

VARIOUS

BELFORD'S MAGAZINE,
VOL II, NO. 10, MARCH
1889

Various
Belford's Magazine, Vol
II, No. 10, March 1889

*http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25570759
Belford's Magazine, Vol II, No. 10, March 1889:*

Содержание

WEALTH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES	4
A YOUNG GIRL'S IDEAL	10
THISTLE-DOWN	36
NOVELISTS ON NOVELS	37
A QUEEN'S EPITAPH	57
THE COST OF THINGS	59
ASLEEP	66
A COUPLE OF VAGABONDS	67
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	83

Various Belford's Magazine, Vol II, No. 10, March 1889

WEALTH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

When the government established by our forefathers became a recognized fact both at home and abroad, and for three-quarters of a century thereafter, no one dreamed that the greatest danger which threatened its existence was the wealth which might accumulate within its realm; indeed, no one ever dreamed of the possibilities which lay in that direction.

It is only during the past twenty years that the accumulation of wealth has entered into the problem. Down to the period of 1861, the only disturbing element of any magnitude was slavery. It was the slavery problem which weighed so heavily upon the "godlike" Webster. It was an ever-present, ghastly, and hideous form, appealing to his patriotic soul. It is certain that it cast a shadow of melancholy over his whole life. But Mr. Webster did not live to witness the dreadful loss of life and treasure, and the awful gloom, of its going out.

There is a question now of far greater magnitude than that which was settled by the sword, and that is the question of the enormous wealth, and its increase in the hands of the few. No reference is now made to the owners of the thousands or the hundreds of thousands – to the industrious and prosperous people scattered all over the land; for moderate wealth, universally diffused, is the prime safeguard of a nation: but I refer to the millions, the tens of millions, and the hundreds of millions owned and controlled by the few.

The ignorant poor and the no less ignorant rich may ridicule or sneer at the expression of fear that harm may come to the Republic on account of great wealth; but ridicule never settled any question. Ridicule is always the weapon of the ignorant and the vicious. None but the ignorant will ridicule the subject, for the history of the world reveals the destruction of nations on account of wealth – never from poverty.

What if a man does have millions – is it any of the people's business? is the query of the ignorant. This is the question that is to be solved. This is, in fact, the supreme question. If the government is a government of the people and for the people, under the people's Constitution the people have the right to protect themselves. If the possession of millions by any person is a menace to the liberties of the people and to the permanence of their government, the people have the right to legislate upon the matter and to protect themselves. That this Republic belongs to the people, no one can doubt. That it was established, by their

blood and treasure, as an asylum for the oppressed of all nations and the perpetual abode of free men, every page of American history attests. The protest of our forefathers to British tyranny, the Declaration of Independence, the war which followed, the steps taken for the adoption of a Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution all declare, in terms not to be mistaken, the right of the people to protection against foes from within and foes from without. How this menace will be met I have no means of knowing; but that it must be met, or sooner or later the Republic will be destroyed, no intelligent man can doubt.

As matters now stand, bad as they are, it might perhaps be enduring; but wealth accumulates, and the man with ten millions to-day may have a hundred millions in ten years, and the man with a hundred millions may have a thousand. There is not a king or an emperor on a throne to-day that would be safe a single moment with a subject possessing a thousand million dollars; and can it be expected that a Republic would be safer? The wealth of the Rothschilds was for a long time the wonder of the world. They held the purse-strings of nearly all Europe; kings, emperors, and principalities were and are yet at their mercy. But the wealth of the Rothschilds, the accumulations of generations, pales into insignificance before the wealth of the Vanderbilts, the Goulds, the Astors, the Lelands, the Carnegies, and the Spreckels, when the period of acquisition is taken into account. History fails to record any accumulation of wealth so rapid and so colossal as that which has taken place in this country, and during a period

of from five to twenty-five years.

The wealth of the Rothschilds has been the marvel of generations until within the past decade; but their wealth ceases to dazzle and bewilder even the youths of America in this generation. Their wealth, however, has been the accumulation of a hundred and twenty-five years, with all Europe for their field of operations. Their accumulations do not represent the robbery of the masses. They never levied a tax upon or demanded a toll upon the necessaries of life. Their operations were mainly confined to the negotiation of loans, the placing of investments for the wealthy men of Europe, and to the legitimate sphere of banking. They had a bank in the capitals of France, Austria, Italy, England, and Prussia; but neither of those nations ever gave them the authority to issue money. The toiling millions of Europe are taxed to maintain armies and support dynasties; but they were never the subjects of a moneyed aristocracy, or victims to their cupidity, in the sense that American toilers are. Emperors and kings did indeed make their burdens heavy, and oft-times intolerable, but they taxed to maintain their governments. They were the sole despots or robbers; and there is this difference between the robbers of Europe and those of America: that European despots maintained a government, while the American despots rob the people, by the aid of the government, for purely personal profit. True, the Rothschilds' power was great. They could probably make or unmake kings; but their power was never used to build up towns and cities in one

section of country and tear them down in another; to build up manufacturing establishments and great commercial monopolies in one kingdom or state, and destroy them elsewhere. They never attempted to control lines of transportation, corner the price of meat, bread, coffee, sugar, light, fuel, and other necessaries of life. No such operations were ever attempted by them, and no king or emperor would have been safe a day upon his throne who would have permitted such crimes as have been and are openly perpetrated by the millionaires of our country in their operations with beef, pork, coffee, oil, coal, sugar, wheat, and almost every other necessary of life. Under an absolute, or even a limited monarchy, these evils can be prevented or remedied; but as yet no means have been discovered to remedy or prevent them under our form of government.

Events of great magnitude crowd fast upon each other in our rapidly growing country. New questions of great importance and new phases of old questions have arisen and assumed huge proportions in a brief period, requiring the highest virtue, intelligence, and patriotism to deal with; and, while yet there may appear no constitutional means for protection against the illegitimate use of wealth under the operation of trusts and syndicates, without infringing upon the constitutional rights of citizens, it is absolutely certain that a way must be found to do so, or this great Republic, which promised so much for humanity, will cease to exist, and the hope of a "government of the people, for the people, and by the people" will be crushed from out the

hearts of men.

N. G. Parker.

A YOUNG GIRL'S IDEAL

There are people one meets with now and then who seem so perfectly fitted to their age and condition that it is difficult and almost painful to imagine them in any other – some old ladies, for instance, so sweet-faced, cheery-hearted, and placid-minded that one rebels against the reflection that they were ever crude, impulsive girls or busy matrons; and some busy matrons there are whose supply of energy and capacity seems so admirably to equal the demands made upon it that, for them, girlhood and old age appear to be alike – states of lacking opportunity; and, in the third place, there are crude, impulsive girls who wear these attributes so blithely that one does not want to think of them developed and matured.

Of these was Kate Severn, aged eighteen – a tall, brown-skinned, brown-eyed, brown-haired creature, so richly and freshly tinted that these three shades blended, in a beautiful harmony, in a face of rounded lines and gracious curves such as belong alone to the lovely time of youth. She was an affectionate and dutiful daughter to her widowed mother, whose only child she was, and yet almost everyone who heard Kate Severn talked about at all heard her called cold, the basis of this appellation being a disinclination to the society and attentions of young gentlemen, which, in a girl of her age and appearance, seemed a positive eccentricity. She had had this trait from a child,

when she would fly into sudden rages and fight and scratch the little boys who called her their sweetheart; and it had grown with her growth. Every summer, when she and her mother would come back to the old country-place, near the dull little town of Marston, where all the summers of her life had been spent, this determination to avoid the society of young men was more resolutely set forth by her looks and tones. It was not so aggressive as formerly, for she had acquired a fine dignity with her advancing girlhood, and was too proud not to avoid the danger of being called ridiculous. Therefore, her resentment of all masculine approaches was now quiet and severe, where it had once been angry and vehement; but it was as positive as ever, as the youth of Marston had reason to know. They said they didn't mind it, but they did immensely. A favorite remark among them was that, if she could stand it, they could – and stand it she did, magnificently. Who that saw her, driving her smart trap and strong bay horse along the country roads of Marston, with rein taut and whip alert, her erect and beautiful figure strikingly contrasted with her little mother's bent and fragile one, could suppose for one instant that it mattered an atom to her whether those were men or wooden images that walked the streets of Marston or drove about its suburbs, having their salutes to the tall cart returned by a swift, cool bow from its driver, who disdained to rest her handsome eyes upon them long enough to discern the half-indignant, half-admiring gazes with which they looked after her.

She was not, at heart, an unsocial creature, and in her childhood had been rather a favorite with the girls who came in contact with her, but she always was unlike them; and this dissimilarity now constituted a distinct isolation for her, since the fact that she had herself no beaux, – to use the term in vogue in Marston society, – and took no interest in hearing of those of her girl friends, left the latter much at a loss for topics, and forced upon Kate herself the conviction that she had not the power of interesting them. Dr. Brett, the country doctor who was her mother's physician and chief friend when she came to her country home, used to try to adjust matters for Kate, and made many praiseworthy efforts to promote a spirit of sociability between her and the young people of Marston, each and every one of which was a flat failure. At last he had given up in despair and let the matter drop, for Kate, in this her eighteenth summer, was more difficult, as well as taller, straighter, and handsomer, than ever. So reflected Dr. Brett as he drove homeward from his first visit to the Severns, feeling a good deal cheered by the recurrence into his humdrum life of this attractive mother and daughter, who received him into their home with a cordiality and friendliness enjoyed by a few people only. Mrs. Severn was an invalid, and unequal to seeing much company; and Kate, though the very opposite of an invalid, had contrived, as I have shown, to cut herself off from society – in Marston, at least – rather effectually. She liked Dr. Brett, and seemed always glad to see him – a departure in his favor which he was not old enough to

relish altogether. Still, the gods had provided him a pleasant spot of refreshment in the midst of a rather dull professional routine, and he gladly made the most of it. Kate, who was extremely fastidious, criticized him severely to her mother, and regretted very often that a man who had some capabilities should neglect his appearance as he did – allowing his face and hands to get so sunburned, his hair to grow so long, and his clothes to look so shabby and old-fashioned.

