

Literary.

Someone, it makes no difference who, once said that for a lonely man the best kind of a letter was one that was poorly written and obscurely composed. The effort necessary to decipher the words and then to find out what they meant was supposed to add zest to the epistle. For anyone who expects to be wrecked on a desert island and get his mail at long intervals Prof. Ladd of Yale would be a perfect correspondent. The University possesses no specimen of his chirography and it may be excellent; but as a thought concealer he is certainly without a peer. A literary text book on psychology would be too much to expect. Most of Prof. Wolte's students, however, would be willing even to sacrifice a little of Ladd's science if in return they could get a modicum of respectable English.

We do not wish to encroach upon the exchange editor's rights, and so are a little in doubt as to the ethical propriety of discussing an article which appeared in the last issue of "our esteemed contemporary." Yet anything so extremely literary as the article in the last *Hesperian* on the study of Greek and Latin, certainly lies in the province of the literary editor. The production, as the saying goes in Junior Themes, has one fault, which is quite serious. The author's thought is a little off. We have all noticed the learned plea which has of late been advanced by Mr. Stead of the *Review of Reviews*, for a more natural method of teaching languages; but really, wasn't it a little unfair to him to take his idea and apply it to Latin and Greek without giving him credit for it? Nevertheless, it was possibly wise, as Mr. Stead might have objected to such a misuse of his darling child. As applied to modern languages, which we all hope, vainly, no doubt, to learn to talk and write, the plan is undoubtedly excellent. Who wants to learn to talk Greek, semi-modern though it may be, or Latin, dead as our beloved Mr. Egan's mummies? The sole object of the study of

ancient tongues, or rather pens, beyond a better understanding of our own language, is the ability to enjoy ancient literature. If we throw away our lexicons, grammar and text book, and begin to ask for our meals in Latin, it will be a long while before we know whether it was Cæsar or Virgil who built that awful bridge across the Rhine. Moreover, we will probably get hungry waiting for our meals. Max O'Rell says that Americans run everything into the ground. This idea is another example of our earthward tendency.

The development of magazines is possibly the most important literary movement of the nineteenth century. In them we find literature of all kinds and to them we must look for whatever is characteristic of the present time. Begging Mr. Howell's pardon, the novel of today is not all that it might be. It may be that the impatience of the average reader with the "continued story" is the cause of its weakness. The suspense caused by leaving a fair heroine in tears and permitting her to weep for a whole month without telling us why, is aggravating in the extreme. It is in the short sketch that the magazine reader takes refuge. It is the characteristic *fin du siècle* fiction. In writing of this kind Mr. Richard Harding Davis is particularly successful. His stories are fresh and interesting. They are not ambitious as to plot. Often mere descriptions of character, they are excellent chiefly because Mr. Davis restricts his efforts to people and scenes with which he is familiar. He remembers the often repeated warning that it is necessary to live before one can write. Instead of sending his characters to Africa or beginning a story, "It was a sunny morning in the year 2,000 B. C.," he sticks to New York and the present decade. The life he describes is purely metropolitan. "Sassiety" young men and Bowery toughs figure quite largely. In these, at first sight, unprepossessing subjects, Mr. Davis manages to find pleasant traits. They have their good points. Van Bibber's heart opens to the two young