

TOPICS OF THE TIME.

Engraving on Wood.

"HERE in America," says Mr. Linton, in the June number of the "Atlantic," "engraving on wood has been for the last ten years steadily improving." We suppose this is true; indeed, we have no doubt of it; and we hope it is not unbecoming in us to say that, if the question were put to the artists of New York, who know all about it, they would testify that the development of SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE has had much more to do with that improvement than any other influence or agency, if not more than all other influences and agencies combined. Yet Mr. Linton, in his long article from which we have quoted, not only makes no recognition of this fact, but indicates, by his attack on one of its most eminent engravers, that the improvement has been outside and in spite of the work done on this magazine. SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE is mentioned as the one great sinner in the origination and propagation of a false and illegitimate style of work.

And now, before we undertake any defense of the work so severely criticised, it seems proper to pay our respects to the critic. He calls names and deals in personal allusions and illustrations, and of course must expect them in return. In this marked improvement in engraving which Mr. Linton recognizes, has he had any share? Does he maintain, as an engraver, the reputation he won in England? He claims that he has been upon the right and only legitimate track: has he made any recognizable advances in his art? We believe it is pretty well understood among publishers that Mr. Linton's work is not what it used to be. Certainly, his latest notable appearance, made in the illustration of Bryant's "Flood of Years," was one of the feeblest, most monotonous and most unsympathetic pieces of work ever issued from the American press; yet, here he engraved his own designs. We do not know of an artist who would not choose to have Cole cut his blocks rather than Linton, yet Cole is the man whom Linton has "sat down on," if we may use the slang of the time. It is the conservative old man, who has arrived at the end of his development, and sits petulantly enshrined within his conventional methods, who assumes to be god and arbiter of wood-engraving, passing judgment upon a young genius, all alive with the spirit of discovery and progress. The sympathy of artists and the well-informed public is with the young man, and their faith is in him. The question of taste involved in this attack on Mr. Cole, by a member of his own guild, we leave Mr. Linton and the public to settle. It certainly has not a very pretty look.

To those who do not understand the processes of wood-engraving, it is proper to explain that in the preparation of a block for the engraver, the picture to be engraved is in some way made upon the block. The work of the engraver is to cut the surface of the block so as to reproduce in printing every part of the picture, and the picture itself is, of course,

spoiled as the graver goes over the surface. When the block is cut, the picture is gone, except as it remains in the lines of the engraving. It will thus be seen that as fast as the engraving is done the original picture is practically defaced, and the engraver has no guide by which to correct his details, or to hold the feeling of the picture. We say this particularly, because it has an important bearing upon what is to follow.

When SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE was established, nearly nine years ago, the men who could draw well upon the block were comparatively few. They could almost be counted on the fingers of the two hands. Drawing upon the block was an art, of and by itself. Very few of the best artists had ever attempted it, and the magazine, with all its fellow magazines, was shut off by this barrier from some of the best talent in the country. Drawing upon the limited surface of a block has always been regarded by artists as a cramped business; the freest handling is not attainable in that way. But from the moment SCRIBNER began to avail itself of the art of photographing pictures upon the wood, a great development took place, because that presented at once to the public the work of the best artists. The men who hitherto had been shut away from us could draw and paint their pictures, which could then be photographed upon the block; and the pictures themselves could all be preserved, so that as the engraver cut away his picture on the block, he had always the original before him, not only as a guide, but as an inspirer. Men drew, or painted, their designs with freedom, of any size, and often direct from nature, and the photograph, preserving this freedom and its results, reduced everything to its proper size. Now this is what Mr. Linton particularly despises, and on the engraving of these photographic pictures he expends a good deal of contemptuous English,—apparently forgetting, or not knowing, that Cole's engraving of Modjeska, which he praises, was done from a photograph on the block, and could not have been so well done in any other way.

Now we go a step further. It was found that when the pictures were photographed upon the block, we had secured entirely new effects. One picture would be drawn in charcoal; another in crayon, another would be produced by washes, another would be painted in black and white. Here was an opportunity for new effects in engraving. It was impossible, for instance, to reproduce the effect of a charcoal drawing by what Mr. Linton regards as legitimate line engraving. Such an engraving would utterly disguise such a drawing, and spoil it. In the reproduction, so far as the graver could do it, of these original designs by the best American artists, has lived the charm of the engravings of SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE, which has made it unprecedentedly prosperous at home and admired abroad. We have made mistakes, but everybody

makes mistakes who undertakes improvement. We have produced new and charming effects, and when we talk about "legitimate engraving," let us not ignore results, which legitimize everything, and stand as authority against all the old fogies and bigots in Christendom.