Perhaps the reason that she was so hard upon good Dr. Brett was accounted for by the fact that this man-repudiating young lady carried about in her mind a beautiful ideal of her own, of whose existence, even in this immaterial form, no being in the world besides herself had a suspicion. His appearance, in truth, was wholly and entirely ideal, but he was founded on fact, and that fact was a certain manuscript which five years ago she had fished up from an old box in the garret. This garret had been for generations the receptacle for all the old, disused belongings of the Severns; and it had been Kate's delight, from childhood up, to explore its old chests and trunks, and invent for herself vivid stories of the old-time ladies and gentlemen to whom had belonged these queer old gowns and uniforms – these scant petticoats and meagre waists, and these knee-breeches and lace-trimmed coats. There were spinning-wheels and guitars to suggest poses for the women, and cocked hats and swords for the men. As she grew older, these childish games lost part of their charm for her, and these mere suits and trappings of the

creatures of her imagination gave her such a sense of lack that she turned to some old papers in one of the boxes, in the hope that she might get some light upon the spirits and souls that had animated them. In her own fair young body there had arisen certain insistent demands which there was nothing in the life she led to supply. The tortures of the Inquisition would not have drawn this confession from her; but so indeed it was, and I must have sketched the personality of this young lady very clumsily indeed if it has not appeared that, beneath this independent, self-sufficing surface, there was a heart full of romance and sentiment, a feeling all the stronger for being denied a vent.

It was an era in Kate Severn's life – that rainy day in late summertime, when she found in the garret the old roll of manuscript from which was formulated the ideal that afterward so wholly took possession of her. It was a budget of closely written sheets, on blue paper turned white at the edges with age. The ink used must have been of exceptionally good quality, for it was still dark and distinct. The writing was clear, and done with a very fine pen – but there were evidences of haste. This, however, was not to be wondered at, for the subject was an exciting one, and Kate pictured to herself, with enthusiasm, the exquisite young gentleman (whom she promptly invested with the blue-velvet, lace-ruffled coat, and the handsome hat and sword which were among the paraphernalia of the attic) bending his ardent, impassioned gaze over the sheets on which were written such beautiful, fervent, reverential love-words. It was not in the

form of a letter, though it was a direct appeal, or, rather, a sort of aspiration, from the heart of a man for the love of a woman. There was not a name in it from beginning to end, and there was a sort of impersonal tone in it that made Kate believe that it was addressed to an imagined woman instead of a known one. This thought occurred to her even in that first breathless perusal, and all the subsequent ones (which were countless, for she was subject to certain moods in which this old manuscript was her only balm) confirmed it. In consequence of this conviction, she did a most un-Kate-like thing. It required only a slight effort of that powerful imagination of hers to put herself in the place of this loved and importuned lady; and she actually went so far as to compose and indite answer after answer to this fond appeal – impassioned outpourings of a heart which was full and had to be emptied. These she would lock away in her desk, along with the precious blue manuscript – and read and amplify from time to time.

She had never told anyone about the finding of this manuscript, though she had questioned her mother frequently and closely about the various contents of the attic boxes, only to hear repeated the statement that they were all belongings of the Severns, and had been in the house long before her occupancy. So this precious manuscript, it must appear, was written by some by-gone relative of her father, who, it pleased her to believe, had died with all these beautiful aspirations unfulfilled. That was a thought that smiled upon far more than the picture of her ideal

hero comfortably settled as a commonplace husband and father, with degenerate modern descendants. So Kate, who had no lovers in reality, made the most of this impalpable essence of one. And really he suited her much better. She could endow him with all the attributes that she admired, and even alter these at will, as her state of mind changed or her tastes developed, and a real lover could never have kept pace with her so well. Then, too, she could imagine him as beautiful and elegant as she desired – and she loved beauty and elegance in a man so much that she had never seen one yet who came up to her standard. She invested him with the most gorgeous changes of apparel – the blue velvet coat in the old trunk being one of his commonest costumes. It is true that it did not occur to her that, to fit the wishes of the manuscript to the time of the knee-breeches and lace ruffles, etc., suggested the propriety of his expressing himself in old English, while that of the blue manuscript was quite modern; but an anachronism or two of this sort was a trifling matter in so broad a scheme as hers. One effect of the finding of the paper was to make Miss Kate far more than ever scrupulous in her person, and gentle and courteous in her ways, for, although she had no superstitious idea that he really saw her out of the spirit-world, still it was her pride and pleasure to be what she knew he would have her to be. So she dressed herself in very charming gowns, with a slight expression of old-timeness about them that was not unnatural, and wore her severe, scant coifs and little folded kerchief with a prim grace that was a matter of contemporaneous benefit. Her

mother and Dr. Brett got the most of it, for out-of-doors her dress was necessarily conventional, and out-of-doors, also, she encountered so many antagonistic elements that she was often made to feel that her bearing and state of mind were not such as her loyal knight would have approved. That he was a person of the gentlest heart, the kindest nature, the most loving spirit, no one who read those heartfelt words of his could doubt. Very often he would interrupt his rhapsodies to his lady-love to prostrate himself before himself, at the thought of his unworthiness to ask the love of so divine and perfect a being as her whom he addressed. How great, then, was the necessity laid upon her who had appropriated these addresses to be circumspect in thought and act!

So Kate grew every day more sweet and winning, until Dr. Brett began to wonder how he could ever have thought her hard and conceited – as he confessed to himself, with abasement, that he had. She felt that her knight and lover would have wished her to be kind to this poor, lonely old doctor, who was so good to the sick and humble about him, and led such a cheerless, companionless, bachelor existence; and she used to make his cup of tea in the evenings when he would drop in to see her mother at the close of a hard day's work, and minister to his comfort in a manner that was certainly new to her. Before the finding of that manuscript, it was little enough that she had cared about his comfort; but now it seemed of real importance to her. The more his country-made clothes, and sun-burned hands, and awkward,

heavy shoes grated on her, the more it came home to her how she would be pleasing some one who wore velvet coats, with rich lace ruffles that bordered tapering white hands, and with shapely feet encased in fine silk stockings and fine diamond-buckled slippers – if he could see her! Hers was quite a happy love affair, and she had no occasion to mourn her lover dead, as she had not known him living – so, as yet, he had brought only pleasure into her life.

It was at the age of sixteen that Kate had found the blue manuscript, and so her *affaire* was a matter of two years' date when she returned to Marston on the occasion of her eighteenth summer. The blue-coated knight had held his own with inviolate security during those two years, and Kate was as indifferent as ever to the approaches of the youth and valor of Marston. So she and her mother settled quickly down into the routine of the old dull life. The usual visitors called, but they, too, were dull, and therefore undisturbing, and life flowed monotonously on. It was only a little less quiet existence than the one she led in winter in the city, for she never went to parties, and not often to the theatre unless there happened to be some unusual musical attraction; and her friends and relatives, of whom there were quite a number, gave her up as an incorrigibly queer girl, whom no one need try and do anything for. It is true she had her music and painting lessons there, which were some variety and diversion, but she practised both here in the country; and the life, on the whole, pleased her better. Her eccentricity, as it was called, was commented on by fewer people, and she had more

time for those delicious reveries over the old blue manuscript. She loved, on rainy days, when it was not too warm up there, to steal off to the garret and look at the blue coat, and the sword, and hat, etc., and feel herself a little nearer, in that way, to her knight. It seemed a very lonely time indeed, when she looked back to the years and days before the finding of the manuscript. It had introduced an element into her life almost as strong as reality. And yet there were times – and they came oftener, now that womanhood was ripening – when a great emptiness and longing got hold of her, and the blue manuscript, which had once been so sufficient, would not satisfy her. She hugged it closer to her heart than ever, though, and all it represented to her. She often told herself it suited her a great deal better than marriage, which she had always looked upon as a grinding and grovelling existence for a woman, and expressed and felt a fine superiority to. It was quite too commonplace and humdrum an affair for her, and she told herself, with emphasis and distinctness, that she was quite content with an ideal love. And yet, to mock her, came the thought of the pictured domestic life which the blue manuscript had so tenderly described – with such longings for the fireside, the home circle, the family love that she held in scorn. She got the old blue paper and read it over, and those words of winning tenderness brought the tears to her eyes. She found herself half wishing, for his sake, while a numb pain seized her heart for herself, that he had lived to realize these sweet dreams of home and domestic love. If that was so, her ideal was gone, and how

could she do without it, seeing she had nothing else? The tears became too thick, the pain in her throat was unsupportable, she felt the great sobs rising, and, springing up, she rushed down the stairs, flew to her room, bathed her face and adjusted her toilet, and then went down to make tea for her mother and Dr. Brett, after which she played away the spirit of sadness and unrest with all the gay and brilliant music she knew. By bed-time she was her own calm self, and the next day she regarded her strange mood with wonder, but she could not forget that it had been, and she was horribly afraid of its recurrence.

