

### Shall We Have an American Conservatory?

THE theater of America has no "traditions," such as have nourished the Théâtre-Français. Our theater has little of the artistic surroundings that have proved so helpful to the Meiningen company and to Henry Irving. Where, then, lies the hope of our theater?

The revival of the "stock-company" system and all the necessary reforms of the American stage can be sought for in a cultivation of the art-spirit in the people (in place of the speculative mania), in the erection *here* of a standard of taste.

The Paris Conservatoire has furnished heretofore this standard for the whole theatric world. Must we go to France for our dramatic instruction? Can we not even better it here?

The professors of the Conservatoire are also the principal actors of the Théâtre-Français. Teaching and acting are two allied professions, but based on different modes of mental discipline. The actor is an artist; the teacher should be a scientist. The empirical and imitative method of "coaching" for the stage has given way in this country especially to the methods of scientific training.

When we realize that in the United States we possess the best-trained teachers in the various branches of the dramatic art, in pantomime, elocution, vocalization, etc., hardly excepting the French, the best teachers of these specialties in the world; and when we realize also that our people have more dramatic instinct inborn than most other nations,—than the German or English, for example,—the thought will occur to every one: "Why not an American Conservatory of Dramatic Art?"

First of all, it is essential for the success of such a project that it should have the sympathy and support of our professional actors. Now, among the ladies and gentlemen of the "profession" all differences of opinion upon the desirability of an American School of Dramatic Art resolve themselves into the old standing debate on the relative value of *experience* in comparison with *training*.

Experience is a great teacher. But no one could learn to play the violin, for instance, under the teaching of experience alone; and the actor has a much finer and more complex instrument for the application of his skill. Surely a little attuning of the instruments, body and voice, a little philosophy, a little study of the history of the human heart, would round many a mechanic or amateur of the stage into an artist.

Whatever reforms are needed for the stage can be easily and quickly brought about by means of a good training-school.

F. H. Sargent.

### Silk Culture at Home.

WHEN, in 1881, a number of ladies in Philadelphia opened in that city an exhibition of raw silk, cocoons, and silk fabrics, general attention was drawn to the fact that silk can be produced in nearly every State in the Union. This was, in a sense, known before, and it was known also that practically no silk was produced here. The amount of raw silk imported was very great, aggregating at least twenty millions a year.

The object of the exhibition in Philadelphia was to prove that silk culture was an employment in which women and young people could engage with profit. Through the liberality of a well-known business house in that city, prizes were offered for the best cocoons raised in this country. Twenty-six competitors offered their cocoons, and, from a critical examination of the silk produced, the material was pronounced in every respect as good as the best Italian silk.\* In 1882 there was a second competition, and thirty-six samples of American silk were offered. This spring a third competition and a second exhibition brought out seventy-seven lots of cocoons from twenty States. The highest award this year was given to Miss E. Woolson, of Pemberton, N. J., her display averaging six hundred and forty cocoons to a pound, one hundred cocoons yielding a little over three-quarters of an ounce of reeled silk.

This matter of silk culture as a home employment for women has now attracted considerable attention. There has been much discussion both for and against the plan of introducing it as a home-work for farmers' wives and daughters. Remarkable progress has certainly been made in the last few years; and having attended both exhibitions, and having examined the work in various stages, the writer may be prepared to briefly outline the present situation. In the first place, it must be observed that the qualities needed in the work are neatness, carefulness, watchfulness, and patience—precisely the qualities of a trained nurse. None of the labor is heavy, and the only really taxing portion of the work (taxing alone on care and patience) extends over a period of thirty-five days, once a year. The facilities required are one or more light and airy rooms that can be protected from excessive heat, cold, noise, and dust—exactly the requirements of health in a home. In this room must be placed a light framework, on which can be stretched horizontally common netting. The materials required are good, healthy eggs of the silk-worm, and fresh, succulent foliage from the white mulberry, or, in default of this, the osage-orange. The tools required are trained hands and a pair of scissors to cut up the leaves. The work proceeds rapidly from the hatching of the eggs, through the several molting stages, to the final spinning of the cocoons, and during this time the entire work consists in feeding the worms and keeping them in a healthful condition by attention to cleanliness, warmth, and ventilation. The work is light, and there appears to be no good reason why it might not form a part of the year's work of many a farm and plantation throughout the Union.

The objections raised to this work as an industry for women are, that it is only fit for ignorant peasants, and is followed by them in disagreeable and unhealthful places; and, what is of more importance, it does not pay. That ignorant peasants raise silk in a stupid way, does not mean that American women need follow their example. The profitableness of the work turns on our facilities for reeling the silk from the cocoons. The silk-reel occupies precisely the position of the steam-thresher. Not every farmer can own one, but a company of farmers may have one and use it in turn. The amount of silk raised here is as yet too small to make it profitable to set up reeling machin-

\* See "The World's Work" in THE CENTURY for April, 1882.

ery — unless it be, as in California, owned by the State, or, as in Philadelphia, by a private association of ladies interested in the work. Silk is like a diamond — worth money in every currency. If the culture is yet so young that its profitableness is in doubt, it has only to grow, and must of necessity command its market. American silk has been raised, reeled, dyed, spun, and woven into ribbons and fabrics. American women have worn these fabrics and pronounced them as good as foreign silks.