To illustrate what we mean by the reproduction of drawings, let the reader turn back to the February number of SCRIBNER for the present year. He will find on the first page of that number, illustrating "The Tile Club at Play," the reproduction of a drawing in pencil. Mr. Linton's line would utterly have spoiled the raciness and character of this drawing. By the time such a drawing had been Lintonized by a graver there would have been none of its true character left. Or, take the drawing on page 472, in the same article. This was drawn with charcoal, and photographed upon the block. It is an exquisite piece of engraving, and a picture which has excited universal admiration, but it has hardly a "legitimate line" in it. It is what the editor of "The Atlantic" in his own columns calls "bad and false" art, yet we presume our readers (who have no end to push except getting at the truth) will see that it is fresh and attractive, and does exactly what it pretends to do—it reproduces a charcoal drawing and does not lie about it, as a man who engraves in Mr. Linton's "legitimate" way would be obliged to do. Take the picture on the opposite page, photographed upon the block from a clay model. That tells the simple truth, as it is in clay. There is another charcoal drawing on page 476, worth looking at. Then, on page 468, there is a picture of Swain Gifford's in which the attempt is made to reproduce the effect of a work mostly done in washes. For another notable reproduction of the effect of a modeled clay surface, see page 465.

Now, to drop all these effects, whose charm of freshness and variety has made the popular magazine the household treasure of a nation awaking to the sense of art, is to throw away, at the bidding of a man from whom the age has absolutely run away, all the progress that has been made during the last ten years. The editor of "The Atlantic," in a notice of the new illustrated edition of Longfellow's poems, says: "All but two of the pictures here are executed in pure line, and we learn that throughout the edition none others will be done in the manner reprobated on another page of this magazine by Mr. Linton * * * " He proceeds further to speak of the others as "the bad and false school." We greatly regret, for Mr. Longfellow's and the country's sake, that he and we are to be treated to the same monotony of consecrated commonplace which prevails in the old books of engravings, and in the recent "Flood of Years." We are sorry that Mr. Anthony clings to the conservatives, and has bound himself to so hopelessly bigoted a leader. He has made a mistake for himself and his employers, which they will not be slow to discover to his disadvantage.

It is the deepest condemnation of Mr. Linton's system of engraving, and at the same time a fair index of its character, that it entirely ignores all originality

of style. With this in mind, it is not surprising that his "Atlantic" paper contains no word of praise for the exquisite work that has been done by Mr. Henry Marsh; indeed, not even the slightest mention of what can fairly be called the greatest single engraving enterprise in the world.—Mr. Marsh's wood-cuts in Harris's "Insects Injurious to Vegetation," examples of which we are fortunately able to present in this and the following number.

Mr. Kiddle's Book.

FOR every man interested in the question of immortality, we have the profoundest sympathy. It is a question which has an intense, abiding interest for every thoughtful mind. At this time, particularly, when the immortality of the soul is questioned more sharply than it has ever been before in the history of Christianity, the precious faith of the churches has to be fought for with all the weapons that can be laid hold of. From the fact that there is really no evidence of immortality except the resurrection of Christ himself, and his declarations, many minds have reached about them on every side for everything that offers help. In the desire to know something positively about the matter, modern spiritualism had its birth and has held its life. It promised to do just the thing that millions of minds desired to have done; so that when it assumed to demonstrate the existence of life after death, it had a tremendous audience in readiness for it. The marvel is that there was a man or woman living who was unwilling to hear what it and its promulgators had to say. That it has millions of believers and followers to-day, is, probably, due less to its real, inherent strength, than to the greedy want which it assumes to satisfy,—a want so greedy that it accepts as fact that which only has its lying semblance.

We are not among those who regard what are claimed to be the facts of spiritualism as improbable *a priori*. No man can read the Bible carefully without being educated in a belief in spiritualism. In both the Old and the New Testament we have multiplied records of the communications of spiritual existences, with men and women in the flesh. The doctrine of demoniacal possession is taught with great distinctness. The ministry of angels, the return to the earth of those long dead, familiar intercourse with Christ after his resurrection, all are in the line of phenomena claimed as genuine by modern spiritualists; so that it is not strange that Christian men and women should find themselves educated by the Bible itself into a sort of readiness to receive spiritualism. It is, or would seem to be, easy for a Christian to believe that visitants from the unseen world are about him influencing his mind, and endeavoring to make themselves known. That is precisely what they used to do in the olden time. Why should they not do it now as well as they did it then?

So we are not among those who think it strange that Mr. Kiddle, a thoughtful, Christian man, should give heed to what claimed to be a revelation from the unseen world. We know something of this man, whose book has attracted so much atten-