

NEW THOUGHT AND HORSE SENSE.

THE ART OF BEING ALIVE. By ELLA WHEELER WILCOX. (Harper, 3s. 6d. net.)

"The Art of Being Alive" is one more cursory manual of spiritual health and felicity. The touch of irony in its title at the present moment is unintentional. What Samuel Smiles and Tupper and diverse other edifiers did for their generation, Mr. A. C. Benson, Mr. Arnold Bennett, with other less popular writers, and now Miss Ella Wheeler Wilcox have endeavoured to do for theirs. All of them preach life—"a life that means action from the cradle to the funeral pile"—and, what is no less remarkable, all entertain a large and attentive congregation. Not every philosopher is an exemplar of his philosophy. But each of these writers might testify—I began to use my panacea ton, twenty, thirty years ago, and since then I have used no other. Their methods are widely different. Mr. Benson's pensive counsel—by Introspection out of a Study Window, as it were—is not the slashing, almost devil-may-care camaraderie of "How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day." The Card would find a tranquil but uneasy hermitage in the House of Quiet. Miss Wilcox's proscriptions are less cultured, less elegant than Mr. Benson's, far less vivid and pungent than Mr. Bennett's. She dabbles more freely in vast abstractions. Her readers may know already that they are "crude chunks of Eternity," she will teach them also that "forth from little motes in Chaos We have come to what we are," that evolution has missed no link, but that in order to become that *summum bonum* a normal Triangle (we are abnormal if "one side of the triangle is dwarfed," if, that is, the equilateral tends towards the scalene) we must cease wondering why we came:—

Cease wondering why you came—
Stop looking for faults and flaws;
Rise up to-day in your pride and say,
"I am part of the First Great Cause."

Millions of æons, cycling rounds of years have passed, Miss Wilcox reiterates, since protoplasmic monsters disported themselves in the primeval ooze and man is here now—by means of New Thought—earnestly to "strengthen the plan." The thought is new, of course, only in the sense of renewal, for "all New Thought methods should first fit into God's supreme plan. Then they cannot fail." The disposition of the capitals in this sentence suggests, if not the relative importance, at least Miss Wilcox's relative clearness of mind, regarding the Thought and the plan. And Miss Wilcox is as eloquent about the former as she is vague about the latter. "Correct breathing" is necessary, the doctrine of Karma and insistence on "the Self self" are aids to clarification, But so long as one hopes for the best, and is, as well as does, one's best, all is well:—

The earth is God's impression,
And love is all it needs;
And this is faith's confession
Of what it lacks in creeds.

There is nothing very new in that (rather dangerous) thought—except its bottle. The real risk is that the old wine will burst this new bottle, as it has burst its like again and again in the past; that its followers will swear by the fragments that remain rather than by the elixir they have wasted and the miracle it represents.

In all practical matters Miss Wilcox gives excellent counsel. Her sermons are often better than her texts. She heartily denounced "the get-rich-quick method of financiering," the "divorce-while-you-wait type of men and women," wanton husbands, whining wives, "morbiditis," foolish anxiety, flaccid melancholy. But it is as easy to denounce as to advise. She is hostile to turkey-trots, to the self-conscious Venuses of her own sex as to such prodigies of either sex as are "only happy in the glare of the spot-light." She is courageous—"difficulties are but dares of fate"—she is mystical—as much in her references to Invisible Helpers as to the soul's inexhaustible reservoir, to which she bids us "pipe our mental faculties" and turn on the faucet. And when love or manners or marriage is her theme, her edification is of that flawless quality which most of us lavish on other people, and rarely use at home.

The woman of forty—arrived at an age said to be as "dangerous" as it can be all conquering—should profit by this book. So should the mother of five—who may be forty, but whose dangers are most of them happily over. The "high-brow critic," who supposes that "to be popular in the world of art is to be a dweller outside of the inner sanctuary," should pipe a little low after its perusal. But since Miss Wilcox never hesitates to speak her mind (even regarding a friend who ventured to give her advice—"an egotist of the rankest order")—we may express a regret that her volume is immethodical and her new thought at times a little incoherent. It is presented with just enough penetration to be specious and enough knowledge to be plausible—and it deserves much better than that. Miss Wilcox's commonsense excels her philosophy. And without question if her readers put that into practice they would soon be breathing correctly without being aware of it and their triangles would almost unconsciously regain equilaterality.