One morning she was driving herself alone in her pretty cart along a shady road that ran outside the town, when she recognized Dr. Brett's buggy and horse fastened to a tree near a small shady house. This was nothing to surprise her, for he was always working away on poor and helpless people who couldn't pay him, and she would have passed on without giving the matter a second thought, but that, just as she got to the dilapidated little gate, a woman rushed out of the house, with a girl of about fourteen after her, both of them screaming and throwing their hands about in a way that caused Kate's horse to take fright and gave her all she could do to control him for the next few minutes. He ran for a little way straight down the road, but she soon got him in hand and turned back to inquire into the cause of the trouble. The two females were still whooping and gesticulating in the yard, and the scene had been furthermore enlivened by the addition of three or four dirty and half-clothed children, who were also crying.

Just as Kate came up, Dr. Brett appeared in the doorway, with his coat off and a very angry expression on his face. He caught hold of the woman and gave her an energetic shake, telling her to hold her tongue and control her children; and just at this point he looked up and caught sight of Kate, gazing down upon the scene from the top of her pretty cart, whose horse was now as quiet as a lamb.

"What is the matter?" asked Kate, while the whole party suspended their screams a moment to gaze at her.

"I wish to goodness you could help me," said Dr. Brett, half desperately. "I was about to perform a very simple operation on this woman's child and had everything in readiness, supposing I could trust her to assist me, when she began to bawl like an idiot, and demoralized this child who was helping me, too, and simply upset the whole thing. I came out to see if there was anyone in sight who could give me some assistance; but of course –"

"I'll help you," said Kate at once, beginning to get down from the cart. "I suppose if these people could do it I could – at least I won't lose my head."

"Oh, if you only would help!" said Dr. Brett. "I can't stop to tie your horse even. I must see about the child. Here, somebody come tie this horse, and keep out of the way, every one of you! If I hear any more howling out here, I'll box the ears of the whole party!" And with these words he disappeared into the house.

A small boy came up and took the horse's rein, and the woman promised eagerly that they would take care of everything. She

was still half sobbing, and began to make excuses for herself, saying she couldn't stay to see it done, not if she'd die for it.

Kate did not stop to listen to her, but ran up the rickety steps, drawing off her long gloves as she did so, and entered the wretched little room. She had only time to take in its expression of squalor and destitution, when she paused abruptly, affrighted, in spite of herself, at the sight before her. On a table in the middle of the room was stretched a little child, dressed in a clean white frock, and with a fair little face, above which gleamed a mass of rich auburn curls. She glanced at the pretty face in its statuesque repose, and then saw that the little legs, bare from the knees, were horribly deformed, the feet being curled inward in a frightfully distorted manner.

"Is it dead?" said Kate, in a hushed whisper.

"Dead? My dear young lady, you don't suppose I've asked you to assist at a post-mortem," said the doctor cheerily, as he chose an instrument out of his case. "It's bad enough as it is. I don't know what I'll say of myself when this thing's over. But tell me! do you think you can stand it? There'll be only a few drops of blood. But I can put it off, if you say so. Tell the truth!"

"I don't want you to put it off," said Kate. "I am perfectly ready to help you. Tell me what to do."

She smelt the strong fumes of chloroform now, and realized that the child was under its influence and would feel no pain, and the knowledge strengthened her. She watched the doctor as he bent over and lifted one little hand, letting it drop back heavily,

and then raised up one eyelid, for a second, and examined the pupil.

"All right," he said. "Now, are you frightened or nervous?"

"Not in the least," she answered, calmly, feeling a wonderful strength come into her as she met his steady, confident, reassuring gaze. It was strange, but it was the first time she had noticed how fine his eyes were.

"That's right," he said; "I knew you were not a coward. Now you must watch the child's face carefully, and at the first movement or sign of returning consciousness you must douse some chloroform out of that bottle inside that towel, and hold it cone-shaped, as it is, over the baby's nose and mouth; I'll tell you how long. Don't be frightened; there's not the least danger of giving too much, and the operation is extremely simple and short."

As he spoke the baby contracted its face a little and turned its head.

"See – I'll show you," he said. And wetting the towel from the bottle he put it over the baby's face and held it there a little while, looking up at Kate, into whose face a sweet compassion had gathered, softening and beautifying it wonderfully. She was not looking at him, but down at the baby; and with a wonderful movement of tenderness she laid her fair hand on the poor deformed feet and gave them a little gentle pressure. She was utterly unconscious of herself or she couldn't have done it. Theoretically, she hated children.

The doctor now took his position at the foot of the table, and holding one of the child's feet in his hand, felt with his thumb and forefinger for a second and then made a slight incision. Kate saw one big drop of blood come out and then turned her eyes to the face of the child, as she had been instructed. The little creature was sleeping as sweetly as if in a noonday nap, and looked so unconscious and placid that it seemed all the more pitiful. She bent over and smoothed the bright curls, and then kissed the soft cheek.

"Poor little man!" she murmured, softly. She thought no one heard. Suddenly, behind her, there was a little snap.

"Hear that?" said the doctor, cheerfully. "*That's* all right."

She looked around and saw he was holding his thumb over the little cut he had made, and looking across at her with an encouraging smile.

"You're first-rate," he said, heartily. "I wish that screaming idiot could see how a brave woman behaves."

"Ah, but she is its mother!" said Kate, in a tender voice, "and it's such a little dear. I don't wonder she loves it!"

Was this really Kate Severn? He didn't have time to think whether it was or not, for the blood had stopped, and he now took up the other foot. At the same time the baby moved again and gave a little whimper. Kate promptly doused the towel and put it over the child's face, who, at its next breath, relapsed into unconsciousness.

"First-rate!" said the doctor again. "That will do for this time,"

and then proceeded with the other foot. Again Kate heard the little snapping sound, as the tendon was cut, though her eyes were fixed upon the placid face of the child.

"Now look, if you want to see a pair of straight little feet," said the doctor. And she turned around and saw, as he had said, instead of that curled deformity, two natural childish feet.

"Wonderful!" said the girl. "Oh, how thankful you must be that you are capable of such a thing as this!"

The doctor laughed his cheery, pleasant laugh.

"Why next to nobody could do that," he said. But it was plain that her commendation pleased him.

He then rapidly explained to her how into the vessel of warm water standing by she was to dip the little rolls of plaster spread between long strips of gauze, and rolled up like bolts of ribbon, and squeeze them out and hand them to him very promptly as he needed them.

"Never mind watching the baby," he said. "If it cries you must clap the towel over its face. You've got enough to do to watch me, and hand me the plaster as I need it."

Kate obeyed implicitly, and in a little while both feet had been deftly and neatly bandaged, from the toes to the knees, with the plaster bandages, and the little creature, appearing suddenly unnaturally long from this transformation, was pronounced intact.

"That's all," said the doctor. "As soon as I wash my hands I'll lay it on the bed."

"Let me," said Kate, hastily drying her own hands. And while he pretended to be engrossed in his ablutions he watched her curiously, as she lifted the baby tenderly and laid it on the bed. As she put it down she bent over and kissed it, murmuring sweet words, as a mother might have done.

"You must have the legs very straight," he said, coming over and standing at the bed's foot that he might the more accurately see them. "In an hour the plaster will be perfectly hard, and then they can move it anywhere. That's a good job, if we did do it ourselves," he said, with a bright smile.

"Oh, may I go and tell the mother?" said Kate, eagerly. "How happy she'll be to see those straight little legs!"

She went out and called the mother in. The woman's excitement had changed into stolidness, and she showed far less feeling in the matter than Kate had done. She looked at the child, without speaking, and then said she guessed she'd better clean up all this muss, and proceeded to set things to rights. Kate was indignant, and showed it in the look she cast at Dr. Brett, who smiled indulgently in reply, and said in a low tone, coming near her, "That manner is half embarrassment. I'm sure she really cares."

While he was wiping and putting up his instruments, Kate went back to the bed, a little whimper having warned her that baby was coming to.

"Don't let him move if you can help it," said the doctor, and she dropped on her knees by the bed, and began to talk to the

child in the prettiest way, taking out her watch and showing it to him, holding it to his ear that he might hear it tick, and occupying his attention so successfully that he lay quite still, gazing up at her with great earnest brown eyes, and giving a simultaneous little grin and grunt now and then. Dr. Brett came up and stood behind her for a few moments unnoticed, observing her with a strange scrutiny. "Who would have expected a thing like this from this queer girl?" he said to himself. Then, aloud, he informed Miss Severn that the baby might safely be left to its mother now; and she got up at once, and, seeing he was ready to go, followed him out of the house.

He unfastened her horse and brought the cart to the gate, and, as she mounted to her seat and took the reins, she looked down at him and said impulsively:

"I'm so glad you let me help you. Is this your life – going about all the time doing good and curing evil? I never thought how beautiful it was. If I can ever give you help again, let me do it; won't you?"

"That you shall," he said, and seemed about to add more, but something stopped the words in his throat, and she drove off, wondering what they would have been. The mingled surprise and delight in his eyes made her long to know them. As she turned a bend in the road, she looked back and saw Dr. Brett standing in the door among the children, with a hand on the head of one of the untidy little boys, looking down at him kindly. His figure was certainly both handsome and impressive, and his head and

profile fine. She wondered she had never noticed this before – but then she had never before been really interested in him. She wondered suddenly how old he was.

All the way home she was thinking about him, and how good, and cheerful, and strong, and clever he was; how everyone loved him, and what a power he had of making people feel better and brighter as soon as he came into the room. She began to recall accounts she had heard, with rather a listless interest, of difficult and successful surgical operations he had performed, and inducements offered him to go to big cities and make money, of which he had refused to avail himself simply because he loved his own people and had his hands full of work where he was. This was a fine and uncommon feeling, the girl reflected. Why had she never appreciated Dr. Brett before? By the time she reached home she had worked herself into quite a fever of appreciation, and she had a glowing account of the operation to give to her mother, who listened with great interest.

