Indeed, I have myself heard women doctors complain that their own sex does not support them as it should. The sound will be the case with women solicitors. There will not be many of them, and there will not be any danger of competition from them. —Yours, etc., "CITY SOLICITOR."

Reform Club, Pall Mall.

THE KELTIC LANGUAGES

To the Editor of The New Statesman.

Sir,—Under the above head your correspondent, Miss L. J. Winstanley, makes one or two observations which invite some comment. That lady says that the Germans have "invaded" English history because their own is "not very glorious." If Macmillan's Goodbye is still set up in type his opinion of that wonderful utterance would be interesting, if it could be had in not too explosive language. Miss Winstanley would appear to be inступил on what she would doubtless style an "obsession" against all things German. She recently contributed a Paper to a Welsh periodical that I get, in which, under the title of "The Germanic Obsession," she had the front to deny all credit and merit to German Celtic scholarship. As "Lecturer in English at the University College of Wales." Miss Winstanley may suffice, for all I know, or care, to the contrary; but as a mumps-utterer touching things Celtic she is plainly very ridiculously employed. It has been only by the patient industry of the Germans (say the author of Celtic Mythology and Religion, the late Dr. Alexander Macfahan, the greatest of Scottish Celtic scholars) that full recognition has been given to the proper position of the Celts among the other Indo-European nations.

Writing of the Irish, your correspondent says "they take our national neglect of their language and literature as a very real insult." I am in close touch with the Irish language movement, but it is news to me that that people take anything of the kind on the grounds imputed to them. What the Irish, Scots, and Welsh justly complain of is that their respective national languages are starved in their own schools, or at all events in those "facilities" which they are entitled to enjoy as the ancient national languages of those countries. If I "neglect" this or that language and literature by refraining from dogmatising very ignorantly about it, I surely do not thereby "insult" it? Rather, it appears to me, should I so use it by doing that which I should not do, instead of discreetly holding my peace.

As ethologist, your correspondent is quite as wild as she is absurd as law-giver. She says: "Ethologists are agreed that the race-type of England is prevailingly Celtic or pre-Celtic." I should like some authority, other than her own, for that nonsense. Doubtless, parts of England are prevailingly Celtic, as she implies the whole of that country to be; but I have yet to learn that a part is equal to the whole. Further correspondent asserts that "of the four kingdoms composing the British Isles, two—Ireland and Wales—are Celtic or pre-Celtic; the two others—England and Scotland—are mainly so." Here is confused ethology with a vengeance! Wales is not a kingdom at all, but a principality—though that is a minor matter. The best ethologists describe the population of the principality as "very mixed"; so is that of Ireland. Scotland is predominatingly Celt-Iberian; and, as for England, the Teutonic prevails throughout, save in those parts which have been scientifically classed as "mixed" or are acknowledged by scholars to be predominately Teutonic. In fine, if England is "prevailingly Celtic or pre-Celtic," Miss Winstanley asserts it to be, how is it that the English genius, language, literature, art, and institutions are not "Celtic or pre-Celtic," but unmistakably and uncompromisingly Teutonic?—Yours, etc.,

R. EUSKINE OF MALL.

THE CULT OF THE LABEL.

To the Editor of The New Statesman.

Sir,—It is to be hoped that that now considerable section of the general public which is still master of its own house will refrain from adopting the "Honour" Voluntary Ration Cards, or from wearing the ribbons which accompanies them. We have had enough badging, armbletting, and labelling generally. Most of us are quite willing to submit to regulations, and to keep our food consumption within our prescribed limits. But we do not see the necessity of telling the whole world of our promise to be—merely law-abiding.—Yours, etc., A. K. W.

MISCELLANY

THE BORDERLINE OF PROSE

In the days when prosperous middle-class chimney-pieces were decorated with overmantels and flanked by tall jars of pampas grass; when knowing amateurs began to talk of Outamaro and Toyakuni; in the days when Mr. Pemnill's friends found source of laughter in feeding peacocks with ponceau-soaked in absinth; when Mr. George Moore was wearing a sugarloaf hat with a flat brim, then, or perhaps a little later, in the age of music-halls and cabaret's shelters, in the long-forgotten Nineties when sins were still scarlet, there appeared a little book called Pastels in Prose. It was mostly, if not altogether, translations from the French—from Ephraim Michael, Judith Gautier, Mallarme, and many
less-remembered names. This book introduced to the English reader the Prose-Poem.

