Literature

"Wimples and Crisping-Pins."

By Theodore Child. Illustrated. Harper & Bros.

THAT EARNEST trifler, the late Theodore Child, who, when he was not exploring the ends of the earth in search of material for copy, might be found concocting a sauce or analysing a Whistler,—was a literary babbler whose ingenious prattle has been silenced untimely. He wrought not on the surface, but near it, like those minute boring insects whose pits and galleries do not penetrate further than to the second cortical envelope of the plant that they inhabit. He knew that the daintiest things lie hidden, but not very deeply. The world has lost a brilliant work on contemporary Persia owing to his death at Ispahan of the cholera. The opening chapters of this book of "reveries and reflections on the dressing of hair and the adornment of beauty" show how discreetly he would have lifted the veil, had he been permitted to write of the land of the Lion and the Sun. The wooden statues of Boulak and the translations of M. Maspero have enabled him to conjure up an Egyptian vision of black hair and blue lotus flowers, but he avoids shocking modern susceptibilities with too close a view of the paradisiacal simplicity of old Egypt. The book is as a pomade of many essences, in which are mingled the most precious ointments and all the spices of the merchants, but no common ingredients. The denunciations of Isaiah furnish him with a "passage of precious nomenclature," which he applies to the magnificent headdresses of the women of modern Algeria. He imagines a dialogue on the Attic and the barbarian styles of hair-dressing, between an Athenian sculptor and his model, and shows us Tertullian taking notes from the life for his treatise "DeCultu Feminarum." But Mr. Child's artistic sympathies were mainly with the Renaissance—with that early Renaissance, compact of native realism and borrowed graces, which so many now-a-days affect to worship and so few understand. He was a sincere and knowing admirer of Botticelli. He did not fancy the "primitives," either more or less pious than their successors, but he was greatly taken with their allegories and symbols, which were continued by Botticelli and Leonardo. Should any lady wish to look like the Gorgon Medusa, here are drawings by Da Vinci that will show her the way. Here are also Treachery and Fraud dressing the hair of Calumny. Farther on are shown the, to us, more delightful torsades of Palma Vecchio's Violante, and the saucy Spanish toque of Marguerite of Parma. There is a chapter on last-century styles and one on the coiffures of the Romantic period, and the volume closes with a chapter on "Jewelry and Ornament." It is not a monumental work, like the author's book on cookery, but it is by no means a flippant production. The great Monsieur Lefebvre, defender of the faith of all true coiffeurs, who is quoted in the introduction, would approve, at least, of the spirit in which it is written, though his severe architectural taste might object to the concessions which Mr. Child makes to nature and the picturesque. The philosopher Herder would have the hair resemble a wild and mysterious German forest, waving over the cavern where sleep ideas that wait their day for utterance. The Frenchman's style went out before the Revolution. Herder's suits no one but violinists and poets. Ladies who follow Mr. Child will take the middle way, safest and most artistic.

Most of the pictures are woodcuts—among the last fruits, we fear, of what will soon be a lost art. How one can turn from these engravings to the half-tones in the volume, good as these are of their kind, and not perceive the immense superiority of the artistic over the mechanical method of reproduction, we cannot conceive. Yet some of our best engravers, after having spent half a lifetime in acquiring a mastery of their art, are now becoming confectioners, farmers and drivers of horse-cars.