"How old is he, mamma?" she said, as she concluded.

"I really don't know. I never thought," said her mother. "He can't be much over thirty."

"Do ask him his age – I'd really like to know. It's wonderful for such a young man to be so much as he is. I never thought of his being young before – but thirty is young, of course."

After that morning's experience Kate and Dr. Brett became fast friends – on a very different footing from the old one. He told her about his patients, and took her with him sometimes to

see them, tempering the wind to her with tender thoughtfulness, and refraining her eyes from seeing some of the forms of want and wretchedness that were common things to him; but in what she did see there was opportunity for much loving ministration; and her visits to those poor dwellings with him were in most cases followed by visits alone, when she would carry little gifts for the children and delicacies for the sick, along with the sweeter benefit of a sympathetic presence that knew, by a singular tact, how to be helpful without obtrusiveness.

In the midst of all these new interests it was not remarkable that the Ideal fell into the background. Sometimes for days he would be forgotten. He didn't harmonize with these practical pursuits; and, even when old habit sometimes conjured up his image in Kate's mind, it always made a sort of discord, and, what was worse, made her feel foolish in a way that she hated. She hadn't been to the garret for a long time. There was something that gave her a painful sense of absurdity in the mere thought of the blue velvet coat, and the cocked hat and sword. What could a man do with those things in this day and generation? She thought of Dr. Brett's brown hands encumbered with lace ruffles in the sort of work he had to do, and in her heart of hearts she knew that she preferred the work to the ruffles.

But the more the exterior belongings of her Ideal grated on her now, the more she hugged to her heart his soul and spirit, as expressed in the old blue manuscript. She read it more eagerly and more persistently than ever, and, every time, its lovely words

and loving thoughts sank deeper in her heart, carrying a strange unrest there that was yet sweeter than anything had ever been to her before. All those longings for a beautiful and perfect love seemed now to come from herself – from the sacredest depth of her soul – rather than to be addressed to her.

One afternoon (it was rainy, and she could not go to drive as usual, and she no longer cared for her garret *séances*, which would once have seemed so appropriate to a day like this) she was sitting at the piano, playing to her mother, when Dr. Brett came in. He had not been to see them for many days – a most unusual thing – and she had felt neglected and hurt by it. Perhaps it was this feeling that made her very quiet in her greeting of him, or perhaps it was the melancholy, wilful strain of music into which she had wandered – plaintive minor things that seemed made to touch the founts of tears. At all events she did not feel like talking, and she drew away, after a few formal words, and left him to talk to her mother. He explained at once, however, that he had not come to stay, but to ask Mrs. Severn's permission to go up into the garret and look for something in an old box which she had permitted him to store there before he had built the house he was now occupying. Mrs. Severn remembered the fact that he had once sent a box there, and of course gave him the permission he desired.

"Kate will go with you," she said; "the garret is a favorite resort of hers, and she can help you to find your box."

So bidden, Kate was compelled to go; but she felt a strange

reluctance possessing her as she mounted the stairs ahead of Dr. Brett. When they were in the great, wide-reaching, low-ceilinged room so familiar to her, she thought of the paraphernalia of her Ideal, and felt more foolish than she had ever felt yet. What an idiot Dr. Brett would think her if he knew of the impalpable object on which she had lavished so much feeling! She thought of the Ideal that had once been so much to her, and then looked at Dr. Brett. How real he was! how strong, capable, living! What a powerful, warm-impulsed actuality, compared to that unresponsive void! She surprised the good doctor by turning to him a face suffused by a vivid blush. He looked at her intently for a second, as if he would give a great deal to find out the meaning of that blush, but he recollected himself, and said suddenly:

"There is the old box. It had no lock on it, but that precaution was not necessary, for no one would ever care to possess themselves of that old plunder. It was mostly papers, and servants are not apt to tamper with them."

He walked over and opened the box, without looking at Kate, who had turned pale as a ghost and was standing like one transfixed, with her eyes riveted to him. He knelt down and began to turn over, one by one, the parcels of papers, which were labelled on the outside and were principally old deeds and account-books. When he had gone to the bottom of the trunk, he said, without turning:

"I cannot find what I want, and yet I know it was in this box. It was a – a – certain paper of mine, that I put in here years ago.

I should know it in an instant, because it was written on some old blue paper, bleached white at the edges with age, that I happened to have at hand, and used for the purpose. I thought I should never want it again, but now I am anxious to reclaim it. It's too bad," he went on, putting the parcels back in the box; "every piece of this old trumpery seems to be here but that."

He got up and closed the lid, and, taking out his handkerchief, wiped his hands, and then began to flick the dust from the knees of his trousers. Kate still stood motionless, and, when at last he looked at her, his countenance showed him so startled by her expression that she was obliged to speak.

"I know where it is," she said; "I've got it. I didn't know it was yours. Oh, how could it be yours? I thought it was – "

"You've got it?" he said; "and you've read it?" And now it was his turn to blush. "Have you really read it?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I've read it – and over, and over, and over. How could I know? I thought it belonged to us. I thought all these old boxes were ours, and I thought of course that old faded paper was written by some one years and years ago – some one long dead and buried."

"And so it was," he said – "at least, it was written some years ago indeed, and by a rash fellow, full of the impulsiveness and fire of youth, whom I thought dead and buried too, until these last few weeks have brought him to life again. He's come back – for what, I don't know; but I could get no rest until I tried to find that old, romantic outpouring of my passionate, hungry

thoughts, written one night in red-hot haste and excitement, and addressed to a shadowy ideal of my own fancying, and proved to myself how absolutely they were realized at last – " he paused an instant, and then went on impulsively " – by you, Kate! – by you, in all your loveliness and goodness. If you have read those pages, you know how big my expectations were, how tremendous my desires. Then, let me tell you that you realize them all beyond my fondest dreams. I know you don't love me, Kate," he said, coming near and taking both her hands. "I know a rough old fellow like me could never win your love. I didn't mean to tell you about it. I never would have, but for this. I know that you don't love me; but I love you, all the same."

Kate would not give him her eyes to read, but he felt her hands shake in his, and he could see that her lips were trembling. What did it mean? Perhaps, after all – He was on fire with a sudden hope.

"Kate," he whispered, drawing her toward him by the two hands he still held fast, "perhaps you do – it seems too wonderful – but perhaps you do a little – just a little bit – enough to make me hope the rest might come. Oh, if you do, my Kate, my beautiful, my darling, tell me!"

She drew her hands away from him and buried her face.

"Oh, I don't love you a little at all," she said, half-chokingly. "I love you a great, great deal. I know the truth now."

Then he took her in his arms and drew her tight against his heart. When her lips were close to his ear, she spoke again:

"I knew it the moment you said you had written that paper. I loved whoever wrote that, already – but it wasn't that. I knew I loved *you* because it made me so unhappy, so wretched, for that minute when I thought maybe you had written those words to some one else you loved – and then you *couldn't* love me."

"Let me tell you," he whispered back: "'Some one else' never existed. There never was anyone that could command the first emotion of love from me until you came. But, like many a foolish creature, I have loved an ideal, tenderly, faithfully, abidingly, and to her these passionate words were written. Now do you think me irretrievably silly? Can you ever respect me again?"

For answer, she told him her own little story, and even got out the cocked hat and sword and blue velvet coat, and showed them to him, in a happy glee. He made an effort to take them from her and put them on; but she prevented him, indignantly.

"You shall not!" she exclaimed; "I should be ashamed of you! A fine time you'd have wrapping plaster bandages, with those ridiculous lace ruffles! Oh, I like you a thousand times better as you are."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her – a fervent, passionate, happy kiss.

"Go and get the paper," he said, as he released her, "and let us read it together, or, rather, let me read it to you – to whom it was written in the beginning. My ideal is realized."

"And so is mine," she said. "How silly we are!"

"But aren't we happy?" he answered. And then they both

laughed like children.

She broke away from him and ran noiselessly down stairs, and got the dear blue paper and brought it to him, and then, seated beside him on a rickety bench, with his arm around her waist, she listened while he read. There were many interruptions; many loving looks and tender pressures; many fervent, happy kisses. As he read the last words the paper fell from his hands, and they looked at each other, with smiling lips and brimming eyes. For one brief instant they rested so, and then both pairs of arms reached out and they were locked in a close embrace. No words were spoken – that silence was too sweet.

And this was their betrothal.

Julia Magruder.

THISTLE-DOWN

All silver-shod within a weed's
Dark heart, a thousand tiny steeds
Were tethered in one stall. Each wee heart
Panted for flight, and longed to start
Upon the race-course just beyond their walls;
And, while they waited, down the silent stalls
The wind swept softly, and, with fingers light,
Bridled the thistle horses for their flight.

Annie Bronson King.

NOVELISTS ON NOVELS

It has sometimes been a matter of pious speculation with literary and dramatic circles what Shakespeare's personal views on art and literature would have been had the enterprise and liberality of "Great Eliza's Golden Days" induced him to formulate them. A simple and credulous few have been disposed to regret the absence of any authentic enunciation beyond the curt maxims and, as it were, fractions of canons scattered throughout his dramas.

These ardent hero-worshippers dream fondly of the light the master might have cast on many important points, which can now only be dimly descried in twilight or guessed at by mere inference, and sigh at the thought of what the world has lost. Others, rationally and soberly agnostic, have been saved the heartache and intranquillity of their brethren, by the very natural and not too profound reflection that it is entirely problematic whether the actor-lessee of the Blackfriar's playhouse could have expressed an opinion worth a pinch of salt on any vital æsthetic question, even supposing him as eager to give as we to receive. Assumption is dangerous; and the possession of the creative faculty by no means implies the possession of the critical.

