"Our English" *

ENGLISH CRITICS profess to find two faults, *only* two, with the language as spoken on this side: first, there is too much pedantry; second, there is too much slovenliness or slang. The golden mean is their peculiar prerogative. Prof. Hill appears to share this opinion. 'Among the things which teachers of every class should struggle against is what I must be pardoned for calling "schoolmasters' English,"—the dialect of men and women whose business keeps them in close relations with young minds, and who, being to a great extent cut off from intercourse with the world outside of the schoolroom, are apt to attribute undue importance to petty matters, to insist upon rules in cases where the best usage leaves freedom of choice, to prefer bookish and pompous ways of putting things to easy and natural ones.' This is a wholesome sentence, even if a trifle skittish in its enjoyment of freedom. The ponderous dictionary as an article of furniture in every æsthetic American office, is unknown in England. On the other hand, the author pillories the novelists and journalists of the hour for their atrocities in the ephemeral cant of gush and slang. These are a few illustrations of the prevalent paucity of idea-words: 'pivotal, mentality, environment, Christmasing, to gondole, to hotelize, to be recepted, or dined, to mechanize,' etc. He also takes exception, with less reason, to 'mayoral, faddists, gilded youth, to resume your seat, to imbibe, proven,' and 'an aborigine.' He credits the verb 'to burglarize' to 'The Pirates of Penzance,' but we saw it quoted from an American source quarter of a century ago.

As a rule the 'How to do' (this, that or the other) type of book has rather a dismal influence on the tyro, who despairs of ever approaching to the perfection of his omniscient instructor. It is a high tribute to the author of this little book to say that you don't feel you are under the rod of a pedagogue. Broadly regarded, his counsels are those of strong commonsense. The average American, he says, leaves college untrained to produce a piece of sound, crisp, properly-spelt and well-penned mother English. His news-

* Our English. By Prof. A. S. Hill. $1. New York: Harper & Bros.

papers and novels convince him that slovenliness is in vogue, and yet, when he has to draw up a formal address or make a speech, he moves heaven and earth to rake together all the antiquated 'beauties' that can be crammed in to make his simple mother-tongue ridiculous. While warning the reader that quality depends on wits and style on individuality, he urges avoidance of bombast and a freer adoption of the plain speech that gives English oratory and writings their charm of reality. Among many happy phrases, a few are weakened by the author's defiance of his own good advice, in preferring 'chirography' to handwriting and 'orations' to speeches. He carefully avoids the monstrosity 'conversation*a*ist,' quoting Byron's 'conversationist' (why not the simpler word *converser*?), but objects to the common and proper use of 'firstly' and 'nor bate' for 'abate,' in Byron's verse, while allowing so jarring an expression as 'I don't know *as* I will.' The worst example of this occurs in an admirable essay by Richard Grant White, in which he speaks of a singer's voice as 'the finest bass as was.' Perhaps the author must not be held responsible for uncouth turn-overs at the end of his lines, such as 'eigh-teenth,' 'knowl-edge,' and 'nec-essary.'