It was after the time when Gautier had written the *Symphonie en blanc majeur*, and Whistler had painted symphonies in various colours, and programme music was not unknown. So that several serious critics took alarm at the confusion of the genres, cried out upon an age of decadence and charlatanism. Charlatanism, no doubt, still exists; but decadence is far decayed; and it is now a little late to assume this motherly perturbation. Time has left us many things, but among those it has taken away we may hope to count *A Rebours*, and the *Divagations*, and the writings of miscellaneous prose poets. They may eventually find refuge in that repository of indiscretions—the North Room of the British Museum—but to the general public they are no great loss. A considerable body of poetry has been proved worth saving; the rest is already forgotten; Dorian Grey has fled to Germany, where a cigarette has been named after him,* and the 'Nineties' aesthetic eccentricities may now be ignored.

But in our times the cycles of change recur very quickly. I have remarked recently a recurrence of the poetry in prose—not only in France, but in England; not only in England, but in America; perhaps not only in America, England, and France, for the tide of civilisation may now have carried it in the wake of Strindberg and Ibsen to the shores of Japan. It is noticeable that poetry which looks like prose, and prose which sounds like poetry, are assured of a certain degree of odium and success. Why should this be so? I know that the difference between poetry and prose is a topic for school debating societies, but I am not aware that the debating societies have arrived at a solution. Do the present signs show that poetry and prose form a medium of indefinite gradations, or is it that we are searching for new ways of expression? There are doubtless many empirical generalisations which one may draw from a study of existing poetry and prose, but after much reflection I conclude that the only absolute distinction to be drawn is that poetry is written in verse, and prose is written in prose; or, in other words, that there is prose rhythm and verse rhythm. And any other essential difference is still to seek.

When I refer to recent prose poetry I am not thinking of either Paul Fort or Walt Mason. The former, I know, is the King of Poets; and the latter, I am informed, commands the highest rates of payment. Nor have I in mind Claudel. These writers may have done prose poems; but, on the other hand, what they have done is not prose nor poetry.† If I am thinking of one writer more than another, it is of a poet who has done interesting work in what is unfairly called *vers libre*, who has distinguished himself by a genuine passion for the Hellenic, and even more for the Sicilian, a poet of whom I have lately seen some prose poems—Mr. Richard Aldington.

Now, reverting, for a moment, to the 'Nineties, it must be observed that the prose poetry of this epoch was probably based upon the work of a man much greater than any poet then living—and that is Arthur Rimbaud. Few people in England have heard of the *Illuminations*, and most of them perhaps believe that the title indicates a supposed divine insight, instead of meaning simply: "Picture-book illustrations." Rimbaud, who I suspect is responsible for everything that is good in Verlaine, wrote his prose poems between 1872 and 1875. They are short prose pieces, as obscure as *Kubla Khan* or *Christabel* and of a similar inspiration. They are amusingly convincing, and their prose is good French prose. Their curious precision, their perfect cogency in the choice and juxtaposition of images, their evident sincerity (as if rising immediately and unreflectingly from the core of the man’s feeling), these qualities give them a position unique in French literature, and in English nearer to Coleridge and Blake than to anyone else. Beside the prose of Rimbaud, the laboured opacity of Mallarmé fades colourless and dead.

The *Illuminations* attain their effect by an instant and simple impression, a unity all the more convincing because of the apparent incongruity of images. They find their proper expression in prose because they seem to have come to their author already clothed in that form; just as Dante’s account of the Aristotelian soul is right in verse, because it seems to have come to the author in that form; and Dante is not “prosaic,” nor would Rimbaud be more “poetic” if he had put his visions into verse. Just here is the problem. Mr. Aldington's prose poems, delicately handled, yet seem to hesitate between two media. They are more truly "prose poems" than those of Rimbaud, which were, in form, pure prose. There is a prose arbitrariness and a prose arbitrariness with which there is nothing wrong, there are moments when we simply have to conform to the limitations of the medium we have chosen; there is a verse monotone and a prose monotone, and success in either verse or prose consists in the most skilful variations of music, all the while we never allow this ground-monotone to become entirely inaudible. Mr. Aldington seems to me to be avoiding the limitations of either poetry or prose; to use either when he wishes; and so to lose the necessary articulation of rhythm:

For my sake Eos, in a cloudless sky, gliding from the many-Isled sea, must be more tender and more thrilling; for my sake the scent of ripe apples in the dim gold autumn must be keen and more odorous; for my sake the music of Pindar and Theocritus must be more stately, more flower-like, more melancholy sweet; for my sake the ecstasy of love must be sharper, wilder; for my sake you must be more beautiful, more alert, more delicate.