True, for —

"No two virtues, whatever relation they claim,

Nor even two different shades of the same,
Though like as was ever twin brother to brother,
Possessing the one shall imply you've the other."

Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, "the high priori road is permissible to the adventurous traveller." With those happily constituted persons who can imagine Shakespeare writing anything quite worthless even in the abstruse and difficult domain of scientific criticism – where so many high qualities are required which are not held to be essential to the mere creative – I disclaim the remotest desire to provoke a quarrel. Rather let me frankly congratulate them on their force of imagination. But those of a simpler faith and a scantier imaginative endowment will probably incline to the belief that the brain which fashioned "Lear" and "Othello" could, under the golden stimulus so potent to-day, have given us pertinent, perhaps even canonic comments on – say, "Every Man in his Humor," or "A Mad World my Masters," or "The White Devil." Would it be heretical to suppose the author of "Macbeth" capable of dissecting an ancient play in as keen and true a scientific spirit as that in which the *Saturday Review* dissects a modern novel? The encumbrance of a conscience might, indeed, be a serious detriment, inasmuch as it would impair the pungency of his remarks. His fantastic notions of the quality of mercy might lead him to exaggerate merits, his lack of a sustaining sense of self-omniscience to a fatal diffidence in pronouncing on defects; so that his judgments would lack that

fine Jeffreys-like flavor of judicial rigor which makes *Saturday Review* a synonym for sterling Jedburgh justice wherever the beloved and venerable name is known. He might prove a honey-bee without a sting; a grave defect at a time when the sting is esteemed more than the honey-bag. Yet, it is not improbable that, with a little judicious training and proper enlightenment on the foolishness of sentiment, he would have made a tolerable critic, for, as has been discriminatingly observed of Sophocles, the man is not without indications of genius. At any rate, in later and better appointed times, we have seen the German Shakespeare, and others of the lawless tribe of creators, enter the field of criticism and win approbation. It is true that Scott and Byron, if not exactly categorically related to Mr. Thomas Rymer, were still but indifferent critics; but we could readily tilt the scale by throwing Pope, Wordsworth, and Shelley into the other, and yet have Mr. Arnold, Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Lowell, and Mr. Lang in reserve.

And, in truth, as there are obvious reasons why lawyers make the best judges, *ci devant* thieves the best detectives, reformed drunkards the best temperance advocates, and the scared sinners (like John Bunyan) the best preachers, so there are obvious reasons why an artist's opinions of the productions of creative art, especially of the productions of that branch of it wherein he labors himself, should have peculiar value. His intimate acquaintance with the principles of art should not be detrimental to his perspicacity as a critic. Fielding's success with Parson

Adams would not, I conceive, be any hindrance to his success in a criticism of the character of Lieutenant Lismahago, nor would the packed essences of "Esmond" prove Thackeray incapable of passing a competent judgment on "David Copperfield."

The fact is, practice has its advantages over theory. To the intelligent, experience is something more than mere empiricism, and some value must be conceded to personal experience. Theory is a wench of great personal attractions, with the coquette's knack of making the most of them; but she bears the same relation to her plainer, plodding elder sister Practice that Mark Twain bore to the invaluable Dan, when that doughty henchman was deputed to take exercise for the languid humorist. Mark might have the liveliest idea of the rugged grandeur of the Alps, but Dan knew the toils of the ascent and the glories of the higher prospects; and though Mark was an invincible theoretical mountain-climber, Dan would be apt to prove the more trustworthy guide.

It was with the view of securing the directions of practical guides for the reader, in another field of exploration, that the present paper was written. I may say at once that my object in seeking the notes – so kindly and courteously placed at my disposition – was not to gratify idle curiosity with any pungent mess of personal gossip. That dignified office I gladly leave to the accomplished purveyors of the Society papers. But I conceived that the curtest expression of the genuine artist concerning the productions of his own art could not fail to be valuable as well as

interesting. The critics, like our creditors, we have always with us, to remind us we are still far from Zion, and the former are just as indispensable to us, in the present state of the world, as the latter. Unfortunately, neither enjoy immunity from the universal law of human imperfection. Creditors are not always generous nor critics always just. One grave difficulty with the latter is the insidiousness of personal predilection, which cannot be wholly excluded from the catholic judgment. Different judges have different tastes. One may have a preference for Burgandy and the other for champagne, while a third may prefer old port to either. The moral is obvious, and points to the prudence of occasionally bringing producers and consumers face to face; having done which I will withdraw for the present.

From Mr. Robert Buchanan

Dear Sir: It is difficult to say off-hand what novel I consider my prime favorite. So much depends upon the mood of the moment and point of view. I should say, generally, that the "Vicar of Wakefield" surpassed all English tales, if I did not remember that Fielding had created Parson Adams; but again, I have got more pleasure out of Dickens' masterpiece, "David Copperfield," than all the others put together. Yes, I fix on "David Copperfield" – from which, you will gather that I do not solicit in fiction the kind of romance I have myself tried to weave.

Again, in all the region of foreign fiction, I see no such

figure as Balzac, and no such pathetic creation as "Cousin Pons." That to me is a divine story, far deeper and truer, of course, than anything in Dickens, but alas! so sad. While I tremble at Balzac's insight, I have the childish faith of Dickens; he at least made the world brighter than he found it, and after all, there are worse things than his gospel of plum-pudding. When I am well and strong and full of life, I can bear the great tragedians, like the Elizabethan group, like Balzac; but when I am ill and wearied out with the world, I turn again to our great humorist to gain happiness and help.

Robert Buchanan.

From Mr. Hall Caine

My Dear Sir: I am not a great reader of novels. My favorite reading is dramatic poetry and old ballads. Few novelists can have read fewer novels. During the last five years I have certainly not read a score of new ones. But I am constantly reading *in* the old ones. Portions of chapters that live vividly in my memory, scenes, passages of dialogue, scraps of description – these I read and re-read. I could give you a list of fifty favorite passages, but I would find it hard to say which is my favorite novel. The mood of the moment would have much to do with any judgment made on that head. When I am out of heart Scott suits me well, for his sky is always serene. When I am in high spirits I enjoy Thackeray, for it is only then that I find any

humor in the odd and the ugly. Dickens suits me in many moods; there was not a touch of uncharity in that true soul. There are moments when the tenderness of Richardson is not maudlin, and when his morality is more wholesome than that of Goldsmith. Sometimes I find the humor of Sterne the most delicious thing out of Cervantes, and sometimes I am readier to cry than to laugh over "The Life and Deeds of Don Quixote." So that if I were to tell you that in my judgment this last book is on the whole the most moving piece of imaginative writing known to me, – strongest in epic spirit, fullest of inner meaning, the book that touches whatever is deepest and highest in me, – I should merely be saying that it is the last romance in which I have been reading with all the faculties of mind and heart.

I like, at all times and in all moods, the kind of fiction that gets closest to human life, and I value it in proportion as I think it is likely to do the world some good. Thus (to cite examples without method) I care very little for a book like "Vathek," and I loathe a book like "Madame Bovary," because the one is false to the real and the other is false to the ideal. I see little imagination and much inexperience in "Wuthering Heights," and great scenic genius and profound ignorance of human character in "Notre Dame." In Gogol's little story of the overcoat, and in Turgeneff's little story of the dumb porter I find tenderness, humor, and true humanity. I miss essential atmosphere in Godwin's masterpiece, and the best kind of artistic conviction almost throughout Charles Reade. It makes some deduction from my pleasure in Hawthorne that

his best characters stand too obviously not for human beings only, but also for abstract ideas. I like George Eliot best in the first part of "Silas Marner," and least in the last part of "The Mill on the Floss." Perhaps I set the highest value on my friend Blackmore among English novelists now living. I find Tolstoï a great novelist in the sense in which his fellow-countryman, Verestchagin, is a great painter – a great delineator of various life, not a great creator. Björnson, the Norwegian novelist, in his "Arne" seems to me a more imaginative artist than Doré in his "Vale of Tears." I do not worship "Manon Lescaut," and I would rather read "Les Miserables" than "Germinal." In short, to sum it up in a word, I suppose I am an English idealist in the sense in which (if I may say so without presumption) George Sand was a French idealist. I think it is the best part of the business of art to lighten the load of life. To do this by writing mere "light literature," the companion of an idle hour, a panacea for toothache, a possible soporific, would seem to me so poor an aim that, if it were the only thing before me I think I would even yet look about for another profession. Fiction may lighten life by sterner means – by showing the baffled man the meanness of much success, and the unsuccessful man the truer triumphs of failure. To break down the superstitions that separate class from class, to show that the rule of the world is right, and that though evil chance plays a part in life, yet that life is worth living – these are among the functions of the novelist. In reaching such ends there are few or no materials that I would deny to him. He should be as free as the Elizabethan dramatists

were, or even the writers of our early ballads. His work would be various in kind, and not all suited to all readers; but he would touch no filth for the distinction of being defiled. It would not trouble him a brass farthing whether his subject led him to a "good" or a "bad" ending, for he would have a better ambition than to earn the poor wages of a literary jester, and his endings would always be good in the best sense where his direction was good.