*Charles Barnard.*

#### Schools of Industry.

THERE is a growing demand for industrial schools in the United States. One would have the trades-unions or guilds of artisans take the matter in hand, and establish schools for the training of their own apprentices; another would have the experiment tried in certain schools which it is proposed that the Government shall establish; while a third would have a work-shop in every existing public school. Meantime more industrial schools are now in operation than people generally are aware of. There are a dozen in New York City, only one of which is widely known. The school of the Cooper Union is noted throughout the United States; and it is true that half the whole number of students in industrial art in the entire city are enrolled upon its books. But, notwithstanding its merited and undisputed preëminence, the others are growing, and they contain the "promise and potency" of much good. One of these smaller institutions, the Free Drawing School of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, is the oldest in the city. Its aims are intensely practical, and are not too high to be successfully realized. The object kept in view is to aid young men engaged in the trades by giving them some knowledge of drawing, both general and as applied to their several occupations. Another, the New York Trade School, provides instruction in plumbing, brick-laying, wood-carving, and fresco-painting. This school is maintained by a private gentleman of means, whose philanthropy takes this useful direction. The school of the Turnverein provides free instruction in drawing, and there are small classes in modeling and designing. Several private schools make a specialty of industrial features, of which the best known is that of the Society for Ethical Culture, whose merits Mr. Felix Adler has often set forth. The Society of Decorative Art has done much for art needlework, and has opened a new field for women. Classes in china-painting, and various kindred branches of decorative art, are found everywhere.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt at the application of art to industry is made by the Technical School of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Its projected course of training goes even further than that of the Cooper Union school. It is as yet, however, in an inchoate state, and the number of its pupils is quite small. It is only fair to add that the authorities of the Museum are now taking steps to put the school on a better footing, and to push it with vigor and determination. It is in connection with this school that the attempt has been made to interest different trades-unions in establishing and maintaining classes of apprentices. So far, the matter has been taken up by

only one such society, the National Association of Carriage Builders, who have had a large class in successful operation during the past winter. Other trades have not taken up the idea, more, apparently, from apathy than from active hostility; although it may be said here that the rules adopted by many trades-unions limit strictly the number of apprentices allowed to each firm, the idea being to keep down the supply of competent laborers, in order to keep up the wages of those who are already masters of the trade.

In addition to the general and somewhat indefinite public demand noticed above, another, far more specific and practical, has given an impulse to art-work in almost every department of industry. People of culture, and that more numerous class of wealthy persons who take the symbol for the substance, and attempt to buy their culture as they do their lands, stocks, horses, wines, and sometimes their social position, are demanding artistic houses and furniture, new and better patterns in wall-papers, carpets, chandeliers, cornices, wall-decorations, gas-fixtures, fenders, and everything that goes to make up the general effect of "the house beautiful." All this implies skilled architects, builders, carpenters, stone-cutters, carvers, cabinet-makers, joiners, designers of all sorts, modelers, fresco-painters, upholsterers, and workers in various kinds of metal. The native supply of artisans capable of producing good work in these departments is too small, and the process of equalization between demand and supply is now taking place. It is no wonder, then, that all the industrial schools are full to overflowing, with long lists of applicants waiting for vacancies; nor that there should be an agitation of the question whether hand-work as well as head-work should not form part of the public-school course.

The first important endeavor to answer this question in the affirmative has just been made in Boston. Its results are not yet apparent, and the example may not be extensively followed. So far, the most successful form of industrial school in this country has been that of the Cooper Union — an institution founded by private liberality, and maintained, so far as the instruction is concerned, in the same way. A charge for materials used is found advisable, as it insures a steady interest and application that are wanting where the school is absolutely free of charge.

It has been said that one of the conditions necessary, or at least effectual, in developing skilled craftsmen in this country has been wanting hitherto, and it is not likely to be supplied. There is here no artisan class in which the pursuit of the father is handed down to the son, and generation after generation works with the accumulated knowledge and experience and inherited skill of a line of ancestry. It is not desirable, politically speaking, that our society should become stratified as fixedly as that of France, for instance; and even for the interests of art it may be as well that it should not. Perhaps the superior readiness of Americans to adopt and invent new and improved methods of work may counterbalance the disadvantage of a lack of such inherited skill as has been mentioned.

However that may be, it rests with the future to determine it. Up to the present time we have had in this country, speaking broadly, no native artisans capable of producing really artistic work. Such work has been brought from abroad, especially from France,