

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## The Outlook for Wood-Engraving.

THE recent sale of proofs by the late Frederick Juengling, one of the most capable of American wood-engravers, would seem to indicate that the public interest in this branch of art has not suffered deterioration by reason of the widespread employment for illustrative purposes of the so-called actinic "processes," and that in general the popular taste for proofs of wood-cuts may be depended upon by engravers as a new resource. While it cannot be said that at present the total amount of work done is sufficiently on the increase greatly to encourage new pupils to devote themselves to this branch of art, there are signs of a fuller appreciation of the best work of those who have made and are making wood-engraving, as a school, the chief distinction as yet of American art. This cannot fail to increase with the general growth and spread of the love of art, and one may confidently look forward to a commensurate increase of general excellence in the work produced. The Juengling sale, we believe, was the first auction of wood-engravers' proofs, as such, in this country, and when it is borne in mind that the proofs sold were not without duplicates, the prices paid (from \$2 to \$25, with an average price of \$8) may be considered not only a marked compliment to the individual excellence of Mr. Juengling's work, but also a very gratifying result to the craft in general, a number of whom, in fact, have lately offered proofs for sale with considerable success. Moreover the public, through magazines, periodicals, and books, have been educated to an intelligent knowledge of wood-engraving, which one would think might be depended on to support a market for artists' proofs.

Another evidence in the same direction is to be found in the interest excited by the recent exhibition of American wood-engravings made at the Grolier Club in New York. Here were 259 proofs by 25 exhibitors—a thoroughly representative show of work. Its nucleus was the American contribution to the Paris Exposition, which won for American engravers enviable honors from the International Jury of Award of the Fine Arts section, including the first gold medal for wood-engraving for Mr. Elbridge Kingsley, and other honors for Messrs. Davis, Closson, Putnam, Aikman, Wolf, Kruell, and Davidson. Among the proofs shown were also Japan impressions of the superb *édition de luxe* of the Portfolio issued last year by the Society of American Wood-Engravers. Not only was the exhibition largely attended, but, as we write, we believe the entire collection, by request, is to be taken to Brooklyn, to Cincinnati, to Chicago, and to St. Louis. Already in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the National Museum at Washington, and in national expositions at New Orleans and Atlanta, have been shown in temporary collections examples of what has been done in this branch of art; the willingness of engravers to dispose of proofs suggests that now is an opportune time (while most of the men are yet living who have given

a world-wide reputation to American engraving) for American museums to begin the systematic collection of a fuller historical exhibit of hand-proofs. We are sure that, where the proofs could not be found, the owners of the blocks would be glad to cooperate with art institutions in such a work, as far as might be practicable. Posterity should not be left to gather up in meager or incomplete examples the record of so marked an achievement.

Nor do we agree with those who think that wood-engraving in America has seen its best days, and is likely to be superseded by mechanical "processes." The nature of art is against such a conclusion. Moreover, while current periodical illustration has gained much by the various mechanical or actinic processes in vogue for the reproduction of photographs from nature, and for the reproduction of original pictures, the time still seems to be far distant when wood-engraving must retire in favor of "the process." The process is at its best in reproducing pen-drawings, though it sometimes lacks the delicacy of wood-engraving in that direction also. But while artists often prefer to suffer from the accidents of the process than from the dreaded lack of sympathy and knowledge of the individual wood-engraver, the fact remains that the engraver's art gives results that can be obtained only by the trained hand and the artistic temperament. One reason for this may be found in the fact that the process reduction of an original drawing or painting is not purely mechanical after all; the "touching up" of the plate by the process man is an interference between the artist and the public which may or may not be wisely and effectively and sympathetically conducted. Again, the mechanical reduction makes a new picture, with new problems of effect which the translator,—*i. e.*, the engraver,—if he understands his art, takes fully into consideration. Still, again, there is a satisfaction to the eye in an exquisite wood-engraving which is seldom if ever equaled by the result of any process.

The defects of mechanical agencies in the reproduction of the tones of a work of art are more manifest when one considers what would be the result of representing by any of the current processes such subtle and delicate originals as the Italian old masters upon which Mr. Cole is now engaged for THE CENTURY. The process can copy outlines, but it cannot interpret tones; it cannot think. How much of the beauty of these admirable cuts depends upon the temperament, the originality, the artistic skill, the "personal equation," so to speak, of the man behind the graver! Not a few other Americans have shown themselves capable of dealing successfully with similar tasks, and Mr. Cole's enterprise is the more remarkable simply because it is a systematic application of the services of one of the leading members of his craft to the education of the public in the qualities of the world's masterpieces, as they can be conveyed in black and white. It is fair to say that wood-engraving has not before been employed to a purpose of such lasting value. The success of the ex-

periment suggests that the mission of the art is not likely to be exhausted while there remain beautiful pictures to be represented and skillful artists to represent them. Looking ahead to the development of American painting and sculpture and the esthetic education of the people, there would seem to be a larger field for the engraver in the popular record which will need to be made of the achievements of art. For the present the magazines and weekly periodicals must remain the engraver's mainstay and stimulus. At first glance the illustrated newspaper appears to be militating against him; along with some admirably successful illustrative work it seems to be dulling the edge of popular taste with a deluge of pictures inferior in execution; but the reaction will be to his advantage in emphasizing by contrast the excellence of the art as he pursues it. Meantime, it must be remarked, there has been of late years not only no falling off in the character of work done by wood-engravers, but a steady increase in freedom, in variety, and in all the other qualities that go to make an artistic whole.