And so in some indirect way I have answered your question; and I would like to add that I foresee that the dominion of the novel must be extended. Fiction is now followed by appalling numbers with amazing fecundity and marvellous skill, which, though mainly imitative, is occasionally original; but its channels are few and very narrow. Already the world seems to be growing weary of feeble copies of feeble men and feeble manners. It wants more grit, more aim, more thought, and more imagination. But this is thin ice to tread, and I would not disparage by a word or a wink the few novelists now living who will assuredly rank with the best in literature. Dugald Stewart said that human invention, like the barrel organ, was limited to a specific number of tunes. The present hurdy-gurdy business has been going on a longish time. We are threatened with the Minerva press over again, and the class of readers who see no difference between Walter Scott and John Galt. But, free of the prudery of the tabernacle and the prurience of the boulevard, surely the novel has a great future before it. Its possibilities seem to me nearly illimitable. Though the best of the novel is nowhere a match

for the best of the drama, yet I verily believe that if all English fiction, from Defoe downwards, including names conspicuous and inconspicuous, remembered and forgotten, were matched against all English poetry of whatever kind, from Pope to our own day, it would be found that the English novelist is far ahead of the English poet in every great quality – imagination, pathos, humor, largeness of conception, and general intellect. And I will not hesitate to go further and say that, the art of the novel is immeasurably greater than the art of the drama itself – more natural as a vehicle and less limited in its uses, more various in subject and less trammelled in its mechanism, capable of everything that the drama (short of the stage) can do, and of infinitely more resource.

Hall Caine.

From Mr. Wilkie Collins

After pleading illness and arrears of literary work and correspondence in excuse of the brevity of his note, Mr. Collins says:

Besides, the expression of my opinion in regard to writers of fiction and their works will lose nothing by being briefly stated. After more than thirty years' study of the art, I consider Walter Scott to be the greatest of all novelists, and "The Antiquary" is, as I think, the most perfect of all novels.

Wilkie Collins.

From Mr. H. Rider Haggard

Dear Sir: I think that my favorite novel is Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities." I will not trouble you with all my reasons for this preference. I may say, however, and I do so with humility, and merely as an individual expression of opinion, that it seems to me that in this great book Dickens touched his highest level. Of course, the greatness of the subject has something to do with the effect produced upon the mind, but in my view there is a dignity and an earnestness in the work which lift it above the rest. Also I think it one of the most enthralling stories in the language.

H. Rider Haggard.

From Mr. Joseph Hatton

Dear Sir: You ask me to name my favorite novel, and if it should happen to be a work by a foreign author to mention my favorite English work of fiction also. I find it impossible to answer you. When I was a boy "The Last of the Mohicans" was my favorite novel; a young man and in love, "David Copperfield" became my favorite. When I grew to be a man "The Scarlet Letter" took the place of David and the North American Indian; but ever since I can remember I have always been reading "Monte Cristo" with unflagging delight. One's favorite book is a question

of mood. Now and then one might be inclined to regard "Adam Bede" as the most companionable of fiction; there are other times when "Pickwick" appeals most to one's fancy, or when one is even in the humor for "L'Homme qui Rit." "Don Quixote" fits all moods, and there are moments when a page or two of "Clarissa" are to one's taste. But with Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Hugo, Dumas, George Eliot, Hawthorne, Smollett, Balzac, Erckmann-Chatrian, Lytton, Lever, Ik Marvel, George Sand, Charles Reade, Turgeneff, and a host of other famous writers of fiction staring me in the face, don't ask me to say which of their works is my favorite novel.

Joseph Hatton.

From "Vernon Lee."

Dear Sir: I hasten to acknowledge your letter. I do not think, however, that I can answer in a satisfactory manner. I am very little of a novel reader, and do not feel that my opinion on the subject of novels is therefore of critical value. Of the few novels I know (comparing my reading with that of the average Englishman or woman) I naturally prefer some; but to give you the titles of them – I think I should place first Tolstoï's "War and Peace" and Stendhal's "Chartreuse de Parme" – would not be giving your readers any valuable information, as I could not find leisure to

explain *why* I prefer them.

"*Vernon Lee.*"

From Mr. George Moore

Sir: Waiving the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of a complete and satisfactory answer to your question, I will come at once to the point. You ask me to name my favorite work of fiction, giving reasons for the preference. The interest of such a question will be found in the amount of naïve sincerity with which it is answered. I will therefore strive to be as naïvely sincere as possible.

Works of romance I must pass over, not because there are none that I appreciate and enjoy, but because I feel that my opinion of them would not be considered as interesting as my opinion of a work depicting life within the limits of practical life. The names of many works answering to this description occur to me, but in spirit and form they are too closely and intimately allied to my own work to allow me to select any one of them as my favorite novel. Looking away from them my thought fixes itself at once on Miss Austen. It therefore only remains for me to choose that one which appears to me to be the most characteristic of that lady's novels. Unhesitatingly I say "Emma."

The first words of praise I have for this matchless book is the oneness of the result desired and the result attained. Nature in producing a rose does not seem to work more perfectly and securely than Miss Austen did. This merit, and

this merit I do not think any one will question, eternalizes the book. "L'Education Sentimentale," "The Mill on the Floss," "Vanity Fair," "Bleak House," I admire as much as any one; but I can tell how the work is done; I can trace every trick of workmanship. But analyse "Emma" as I will, I cannot tell how the perfect, the incomparable result is achieved. There is no story, there are no characters, there is no philosophy, there is nothing: and yet it is a *chef-d'œuvre*. I have said there are no characters; this demands a word of explanation. Miss Austen attempts only – and thereby she holds her unique position – the conventionalities of life. She presents to us man in his drawing-room skin: of the serpent that gnaws his vitals she cares nothing, and apparently knows nothing. The drawing-room skin is her sole aim. She never wavers. The slightest hesitation would be fatal; her system is built on a needle's point. We know that no such mild, virtuous people as her's ever existed or could exist; the picture is incomplete, but there lies the charm. The veil is wonderfully woven, figures move beneath it never fully revealed, and we derive pleasure from contemplating it because we recognize that it is the sham hypocritical veil that we see but feel not – the sham hypocritical world that we see is presented to us in all its gloss without a scratch on its admirable veneer. No writer except Jane Austen ever had the courage to so limit himself or herself. The strength and the weakness of art lies in its incompleteness, and no art was ever at once so complete and incomplete as Miss Austen's.

Every great writer invents a pattern, and the Jane Austen pattern is as perfect as it is inimitable. It stands alone. The

pattern is a very slight one, but so is that of the rarest and most beautiful lace. And in all sincerity I say that I would sooner sign myself the author of "Emma" than of any novel in the English language – the novel I am now writing of course excepted.

George Moore.

From Mr. Justin McCarthy

Dear Sir: I have so many favorites – even in English-written fiction alone: I am very fond of good novels. I couldn't select *one*. Let me give you a few, only a few! The moment I have sent off this letter I shall be sure to repent some omissions. Fielding's "Joseph Andrews;" Scott's "Antiquary," "Guy Mannering," "Heart of Midlothian," and "St. Ronan's Well;" Dickens's "Pickwick," "Barnaby Rudge," and "Tale of Two Cities;" Thackeray's "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis," and "Esmond;" Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre;" George Eliot's "Mill on the Floss;" Hawthorne's "Blithedale Romance;" and George Meredith's "Beauchamp's Career."

And I had nearly forgotten in my haste two great favorites of mine – Miss Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," and Gerald Griffin's "Collegians;" and, again, surely Hope's "Anastasius."

I had better stop.

Justin McCarthy.

From Miss F. Mabel Robinson

Sir: Your question is an extremely difficult one to answer. One likes some novels for one kind of excellence, others for another, and the favorite – the absolute favorite – is apt to depend a little upon the good novel one has read most recently, and a great deal more upon one's mood.

I do not think that I could name any one novel, either English or foreign, as my first favorite; there are at least four of Turgeneff's, the bare memory of which moves me almost to tears; but I could not choose between "Liza," "Virgin Girl," "Fathers and Sons," and "Smoke;" and, of course, Tolstoi's "War and Peace" is a masterpiece which every one will name as a favorite (I give the titles in English, as I have read all these in translations only, French or English), and indeed I think I ought almost to name it as *the* favorite among foreign novels.

To turn to English masterpieces, there are parts of Fielding's "Amelia," which for tenderness, sweetness, and rendering of character and of home life I think finer than anything more modern; but other parts of the book are so unpleasant that I cannot place it first. I think I must plead guilty to four equal favorites: "Amelia," "Esmond," "The Mill on the Floss," and "Villette;" but perhaps I might tell you to-morrow that I place "Vanity Fair" above "Esmond," and prefer "Middlemarch" to "The Mill on the Floss." Still I think to-day's choice is best, so I will stick to it.

It is impossible to know all one's reasons for preferring some books to others – the style, the diction, the subtle way in which the writer makes you feel many things he has left unsaid elude description; and one's own frame of mind when the book first became known may have a great deal to do with it. Unconsciously association has much to do with one's preferences. It is for the character of Amelia, and the charm of her relations with her husband, that I like this novel. Some of the scenes and dialogues between these two are to my mind perfect, absolutely true and beautiful and satisfying. "Esmond" is certainly very inferior to "Amelia" in point of illusion; one always is conscious that one is *reading*, and the characters are like people we have heard of, or who are at least absent from us; but Harry Esmond is, to my mind, the finest gentleman in English fiction, none the less noble for his little self-conscious air. I have always wondered why he is less popular than Col. Newcome. Except perhaps Warrington he is Thackeray's noblest male character; and "Esmond" is, I take it, the best constructed of Thackeray's novels, and exquisitely written. It is only because there is no woman worthy of the name of heroine that I cannot like this novel best of all. For the reverse reason, that there is no hero, I cannot place "The Mill on the Floss" quite first. Maggie is a beautiful creation, and the picture of English country-life inimitable; the Dodsen family in all its branches is truly masterly. But for deep insight into the heart and soul and mind of a woman where will you find Charlotte Brontë's equal? Her descriptive power and her style are unsurpassable, and Lucy

Snowe can teach you more about the thoughts and griefs and unaccountable nervous miseries and heart-aches of the average young woman than any other heroine in fiction that I know of. There is no episode that I am aware of, of such heartfelt truth as that wretched summer holiday she passed alone at Madame Beck's. And every character in the book is excellent; and as for the manner of it, it seems wrung from the very heart of the writer.

