

**OLD AND NEW;
SUNDRY PAPERS**

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Old and new; sundry papers by C. H. Grandgent

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C. H. GRANDGENT

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SUNDRY PAPERS**

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SUNDRY PAPERS

BY

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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH the following essays and addresses form rather a miscellaneous lot, they have this in common, that they treat, in general, of changes in fashion, especially in matters of speech and of school. Four of the papers have already appeared in print: "The Dark Ages," "Fashion and the Broad A," "Numeric Reform in Nescioubia," "Is Modern Language Teaching a Failure?" For permission to republish these I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness respectively to the Secretary of the Modern Language Association of America, the Editor of *The Nation*, the Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Board of New York, and the Editors of *The School Review*.

C. H. G.

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OLD AND NEW

I

NOR YET THE NEW¹

Old things need not be therefore true,
O brother men, nor yet the new.

WHEN Arthur Hugh Clough penned these lines, he little dreamed how quickly the second member of his apparently axiomatic proposition would become obsolete. "New things need not be therefore true"? It sounds like an echo from a forgotten past; yet only a few score years ago it was a perfectly safe assertion, as safe as "All's not gold that glitters," or "Where there's a will there's a way."

There was a time when the old had the right of way and the new had to turn out or force its passage, when the idea of innovation gave pause, when the successful or even the unsuccessful experience of ages created a presumption in favor of accepted usage, when a departure from tradition demanded an excuse. "I love everything that's old," says one of the characters in *She Stoops to Conquer*, "old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine." The same author once said: "When I was a young man, being anxious to distinguish myself, I was perpetually starting new propositions. But I soon gave this over; for I found that generally what was new was false." Of wellnigh universal application was the opinion uttered later by Daniel Webster with reference to a certain political platform: "What is valuable is not new, and what is new is not valuable."

¹ An address to the Smith College chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa on May 17, 1919.

"We have changed all that," as Molière's quack doctor observed. The heart and the liver no longer abide in the respective places to which the former school of medicine — and its accomplice, Dame Nature — assigned them. "Time-honored custom" is without honor. The very word "time-honored" is now used ordinarily in derision. To say that a thing is old is to condemn it without a trial. An old style must be a bad one, an old thought is not worth thinking. What we admire is the "music of the future," the "new art," the "modern school." To a strictly judicial mind, it would seem, the quality of age or of novelty would carry no necessary implication of value; the question of acceptance would be decided on the basis of intrinsic merit. But the judicial mind is rare. We are unconsciously swept along by the tide of opinion, and that tide has set in the direction of the untried. When did it turn?

I believe that the ancients (if one may venture a generalization) were preponderantly inclined to favor antiquity; not because they were ancients — for of this they were cheerfully unaware — but because the notion of progress was in their day foreign to the general run of men. This was surely the case in the Middle Ages. Only with the gradual enlargement of men's horizon by the unfolding and the penetration of a vanished glorious civilization, and by the discovery of unsuspected continents and races, did the taste for innovation develop, a love of change for its own sake, an eagerness to find in one's inner as well as in the outer world fresh fields to conquer, a desire to exploit the individual self; and this tendency was in the Renaissance tempered by a worship of ancient Rome and Greece. Then came, in the period we call neo-classical, a renewed submission to authority, a satisfaction with things as they are and as they have been. Yet we find in the eighteenth cen-