

the like-named structures in horses' teeth. They profess ability to examine a river's mouth and tell as shrewdly as any veterinarian whether the animated stream belongs to the colt stage, the four-year-old, or the decrepit old equine condition. To the discerning eye even pathologic conditions are revealed, for has not one writer described a stream with 'blind staggers'? Let any one cast a glance over the recent literature, if one suspects the simile overdone, and note, amongst other things, the surprising array of anthropomorphic conceptions of nature. Take even a master-craftsman like Professor Davis, originator, if I mistake not, of the terms 'pirate stream,' 'captured tributaries,' 'drowned valleys,' etc. (the hybrid 'peneplain' belongs to another story)—has he not said of Greece that it 'is a country standing up to its knees in the Mediterranean'? The fact may be literally true, but it is hardly decorous to specify anatomical particulars.

Another writer who believes in the virtue of parables characterizes a rapidly eroded land-surface as a 'precocious infant,' from which the lay reader may surmise that it has just graduated from kilts. But for delightfully refreshing imagery we must refer to a short article on 'The Aggrading Bar,' which appeared in these columns some little time ago (SCIENCE, V., p. 646), and begins as follows:

"The little wriggling bar staggering blindly along in a broad meandering valley is like a small boy attempting to fill his grandfather's boots. The waste supplied from the side of the hills of the adolescent valley, cut by the ancestor of the present stream, is much too great a load for a little brook."

Here the anthropomorphic suggestion is very skilfully rendered, in fact so realistically that the fate of this inebriate little brook, after taking on its load at the aggrading bar, might almost be said 'to point a moral or adorn a tale.' As class-room illustrations, or as intending to impart instruction by means of allegory, figurative descriptions of this nature may, perhaps, be tolerated, but it is gratuitous to suppose that the method of Æsop is better adapted to the needs of readers of SCIENCE than the method of Zadig. Sully

Prudhomme, in his essay 'On the Nature of Things,' makes some pointed remarks on the habit personifying inanimate nature, which it may be well for physiographers to take to heart.

Other illustrations of the kindergarten method might be given, but it is probably unnecessary to prove that the standard of most of our popular scientific magazines has become lowered through the habit of 'talking down' to average readers, instead of raised by talking just a little over their heads. Let it be asked as a general question which style of writing is the more helpful to students, that which assumes too much on their part, or too little? Does not there come a time in the education of youth when suggestion by means of nursery methods ceases to be a virtue? When a student reaches the point where he may be expected to dig for himself, let us put a spade into his hand, taking care, however, to call it a spade, and not a toy for making mud-pies.

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#### 'VEGETABLE BALLS.'

REGARDING the subject of 'Vegetable Balls' the following additional information may be worthy of note. This curious formation is characteristic of the section *Ægagropila* of the genus *Cladophora* and is mentioned in Engler and Prantl's 'Die Naturlichen Pflanzenfamilien,' De Ionis 'Sylloge Algarum' and Hanck's 'Meeresalgen.' The most recent work on the subject seems to be that of C. Wesenberg on *Ægagropila Sauteri* (Overs. k. dansk. Vidensk. Selsk. Forh., II., 1903, pp. 168-203), of which there is a very good summary in *Jour. Roy. Micr. Soc.*, April, 1904. The alga occurs in Lake Sorø, Denmark, and the balls attain the size of the fist or of a child's head.

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#### A NOTABLE PALEOBOTANICAL DISCOVERY.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Inasmuch as a note by the undersigned, entitled 'A Notable Paleobotanical Discovery,' in SCIENCE of July 8, was delayed in publication it is only just