F. Mabel Robinson.

From Mr. W. Clark Russell

Dear Sir: I hardly know what to say in response to your question as to my favorite work of fiction. I am afraid I must go so far back as Defoe, of whose "Colonel Jack" and "Moll Flanders" I never weary. Amongst modern writers I greatly admire Blackmore, Hardy, and Besant. There is great genius and originality, too, in Christie Murray. But with Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Brontë's on my shelves, the indication of any one work of fiction as my favorite since the days of "Roxana," "Pamela," "Joseph Andrews," and "Humphrey Clinker," would prove an undertaking which I fear I have not the courage to adventure.

W. Clark Russell.

From Mr. J. Henry Shorthouse

Sir: Your question seems to me to be a difficult, or I might almost say, an impossible one to answer. I do not see how a man of any carefulness of thought or decision can have one favorite work of fiction. To answer your question as simply as possible, I should say that of foreign books my favorites are "Don Quixote" and the novels of Goethe and Jean Paul Richter.

As regards English fiction, I should, I think, place George Eliot's "Silas Marner" first, both as a work of art and as fulfilling, to me, all the needs and requirements of a work of fiction; but I could not say this unless I may be allowed to bracket with this book Nathaniel Hawthorne's "House of the Seven Gables," Mrs. Gaskell's "Cranford," Jane Austen's "Persuasion," Mrs. Ritchie's "Story of Elizabeth," and William Black's "Daughter of Heth" – all of which books seem to me to stand in the very first rank, and not only to fulfil the requirements of the human spirit, but to stand the much more difficult test of being, each of them, perfect as a whole.

J. Henry Shorthouse.

From Mr. W. Westall

Dear Sir: You ask for the title of my favorite work

of fiction. I answer that I have no one favorite work of fiction. Among the myriad novels which I have read there is none of excellence so supreme that I prefer it before all others. On the other hand, I have favorite novels – a dozen or so; I have never reckoned them up. These I will enumerate as they occur to me: "Don Quixote," "Tom Jones," "Ivanhoe," "The Heart of Midlothian," "Jane Eyre," "David Copperfield," "Tale of Two Cities," "Esmond," "Vanity Fair," "Adam Bede," "Lorna Doone," "Crime and Punishment" (Dostoieffsky), "Monte Cristo," and "Froment Jeune et Risler Ainé."

I do not suggest that these novels are of equal literary merit. I merely say that they are my favorites, that I have read them all with equal pleasure more than once, and that, as time goes on, I hope to read them again.

W. Westall.

J. A. Stewart.

A QUEEN'S EPITAPH

[IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.]

"And her chief charm was bashfulness of face."

There lay the others: some whose names were writ
In dust – and, lo! the worm hath scattered it.

There lay the others: some whose names were cut
Deep in the stone below which Death is shut.

The plumèd courtier, with his wit and grace,
So flattered one that scarce she knew her face!

And the sad after-poet (dreaming through
The shadow of the world, as poets do)

Stops, like an angel that has lost his wings,
And leans against the tomb of one and sings

The old, old song (we hear it with a smile)
From towers of Ilium and from vales of Nile.

But she, the loveliest of them all, lies deep,
With just a rude rhyme over her fair sleep.

(Why is the abbey dark about her prest?
Her grave should wear a daisy on its breast.

Nor could an age of minster music be
Worth half a skylark's hymn for such as she.)

With one rude rhyme, I said; but that can hold
The sweetest story that was ever told.

For, though, if my Lord Christ account it meet
For us to wash, sometimes, a pilgrim's feet,

Or slip from purple raiment and sit low
In sackcloth for a while, I do not know;

Yet this I know: when sweet Queen Maud lay down,
With her bright head shorn of its charm of crown

(A hollow charm at best, aye, and a brief —
The rust can waste it, as the frost the leaf),

She left a charm that shall outwear, indeed,
All years and tears – in this one rhyme I read.

Sarah M. B. Piatt.

THE COST OF THINGS

"Papa, why does bread cost so much money?" asks a child, of its father. Perhaps if the father is indifferent, indolent, or ignorant, he may dodge the question and reply, "Because flour is so scarce." But if he is a thinking and observant man, willing to instruct an ignorant child asking a very natural question, he will not content himself with such a reply, for he must have observed that bread is sometimes high when wheat and flour are very plentiful.

By drawing on his experience he will not fail to recall the fact that, in a season when any particular article is in much demand, the price of that article will rise and will continue to rise until the demand for the article induces a supply of it from outside sources.

Let him recall Christmas and Thanksgiving times, when, for instance, turkeys are in demand. If the supply is light, up goes the price of turkeys; and, if the demand increases, the price will continue to rise unless some means are found of supplying the demand. If turkeys flow into the market of a city from the surrounding country, the rise in price is first checked, and then, as the supply increases, the price falls, and the demand being less than the supply, the price goes to its lowest figure. This is in accordance with the recognized law of supply and demand, the relation between the two always establishing the price.

If the demand is greater than the supply, the price will go up; if the supply is greater than the demand, the price will go down. But this state of things can exist only where the inflow of supply and the outflow of demand are *free* and *unrestricted*; for if, from any cause, restriction is placed on the inflow, the outflow will be restricted just in the same way. We may liken the operation of the law to what happens when a bent tube with the ends up is filled with water. If, now, more water is poured in at one end, that same amount will flow out at the other. If the whole capacity of the tube at one end is used to supply water, just that amount will run out at the other; but if one-half the tube at the supply end is plugged up, then only one-half the capacity of the tube will run out at the other.

Reverting to the question of the supply of turkeys in a market, let us suppose that a despot, ungoverned by anything but his own will, is in charge of the city when the turkey market is held, and of the surrounding country, and, wishing to have a plentiful supply of turkeys, he issues his ukase that every turkey within ten miles of the town shall, under severe penalties, be sent into market for sale. Is it not plain that the price of turkeys will at once fall, since the supply will at once become greater than the demand? But suppose this despot has turkeys of his own to sell, and hence desires to make his poor people pay the highest price for their turkeys, so that his coffers may be filled with gold. Now, instead of requiring all turkeys to come in under severe penalties, he does everything he can to keep them out, and issues his ukase that

none shall come in, under penalty of death to the importer of turkeys. Is it not as plain as it was in the other case, that the price of turkeys will go up, up, up, until the vast majority of men cannot buy at all?

Suppose that, instead of placing an absolute prohibition upon the importation of turkeys, the despot, convinced that people must have turkeys, and having already arranged to buy all he wants himself, makes a law that every turkey coming into the market shall be taxed one dollar for the privilege of bringing it to market. Now, turkeys will come in if there is still a demand for them, but every one that comes in must pay a tax of a dollar; and, if there are any turkeys already in market, a dollar will be added to their price, as well as to the price of those coming in. For no importer proposes to lose the amount of the tax himself, and is bound to make the consumer pay that much additional for his turkey; and a resident turkey-dealer, seeing that imported turkeys are selling for a dollar above the market price, will at once add that to the price of his turkeys, since it is expecting too much of human nature to suppose any man is going to sell his property for less than he can get for it. The result of the despot's tax, therefore, is to raise the local price of turkeys by just the amount of that tax; and, the higher the tax, the higher the price of turkeys will be to the consumer.

In this way the price of any article in a market is established by the relation between the supply and the demand; and this law is inexorable. If the supply is restricted by taxing imports, the

price, whilst higher, will still be fixed by the demand made for the article; and this applies to all articles which are salable – flesh and blood, muscle, labor, as well as to bread, meat, etc. In slavery times, when a great demand existed in the cotton-States for slave labor, slaves were imported from the more northern States, where labor was not so valuable, to the more southern ones, where it was more so; and this gave the border States the name of being the "slave-breeding States" of the Union. The increased demand for slaves threatened at one time to reopen the slave trade with Africa; and it is said that some negroes were, in fact, brought into the country. Under these circumstances, had the States (Mississippi, Louisiana, and others) where a demand for slaves existed possessed the power to lay a tax on slaves imported into them, the price of slaves in those States would have been very considerably increased.

The work of hands – labor – is a salable article, just as much as bread or meat, and its price is determined in the same way; not only as regards common labor, but also special kinds of labor. Reverting to the question at the head of this paper, – the price of bread, – let us suppose a community where all the elements of bread-making (flour, yeast, potatoes, etc.) exist in abundance, but where there is but one baker. If the demand for bread is so great that one baker will have to run his bakery night and day to supply the demand, and he can fix his own price, limited only by the number of his customers and their ability to pay (the "demand"), although he can buy his flour and other ingredients

cheap, he must pay high wages to his assistants and work hard himself. As the demand for bread increases, its prices will rise until the attention of other bakers is attracted, other bakeries will be established, the supply will more nearly equal the demand, and the price of bread will fall, in accordance with the same law as governed in the case of turkeys; whilst bakers' wages, from the very fact of there being more bakers on the ground, will fall. If, notwithstanding the establishment of more bakeries, the demand still remains greater than the supply, the price of bread will still remain up, and an attempt may be made to import bread from without. If the bakers have influence enough with the law-making power, or with our supposed despot, they will have an import tax placed upon bread to keep up their prices, under the plea of "sustaining domestic industry;" but the amount of this import tax will go into the pockets of the owners of the bakeries, although the wages of their workmen will not be increased, for their wages depend, as has been shown, not on the price of bread, but upon the number of bread-making laborers available. If such laborers increase in number, the wages of the bread-makers may even go very low, though the price of bread (thanks to the import tax) may remain very high. These points are dwelt upon at length for the purpose of exposing the fallacy of a popular delusion – that...

