preserve them among his miscellanies, and there is no good reason under the sun why they should be printed now. The solid practical truth is that this scraping together of material discarded by famous writers is not done with any real regard for literature. The scraper is looking for pence and "kudos"; this is a truth about which no reputable editor and publisher has any illusions.

Mr. Henry James, setting forth his impressions of America in "The North American Review," reaches this month the serious question of Boston. Alas for the ideals of youth! The returned traveller finds in the city which once prided itself on its superiority to things materialistic, the same money craze that has distressed him elsewhere. But in one place at least Mr. James had his emotions happily stirred. It was in the Art Museum, where, among the antiques, he found himself feeling, in the presence of "the perhaps just too conscious grace of a certain little wasted and dim-eyed head of Aphrodite," that his function of the restless analyst "should simply give way, in common decency, to that of the sonneteer." He gives us no poetry, but, instead, a little note which we find somehow more suggestive than anything he has thus far been inspired to say about his native land.

For it is an impression by itself, and I think quite worth the Atlantic voyage, to catch in the American light the very fact of the genius of Greece. There are things we don't know, feelings not to be foretold, till we have had that experience —which I commend to the raffiné of almost any other clime. I should say to him that he has not seen a fine Greek thing till he has seen it in America. It is, of course, on the face of it, the most merciless case of transplanting—the mere moral of which, none the less, for application, becomes by no means flagrant. The little Aphrodite, with her connections, her antecedents and references exhibiting the maximum of breakage, is no doubt as lonely a jewel as ever strayed out of its setting; yet, what does one quickly recognize but that the intrinsic lustre will have, so far as that may be possible, doubled. She has lost her background, the divine creature—has lost her company, and is keeping, in a manner, the strangest; but so far from having lost an iota of her power, she has gained unspeakably more, since what she essentially stands for she here stands for alone, rising ineffably to the occasion. She has, in short, by her single presence, as yet, annexed an empire, and there are strange glimmers of moments when, as I have spoken of her consciousness, the very knowledge of this seems to lurk in the depth of her beauty. Where was she ever more, where was she ever so much, a goddess—and who knows but that, being thus divine, she foresees the time when, as she has "moved over," the place of her actual whereabouts will have become one of her shrines?

Mr. Rider Haggard's new novel, which is soon to appear, is described as a mingling of romance and character study. It is to be called "The Way of the Spirit." It has for hero a man whose career is determined by a piece of tragedy.

The queer things that may happen to a poet who collects his stray verses in the midst of more serious work are suggested in a letter which Mr. Andrew Lang sends to "The London Athenæum":

I heartily agree with the praise which the reviewer of my "New Collected Rhymes" gives to a piece called "The Food of Fiction." It is charming. But it is not by me. The "Rhymes" were printed from a copy of a manuscript collection of my verses made by a friend, who had inserted several things which I detected as non mea poma. But "The Food of Fiction" I supposed to be my own till a lady told me that it was hers, and that it had appeared in "The Sign of the Ship" in "Longman's Magazine." Then I remembered the circumstances. Unfortunately, this was the lady's one flight in song.

I am sorry to say that another piece in the volume is by another lady; critical readers may detect it if they can. In excuse I can only plead the example of Sir Walter Scott, who not only appropriated and published as his own some lines by a very different person, but attributed Cleveland's song in "The Pirate" to Byron, and announced that in a collection of his minor pieces published about 1818, he did not pretend to know exactly which were due to his fancy and which to his memory.

I also long since accused Mr. Austin Dobson of the authorship of verses of which he proved me to have been guilty.

Little half finished watercolor sketches, partly dashes of color, partly black and white dots and scratches—to such a collection of a traveller's reminders we may justly compare the leaves from her diary which Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) includes in a small volume entitled "The Spirit of Rome" (John Lane Company). Tiny glimpses of Rome, her churches, her gardens, her ruins, bits of color from the Campagna and from hillside villages not far away, recall unnumbered delights to those who have once felt the enchantment of the ancient city and its outlying loveliness. Here is an effective sketch at Marino:

Lake Albano seen from above, waters reflecting black storm, sere oakwoods of Rocca di Papa stormy purple too, and round the highest Latin peak, which looks like an altar slab, a great inky storm, water, hills, sky, all threatening inky green and violet, and against them, on the hill ridge of stones, the delicate pale pink chandeliers of the asphodels.

