

SELF CONTENT.

Shall we be contented with what we are, and only try to grow naturally and regularly? Why not. Human beings are as if all the trees in the forest entered into a struggle to be some other sort of trees. The pear, instead of growing up a pear, with ring after ring of pear wood, and crop after crop of juicy Bartletts, aims to be an elm; and the elm is ambitious to be an oak. There is an uneasy restlessness among us.

What makes it worse is that religion fosters it. I do not doubt but that some people need occasionally to be stirred up to a state of self-dissatisfaction—a good thorough contempt for themselves; but this is far from being a generally desirable state of mind. The preachers used to dwell on the wickedness of human nature; on natural, original and universal depravity. It is possible that this sort of pabulum for a couple of hundred years has created a drift toward self-discontent.

It is probable, however, that it has worked the other way. For people have a faculty for applying all general truths to their neighbors, and holding their own cases to be exceptional. No one ever, in a sane condition, considered himself or herself worthy of damnation; it is other folks who came under the ban. However, religious teaching has led to and helped in the restlessness that is now getting the better hand of us. It has taught great expectations, quite out of keeping with our deserts, or our capacity. The idlest fools expect, immediately after death, to know everything. Those who will not earn a shilling expect to be fed and pampered without work. The meanest little pinchback spirits expect to be angels of the highest rank.

What I think we should preach is not satisfaction with any special condition of things or of character, but satisfaction with development. It is as living, growing things that we must be convinced. No one is the same tomorrow as today. The question is, what kind of growth are we taking on?

Nothing is more certain than heredity. Late science has placed great emphasis on this. Everyone is largely determined before birth. No two can be alike. You cannot become a copy of St. Paul, or of any other saint, try as hard as you may. You will not only have to carry your bodily features, but your mental features as well. You will not be able to get rid of your essential self. How do the preachers expect you will do this—by praying, or the teachers by studying?

The proper thing is to accept yourself at a just estimate; be quite content with what you have to begin on. Only this must be added, that no one is incapable of modifying himself by growth. This growth is ours to control. It depends on our wills and purposing, as the growth of our bodies depends on the food we eat.

Some of the best persons I have ever seen have been immensely self-complaisant. On the other hand the mean men I have met are the least contented with themselves. I must make one exception—a noted and notorious divine—who for forty years had never grown or enlarged, and never doubted his perfection. This man's undisturbed poise I should like to see overturned. But it will not happen. He was born with the predominant idea of complaisance. There is not a fiber of his constitution that is manly, noble, gentle, strong. His home is Blue Beard's Palace; his instinct is tyranny. He never doubts himself.

Self-discontent is not seldom a matter of disease. The stomach touches the brain with a nerve. Dyspepsia leads to conscience. The whole nature is carried through a series of pangs and contortions. The result may be visions of higher things. There is no doubt but these spells often lead to higher conceptions of life and duty. It will not hurt a mean man to have one hour of despising himself. If he can not get a just estimate of himself in any other way a sudden shock or self-revelation is just the thing. But this is not the rule with human nature.

Is it not time that common school education considered character? Why shall not children be as carefully trained to an estimate of themselves as to an estimate of grammatical structure and cordwood? The old, profound educational saw, "Know thyself," is totally ignored in our schools. The young are taught to know plants, stones, stars even, but never themselves. They are simply known as Tom, Billy, Jane and Bess; but who and what Bess is, or what kind of a compound Tom is, is never discussed. Character and the rattan are supposed to have some relations.

But, instead of this, every one is expected at some time to wake to

a vision of himself as a wicked, woe-begone, damnable sort of creature, deserving infinite punishment for not being something else. Or, if you take the milder modern statement, he is to have a vision of himself as "coming short of the beautitudes." This is St. George Mivart's notion. All along the road you see there is no distinct recognition that each person is a definite, precise, distinct creature unlike all others, and not possibly to be made over like others. Tom is to be comprehended exactly as the ship-builder comprehends a fine stick from the Maine forests or an oak from Michigan. They are not to be confused; hardly to be compared. We educate too much on the lump.

But I go further and urge a very much larger and more decisive spirit of moral and intellectual content. Our ambition should be more moderate and rational, even in affairs spiritual. I do not know a more unwholesome book than the "Meditations of Thomas a Kempis." The whole tendency to moral-anatomical analysis is unwise. It never came to anything. Meaner folk never existed than those who, believing themselves vile, have tried to make themselves better by thinking of it and praying over it. "Go out and cut mesquite bushes," was the wise advice given by a Mexican bishop. Go to work. Do honorably. Live industriously.

I have not advocated self-content without growth, but satisfaction in yourself as a growing being. And in such an age as ours growth is very easily secured. There is hardly a person in the United States who, willing to improve, may not do so. Fill your schools and your churches with this ambition and you will secure a nobler class of citizens and saints.

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THEATRICAL NOTES.

Mme. Janauschek will give a series of lectures on dramatic subjects the coming winter.

In San Francisco the Baldwin theatre refuses to admit children. The California refuses to admit babies in arms and the same rule prevails at Stockwell's and the Tivoli.

W. S. Gilbert, after a tiresome search for a musician of a sufficiently appreciative spirit, has at length entrusted the music of his new opera to Senor Albeniz, a Spanish composer, whose "Magic Opal" is somewhat known.

The Bostonians have abbreviated their New York season by cancelling five weeks beginning January 4. During their season at the Broadway theatre they will produce a new opera entitled "In Mexico," libretto by C. T. Dazey, music by Oscar Well.

Maud Hobson, of London, has written and acted "A Successful Mission," a sketch representing the appeal of a dull, arrogant English vestryman to a variety actress to get her to discourage the attentions of his foolish son. She does, and wins over the vestrymen, who finds that stage people are better than he supposed.

In France the ballet girl begins her career usually at 7 years old. She is then paid at the rate of 40c for each appearance in public, as demoiselle de quadrille \$20 to \$40 a month, as a coryphee \$50 to \$60, and sujet \$60 to \$120. A dancer of the first class will get from \$120 to \$300 a month, and a star from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

It is rumored in theatrical circles that Henry E. Abbey and Sir Augustus Harris, who are soon to arrive in this country, are planning a big operatic deal, which contemplates the management of one great opera company in such a way that its time shall be divided between the leading cities of England and the United States.

Hope Booth, a niece of Edwin Booth, and the youngest star in England (she was the youngest American star at the close of the last season,) has the courage not only to try her luck as a star in England, but has made a lease of the Garrick, in London, for three years and will manage the business as well as act. She will make her London debut in a play written for her by Charles T. Vincent, entitled "Little Miss Cute."

Denman Thompson is passing the summer on his farm at Swanzy, N. H., surrounded by his children and grandchildren. Mr. Thompson will play a long engagement in New York next fall, reviving "The Old Testament" with many new features. His daughter Annie will play 'Rickety Ann,' but his son Frank will leave the stage to become business manager of the company. Walter Gale will return to the organization to play his original part of 'Happy Jack,' the tramp.