#### Nine Thousand Manuscripts.

DURING the past two years from eight thousand five hundred to nine thousand manuscripts were annually submitted to THE CENTURY MAGAZINE for publication. This is an increase over previous years, and does not include the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of propositions submitted with regard to articles. As there has been an increase in the number of periodicals published in America of late years, and as the newspapers are publishing more contributions than ever by writers not on the regular staff, it is evident that there has been an increase in literary activity at least in proportion to the increase in population.

Now out of nine thousand manuscripts a year THE CENTURY can only possibly print four hundred or less. It follows that editing a magazine is not unlike walking into a garden of flowers and gathering a single bouquet. In other words, not to accept an article, a story, a poem, is not necessarily to "reject" it. There may be weeds in the garden,—there must be weeds in the garden,—but the fact that a particular blossom is not gathered into the monthly bouquet does not prove that the editor regarded the blossom as a weed, and therefore passed it by. It would be impossible to sweep all the flowers into a single handful. The "rejected" or "declined" are naturally prone to gibe at sympathetic or apologetic words from editorial sources; so we present the above simile with considerable diffidence. There is truth in it, nevertheless! And it would probably be much easier for editors to make up a number of bouquets from the flowers at their disposal than to gather the single one for which alone they have room.

The general impression of a lifelong reader of manuscripts is that the quality does not deteriorate—that, in fact, it improves. Such a reader, moreover, is greatly impressed by the wide diffusion of literary ability. There are certainly very many more people who can write a good story, a good descriptive paper, a good essay, a good poem, than there were, say, twenty years ago. An old manuscript reader is inclined, in fact, to be very optimistic. Even Mr. Howells's recent extraordinary praise of current literature may not seem to such a reader as

so very far out of the way. But after the old manuscript reader has expressed himself thus optimistically he is entitled to his "buts." He may even permit himself to ask whether the literary artist of our day has not caught somewhat of the hurry, the immediateness, of the time; whether, indeed, the present age is not too present with us; whether there is the slow, determined, sure, artistic work which made the successful careers of the earlier generation of American poets, romancists, and essayists. There surely is such work, but is it as general as it should be? and, if not, is this one reason that there are not more literary reputations in the new generation commensurate with those of the old?

At least the old manuscript reader may, by reason of his age, if nothing else, be pardoned should he at times look over his spectacles at the young manuscript writer and say: "Young man, young woman, you have talent, you have industry, you have knowledge, you have a fine, large audience eagerly waiting for you; all you need is to respect still more highly your own unusual parts. Ponder over, perfect your work; be not in too great haste to bring it to the eye of the editor, to the eye of the public. Regard each poem, each story, as a step in your literary career; let it not leave your hand till you have done your very best with it. If you intend it to be a genuine work of art, make it so—if you can. This may seem a slow process, but it may prove the speediest in results; and after you have followed this advice, remember that even an editor is mortal, and, like every other mortal, entitled to his proportion of mistakes."

It is to be hoped that the word "career" incidentally dropped in the foregoing will not have a tendency towards making ingenuous youths selfish and self-conscious. Given a certain amount of skill and taste, literary art is only another name for literary conscience. Conscientious work is not necessarily artistic work, as many a poor devil has found out too late. But it may be. The heart comes first—a warm heart and a cool head, says Joseph Jefferson—the heart comes first, but heart without art is of no avail. The literary artist need not think sordidly on his or her "career," and yet may cherish that decent regard for repute, that love of artistic perfection, which will bring the rewards of conscience and of honorable fame. At the least the literary artist should be ashamed to do less well than in him lies. He should not niggle and polish for the love of nigging and polishing; but he should be remorseless in self-correction for the love of truth, and art, and beauty. And also, as already said, he should allow the editor that privilege of humanity, the right to blunder; remembering that the "declined" writer's revenge is the editor's own too vivid memory of mistakes—the ever-lengthening black list of errors in literary judgment which every old reader of manuscripts turns to in the secret place of his own mind for melancholy penance and warning.

#### Journalists and Newsmongers.

IN the days when Horace Greeley was looked upon as the dean of the faculty of journalists, the soul of a newspaper was its editorial page; a variety of information worthy of the attention of good citizens was not scorned; and the license of wit, the lash of criti-