How does the asphodel, "the flower of dream, the flower of poetry, appear to the wanderer beside the myrtle woods of Anzio? Here is a portrait:

Deep plantations, little fields, like those of cultivated narcissus, compact masses of thin pale salmon and gray shot colors and grayish leaves or fringes, each flower distinct against field or sky, on the ledges of rock and the high earth banks. The flowers are rarely perfect when you pick them, some of the starry blossoms having withered and left an untidy fringe instead, but at a distance this half decay gives them a singular distinction, makes the light fall on the very tips of the silvery buds, sinking the stretching out branches and picking out the pale rose color with gray. The beauty of the plant is in the candlestick thrust of the branches. The flower has a faint oniony smell, but fresh like box hedge.

Vernon Lee knows her subject and loves it. What she has to say she says so sympathetically that the reader cannot but be grateful. Yet, looking at the book from another point of view, it is impossible to avoid noticing the incongruity of the author's desperately "precious" style in a work dedicated to so tremendous a theme. It is not that we want every writer who treats of Rome to try to roll out Gibbonian periods—that would be fatal. But in the midst of our reading of these pretty pages we have thought of a butterfly hovering about the dome of the Pantheon, we have seemed to hear the *frou-frou* of silken skirts, breaking the majestic silence in the ruins of the palaces of the Cæsars.

How does the reader pronounce the word "myth"? A correspondent of "Notes and Queries" observes that most people, as a matter of course, pronounce it "mith," rhyming with "smith." Then he adds that it "is often heard at Oxford and elsewhere as 'meith,' rhyming with 'blithe'." "In the 'Oxford Essays,' 1856, Max Müller spelled the word 'mythe,' which he afterward abandoned for the customary orthography."

Two forthcoming English reprints calculated to interest many readers are Mme. Campau's "Memoirs of Marie Antoinette" and Waterton's "Wanderings in South America."

GREAT NEUROPATHS.

The Sufferings of Captains of the World.

Tighe Hopkins, in The London Tribune.

Of supreme captains of the world there are but six or seven, and scarce one among them exhibits genius in its healthiest colors. In ambush for nearly all of them some form of nerve disorder lurks. Grotesque as the statement seems, epilepsy, manifest in greater or in less degree, revolves upon their destinies. Charlemagne, the great and wise captain of the Franks, who stands for feudal civilization, who "snatched from darkness all the lands he conquered," and who reared an empire that no hand but his was able to control, is almost the sole exception. What says the bead-roll?

At thirty-two Alexander the Great, who had reckoned himself a god, died during, or just after, one of his frenetic orgies. Cæsar, the foremost man of the ancient world, had strange convulsions in his later years, and it may be that the dagger of Brutus saved him from declining into madness. Marlborough, who was married to a violent woman, and whose only son died in boyhood, was epileptic during his ten last years of life. The adventurous and daring Clive, world famous and the conqueror of India, at forty was decidedly a neuropath. In his memorable duel with a brother officer he missed his aim, flung away his weapon, and cried: "Shoot and be damned! I said you cheated, and I say so still." Clive was passionate, morbid, gouty, and an opium eater. At forty-nine, rich and of unstinted reputation, he committed suicide. Wellington was distinctly epileptic. His fainting fits after Waterloo were frequent, and it was an attack of epilepsy that carried him off. The Romanoffs have been neuropathic for nearly three centuries, and one of the epileptic fits of Peter the Great is "said to have lasted three days." Charles V, whose mother was insane, had fits in his youth, and was gouty, bald, and scrofulous. Frederick the Great (from the face of whose father, when he took a walk, says Macaulay, "every human being fled"), reared in a perfect hell of a palace, had a certain general unsoundness of mind, to which mercy was altogether foreign. The stock of Oliver Cromwell was not overhealthy, and of the neuropathic tendencies of the Protector himself there is sufficient evidence. Mahomet—but let Mahomet rest. Joan of Arc, the divine girlwoman, seer and soldier, who came from her sheepfolds of Lorraine to make victorious the oriflamme of France, Joan heard voices and saw visions, and was kissed, she said, by the celestials.

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