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SARAH B. HARRIS, : : : EDITOR

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OBSERVATIONS.

Observations.

The day of the portentous ex-cathedra editorial has passed away. The best editorials of the day are but observations such as one man makes to another over a pipe, before the library fire or on the way to his office. There are no great editors as in the days of Greeley. Few editors write with the consciousness of a calling, a mission or of special inspiration. They modestly make observations about the events of the day before, because certain columns of the papers they edit are devoted to comment on current topics.

If they desire to mould public opinion and they are crass enough to let evidence of their intention appear in their editorials, the purpose is by this means self-defeated. Easily, unconsciously, obviously, with perfect breeding and again effortlessly as one man speaking to another at the club, the most readable editorials are written.

University extension is doubtless a feasible way of piping information from the university to the men and women of the state who are too busy to go to school any more, but the informative manner of the teacher is fatal to an editor, who addresses his audience from no elevation whatever.

Even the publishers of Harper's Weekly have at last appreciated the distaste of the general for airs and have discontinued their old editorial department, which was very heavy and somewhat stilted. In its place appears a department labeled "The Observer," readable, pertinent, unlabored. Mr. E. S. Martin, who for some years has written the paragraphs contained under the heading "This Busy World," has monopolized the attention of the subscribers to Harper's Weekly who are interested in com-

mentary. It has required a long time for the publishers to appreciate the fact that the subscribers were reading not the first pages of the paper, but the last ones which contained Mr. Martin's graceful, pointed observations. The transition to another editorial style was made a month or so ago under the plea of hot weather and the need for relaxing summer reading. The weather is cooler, but there is no indication that the lower temperature will be accompanied by a return to the long-winded, profound mannered editorial affected by "Harper's" for nearly forty five years. Notwithstanding the great and lasting merits of the periodical in question I know of no other publication so slow to respond to the changing tastes of a sophisticated people. Therefore, Harper's abandonment of the formal, portentous, didactic and high-moral-ground editorial is significant.

The Conservative.

For the same reason that people are fond of looking at photographs of places they have seen and of people whom they know, newspaper and magazine readers like to read reports of meetings they have attended or critiques of theatrical performances they have witnessed. Fond of novelty as we are, we like enough of the old, the familiar and the expected to make us feel at home in new experiences. Like a man being lowered into an excavation, the rope which connects him with the uninteresting dirt above ground is, for the time being, more precious to him than the prospect of finding gold in the deep hole. It is conceivable that if the rope should break and leave him balanced on a narrow shelf which revealed the richest ore vein he would only have eyes and hands for the new rope. There may be other ways of extricating him from his perilous situation, but the man down below can think only of a rope with three or four muscular, friendly human hands at the other end of it. When he is drawn up into safety, when he is standing once more on the familiar, commonplace, uninteresting dirt piled about the opening, the rope is again ignored.

There are millions of feet of rope piled in the stores and it is a barren subject of thought and of conversation. But that dull, yellow, thick vein of gold which he caught a glimpse of as he stood on a narrow, crumbling ledge of earth, waiting for death or life in the shape of a rope, has infinite possibilities of romance and his imagination still returns to it.

People who leave their homes to travel in foreign countries do not think in leaving that they will be glad to see the faces they have seen all their lives with no desire for further knowledge. Yet everyone is familiar with the thrills, the enthusiastic affection with which travelers greet travelers, who at home are mutually

repulsive. Travelers whose homes are in villages affectionately read the advertisements of their grocers and druggists in the home papers. These advertisements recall the familiar "store fronts" and satisfy the longing of the eyes for a view of which the retina has received thousands of impressions.

The novelist or the writer is most popular who in a way photographs what the people are thinking, and presents it to them as his own idea. The man who ignores tradition and the rules of the profession he belongs to, does so invariably at the cost of popularity and of contemporary appreciation. In the next century men may have progressed so far that what was ridiculously impossible in the prophet's time is in the way of an old story then.

For being born with a prophet's vision John the Baptist was put to death and Galileo was racked. The multitude moves slowly, and woe to the man who attempts to accelerate its progress. Ridicule, or the punishment of isolation, as a child is put in the corner, has superseded death by stoning for the man who dares to see further and clearer than the procession whose vision is clouded by the dust of its own marching.

But because most of the people live but a trifle above sea-level, because the mountain peaks occur only occasionally, because most of the people work themselves along cautiously from the known to the unknown and still cling to the old, because a tree or any sort of vegetation of permanent value to a generation grows imperceptibly, because it took God thousands of years to make gold and silver, jewels and coal for man, because evolution itself is an interminable procession, because seers, poets and geniuses are impractical and make a mess of their own lives and of all others with whom they come into intimate contact, finally because of the noiseless, unhurried centuries, decades, years, months and days, I believe that God's way is the best way, and so long as His way is slow it is expedient for us who have not the Promethean fire to patiently keep step and shoulder to shoulder with the rank and file of the great procession,—that procession of man that began when the first monkey had an inspiration to be something more than a monkey and whose van reaches farther forward than mortals can see.

Shermanized.

The vogue of silk skirts and silk linings, the fancy for stiff crinoline and the comparatively high price of silk inspired an ingenious man to invent a substitute which is stiff and rustles opulently. I suppose the man's name was Mercer, for his invention is called Mercerized fabric. It is a good substitute and the inventor is doubtless proud of his ingenuity, for he

gave it his own name and it is likely to become as well known as silesia.

A professor in the state university of Nebraska has invented a method of teaching literature which in justice to him should bear his name. His process imparts a certain lustre and style to the student of English, but it lacks body and permanency. The process has not been patented and is still unchristened, but it is unique. Its usefulness has not yet been demonstrated. No other educational institution of standing has adopted it. When the Shermanized methods of teaching the theory, history and practice of English are generally adopted, they may be known by the name of Sherman and the inventor's name will add a new gloss to the fame of the Nebraska state university.

In reading "The Confessions of a Psychologist" by Dr. G. Stanley Hall, president of Clark university, I was impressed by the soundness of Dr. Hall's views in regard to the manner of lecturing to undergraduates. "I have also long been convinced that the mediaeval method of lecturing is unpedagogic and ought to be obsolete. It strove to present with a systematization too ostentatious a view of a subject so complete that reading was almost unnecessary. Students recorded with great assiduity the words of the master as dictations. * * * The idea of the best student was to have a full and beautiful heft or body of notes for his own future reference and for the use, perhaps for pay, of his less diligent classmates. They made little or no use of libraries, but attended lectures sometimes many hours a day. This method naturally tended to produce schools of disciples. * * * Reputations grew great in the perfervid minds of youth in this feudal, if it be not better called tribal stage of development. This was the direct continuation of the method of the porch, the grove and the academy. It gave the masters a moral and therefore a disciplinary eminence and developed the instinct of fealty and discipleship in youth. * * * It tends to develop an hypertrophied amour propre in the professor. * * * All have heard anecdotes of professors who announced to their classes with an air of slightly veiled omniscience, that they would, the next day, demonstrate the existence of God, as though he had been waiting all these years for such demonstration. * * * The mediaeval method also * * * developed the professor who ignores all other authors and who lectures entirely upon his own discoveries."

"The customs of professors in the guidance of research differ as widely as human nature. Some reduce the student almost to the condition of a famulus, who must fetch and carry, hew wood and draw water at first. I can name books of much scope and value, wherein all the work has been done, not by the professor who appears to be its author, but by his stu-