

# EDUCATION: HOW OLD THE NEW

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**T**HE title above is that of a book by Dr. James J. Walsh,<sup>1</sup> the Dean and Professor of the History of Medicine at Fordham University and the Professor of Physiological Psychology at the Cathedral College of New York. Dr. Walsh has written a number of volumes well worth reading, the best of all being his exceedingly appreciative "History of the Thirteenth Century;" a volume, by the way, which can with advantage be read in connection with the essay on the same subject by Frederic Harrison, whose view is substantially that of Dr. Walsh.

Dr. Walsh contributes two or three points of view which it is advantageous

<sup>1</sup> The Fordham University Press, New York.

to have emphasized, in our American intellectual life of to-day. His first essay on education takes flat issue with the common theory that everything represents astounding progress at the present day, that we have nothing to learn at any point from the past, and that we are justified in fatuous self-satisfaction with everything about the present. So far is this from being true, as Dr. Walsh shows very clearly, that there has never been a great civilization in the past which on some point or other does not stand ahead of our civilization to-day; progress on the whole has been rhythmic, long periods of retrogression succeeding the periods when the world has gone forward. With this

statement of the facts I entirely agree, although I feel that, on the whole, it is undoubtedly true that the movement has been forward. But it would be quite impossible to show any advance among any of our people of the present day over certain sections of society in, for instance, the Judea of the great Hebrew prophets, in the Athens of Pericles, in the thirteenth century in various parts of western Europe. The essay on "The First Modern University"—that of Alexandria—is capital; and the author's appreciation of mediæval scientific universities, again, contains things that we as a people need to learn, including, by the way, the fact that in Spanish America excellent work was done in great universities before in what is now our country there was any institution of learning ranking above a second-rate school. These universities in Spanish America did what is really far and away the most telling of all intellectual work—that is, they did

work in actual productive scholarship before in the English-speaking colonies such a thing as productive scholarship was known. This will doubtless be brought out when we have a professorial interchange with Spain as we now have with Germany. Again, in the essay on "Ideal Popular Education," introduced by an admirable quotation from Plato, Dr. Walsh emphasizes some of what the best-informed men are now agreed upon in regarding as the greatest needs in modern education, and especially in our American education.

Of course there are things in Dr. Walsh's book with which I do not agree, and I am sorry he included the essay on "New Englandism." It does not do justice either to him or his subject. But the essays as a whole deserve study, and they make a volume which should be in the library not only of every scholar but of every thinking man who wishes a broad outlook on the American needs of the day.