I submit that, if this is read as prose, it is found jerky and fatiguing; because there is a verse rhythm in it; and that, if read as verse, it will be found worrying, because of the presence of prose rhythms.

For my sake Eos, in a cloudless sky, gliding from the many-Isled sea—is verse, but what immediately follows—

must be more tender and more thrilling—

is prose (aside from the fact that "thrilling" is a word more suitable to prose than to poetry). And so one finds oneself constantly trying to read the prose poem as verse and falling in both attempts. And then one goes on to imagine how it would have been done in verse or in prose—which is what a writer ought never to allow us to do. He should never let us question for a moment that his form is the inevitable form for his content. This inevitability is the important thing. The moment we think of poetry as prose, or of prose as poetry, the artist’s success is lost.

Often, indeed, we derive a peculiar pleasure from seeing something done well in one form which we had thought necessarily confined to the other. We admire Pope, because he has sometimes given impeccable and inevitable verse form to the “prosaic,” and so has made (whatever the nineteenth century may have said) permanent poetry. We admire several prose writers because they have given impeccable and inevitable prose form to what we had supposed limited to verse. There could be no prose equivalent for *The Rape of the Lock*. There could be no verse equivalent for *Madame Bovary* or *Bubu de Montparnasse*.

We infer that to call prose “poetic” or verse “prosaic” does not mean that the prose is aspiring to verse or that...
Music

A NOTE ON OPERA

I

In the correspondence on the opera Louise I expressed the belief that a preference of Brahms to Wagner was not a matter of taste, but of principle. It will have been thought curious, perhaps, to have opposed Brahms instead of some operatic composer to Wagner, but the reason I did so was that I do not consider Wagner as a true operatic composer. The tradition that Wagner reformed opera is firmly established, but exceedingly vulnerable. Suppose we ask to be shown the fruit of the reform, what shall we be confronted with? Black silence, I should imagine, from any discriminating judge; but from others a list of post-Wagnerian operas, of which the best known are La Bohème, Madame Butterfly, Louise, Pagliacci, Cavalleria rusticana; the best MEPHISTOFALES and HANSEL AND GRETEL, and the latest The Boehmian’s Mate. Of all these operas one may say truthfully that the more Wagnerian they are the worse they are. There is scarcely one of them as good as Rossini’s Barber of Seville, or William Tell, or Cherubini’s Roderick, or Gluck’s Orpheus, not to bring into the comparison Weber or Mozart. This may only mean that these later composers are less naturally gifted than the men before Wagner; but it is strange that the decline in talent should be so general, and it is still stranger that it should reach its nadir just where the Wagnerian influence is most marked, and it becomes more than strange when we can plot the same curve in the work of one man. For example, the best of Puccini’s works is La Bohème, which is far less Wagnerian than the much inferior operas Manon Lescaut and Madame Butterfly. Personally, I think much operas as Manon Lescaut, The Bohemian’s Mate, and Louise a great decline on Bellini’s Sonnambula or Donizetti’s Daughter of the Regiment. It is not the fashion to think this. For some reason or other, to make a singer thunder in a heavy, melodramatic, declamatory style “the soup is ready,” as Charpentier does, is thought far superior to vocalising it with a trill and a flourish—though, as a matter of fact, the old Italian composers did not introduce soup into their operas. They ignored table-laying, feeding, and washing-up, just as we still ignore various operations of the toilet; though, no doubt, some “reformer” will come along one day and insist on putting them all in, and his followers will then sneer at Charpentier and Miss Smyth as shallow and artificial—which is a horrible prospect for them.

One authority has defined Wagner’s reform as “getting rid of the parasitic vocal phrase and restoring drama to its proper position of superiority.” I accept this definition, but consider it a definition of degeneration, not of reform. Let us consider the first part of the definition—the “parasitic vocal phrase.” Now this, if it means anything, means the phrase that exists for its own sake; that is to say, the phrase that exists for its own musical value and not merely as a means of telling you that the soup is ready—information which does not interest you in the least, seeing there is no prospect of your getting up on to the stage and eating it. I submit, with due reverence to all the pundits who are against me on this point, that it is precisely the “parasitic vocal phrase”—and not the soup—that you want when you go to hear opera. Similarly, the notion that to restore the drama to its position of superiority in opera is a reform fills me with astonishment. To restore

TALL NETTLES

Tall nettles cover up—as they have done
These many springs—the rusty harrow the plough
Long worn out, and the roller made of stone;
Only the elm butt top the nettles now.

This corner of the farmyard I like most:
As well as any bloom upon a flower
I like the dust on the nettles, never lost.
Except to prove the sweetness of a shower.

EDWARD TASTAWAY.