It is a remarkable fact that, whilst many laboring-men are deluded with the idea that taxing articles which they consume or aid in producing tends to keep up their wages or to increase

them, they entirely ignore the real reason for low wages, which is nothing more or less than the presence of plenty of labor. Once convinced of the fact that the price of everything, labor included, depends on the inexorable law of supply and demand, they will not be able to resist the conclusion that *no importation tax can, by any possibility, affect the price of labor, except an importation tax on labor itself.*

This fact seems almost to demonstrate itself; and yet there is no greater delusion in this country, where its falsity is demonstrated every day to anyone observant of the settlement of our vast Western territories. Let anyone go into a Western settlement and note the high price of labor of all kinds, and that it is almost impossible to get a man to do a day's work for love or money; and let him visit the same place a few years later, when perhaps a railroad is running through the place, which in the meantime has grown immensely in population. He will now note the decrease in wages of all kinds. And, if he will go to the same place still later, he will not fail to note a still further decline; for, if the demand continues, labor will, by means of the railroad, flow in to supply it, and the price of labor will fall – for no other reason than that there is plenty of labor to supply the demand. And this lesson is demonstrated over and over again wherever a new settlement is observed. If there is only one bricklayer in the place he can demand his own price, which cannot be affected by the presence of fifty or a hundred carpenters or blacksmiths, nor by a tax on bricks, mortar, or sand.

X.

ASLEEP

She is not dead, but sleepeth. As the fair,
Sweet queen, dear Summer, laid her sceptre down
And lifted from her tirèd brows her crown,
And now lies lapped in slumber elsewhere —
As she will rise again, when smiling May,
Saying, "Thy day dawns," wakes her with a kiss,
And butterflies break from the chrysalis
And throng to welcome her upon her way,
And roses laugh out into bloom for glee
That Summer is awake again – so she
Who sleeps, snow-still and white, will waken when
The Day dawns – and will live for us again.

Charles Prescott Shermon.

A COUPLE OF VAGABONDS

Vagabonds, vagrants, tramps, – the class has never been entirely confined to humanity, – those careless, happy-go-easy, dishonest, unterrified beings to whom the world is an oyster, and often such a one as is not worth the opening, sometimes possess an interest to the observer, entirely disconnected with pity. They always lead reprehensible lives, and usually die disgracefully. They are amusing because of the exaggerated obliquity of their careers, and are, beasts and men alike, droll with a drollery that is three-quarters original sin. Among animals, at least, there are few cases of actual misfortune, though sometimes there is that most pitiable and forlorn creature, a dog that has lost his master, or that bit of cruelty and crime which has its exemplification in an old horse that has been turned out to die. Ordinarily the cases of animal depravity one encounters are so by race and ineradicable family habit, and are beyond the pale of charity and outside the legitimate field of brotherly love. One does not care what becomes of them, and least of all thinks of trying to reform them. But they usually take care of themselves, after a fashion that excludes all thought of pity. Even among the higher animals there are, as with humanity, occasional cases of extraordinary depravity. I know at this moment of a beautiful horse, with a white hind foot, and the blood of a long line of aristocrats in his veins, who wears an iron muzzle and two halter-chains, whose

stall is the cell of a demon, who has made his teeth meet in the flesh of two or three of his keepers, and who is yet sufficiently sane to try to beat all his competitors on the track, and to often succeed. I know a little gray family dog, terrier from the end of his nose to the tip of his tail, kind to all whom he knows, who is yet the veriest crank of his kind. He hates everything that wears trousers, will not come when called with the kindest intentions, attacks all other dogs, big and little, who intrude within his line of vision, and confines his friendships exclusively to people who wear skirts and bonnets. He wears his heavy coat all summer because he has said to the family collectively that he will not be clipped; and, when an attempt of that kind is made, shows his teeth, even to the little girl who owns him. He reminds one of the incorrigible youth of an otherwise God-fearing family, and has been let go in his ways because he is too ugly and plucky to spend the time upon. I know a cat, now not more than half-grown, with a handsome ash-colored coat and a little white neck-tie, who is already as much a tiger as though born in the wilds of Africa. His playful bites draw blood, and his unsheathed claws are a terror, even when one is stroking his back. His tail quivers and his eyes have a tigerish expression, even when he is but catching a ball of yarn. He was after mice, and caught them, in his early infancy, and he was crouching and skulking after things when he should have been lapping milk. It is plainly foreseen that he will never be a family cat, and will take to the alleys and back fences before he is grown. He has in him, more than other cats have, the vagabond

and depraved instinct – not amenable to Christian influences.

But the two persons of whom I shall doubtless seem to have as full recollection here as their characters justify belong to the extensive family of natural vagabonds, and first dawned upon me in the days when there was a frontier. I was in those days perfectly hardened to a bed on the ground, and was amused with the companionship of pack-mules. I was dependent for mental stimulus upon the stories of the camp-fire, and for recreation upon the wild realm in which the only changes that could come were sunrise and evening, clouds, wind, storms. There was a lonely vastness so wide that it became second nature to live in it and almost to love it, and a silence so dense that it became companionship. There was then no dream of anything that was to come. The march of empire had not touched the uttermost boundary. We wondered why we were there. And the blindest of all the people about this wonderful empire were those who knew it best. I really expected then to watch and chase Indians for the remainder of my natural life; looked upon them and their congeners as permanent institutions; made it a part of business to know them as well as possible; and wondered all the while at the uselessness of the government policy in occupying, even with a few soldiers, so hopeless a territory. Very often there was nothing else to do. All the books had been committed to memory previous to being absolutely worn out. It was a world where newspapers never came. When the friendship of certain animals becomes obtrusive, – when they take the place to you of

those outsiders whom you do not really wish to know, but who are there nevertheless, – you are likely to come to understand them very well indeed, and to find in after years that they seem to come under the head of persons rather than creatures – the casual wild creatures of whom one ordinarily catches a glimpse or two in the course of a lifetime.

There was a bushy and exalted tail often seen moving leisurely along above the taller grasses that lined the prairie trail. One might encounter it at any hour, or might not see it for many days. I finally came to look upon this plume with something more than the interest attaching to a mere vagrant polecat, and even ceased to regard the end that bore it as the one specially to be avoided, however common the impression that it is so. In civilization and in the books nobody had ever accused the parti-colored creature of other than a very odorous reputation; and the tricks of his sly life – such as rearing an interesting and deceptively pretty family under the farmer's corn-crib, and refusing to be ejected thence; visiting, with fowl intent, the hen-house; sucking eggs; catching young ducks; and forcing the pedestrian to go far around him upon the occasion of a chance meeting, were condoned as matters that could not be helped in the then condition of human ingenuity and invention. With us, on the plains, he had acquired another and more terrible reputation. Nobody knows how information becomes disseminated in the wilderness, but it seemed to be spread with a rapidity usually only known in a village of some three hundred inhabitants, with a Dorcas Society;

and we came to know, from authentic instances, that his bite, and not his perfume, was dangerous. In 1873, the *Medical Herald*, printed at the metropolis of Leavenworth, stated that a young man sleeping in a plains camp was bitten on the nose by one of the beasts. Awaking, he flung his midnight visitor off, and it immediately bit his companion, upon whom it unfortunately alighted. Both of these unfortunates died of hydrophobia.

The same year a citizen came to the U. S. Army surgeon at Fort Harker, Kansas, having been bitten through the nose by a mephitis while asleep. He had symptoms of hydrophobia, and shortly afterwards died of that disease. The next case of which printed record was made was that of a young man who, while sleeping on the ground, was bitten through the thumb. The writer states that the "animal had to be killed before the thumb could be extracted." This man also died of hydrophobia in the town of Russell, in western Kansas. Other cases are recorded about this time, with less detail.

I mention these instances, substantiated in cold print in a medical journal, merely to show that what we thought we knew was not a mere frontier superstition. With a righteous hatred did we hate the whole mephitis family. The little prairie rattlesnake often crept into the blankets at night for the sake of warmth; and it is a noticeable fact that he did not "rattle" and did not bite anybody while enjoying their unintended hospitality, and that such things were not much thought of. But the sneaking presence of a skunk, usually considered merely a ridiculous and

disagreeable creature, would always call out the force for his extermination, promptly, and by some means.

Yet mephitis has the air of seeming rather to like, than to seek to avoid, mankind. It is one of his curious traits. You cannot certainly tell whether he really does; but, if he does not, it is strange with what frequency he is encountered, exhibiting on such occasions a singular confidence, not in any case reciprocated. It is certain that he has crossed a railroad bridge to visit the bustling metropolis of the Missouri Valley, and been seen complacently ambling the streets there at midnight. If, in crossing a "divide" or threading a reedy creek-bottom, there is seen before you one of those imposing plumes before referred to, standing erect above the long grass, without any perceptible attachment, and moving slowly along, it will be prudent not to permit any curiosity concerning the bearer of it to tempt you to a nearer acquaintance. Indeed, should he discover you, in turn, it will be rather out of the usual line of his conduct if he does not at once come amiably ambling in your direction, intent upon making your personal acquaintance, or, as is more likely, of finding out if there is anything about you which he considers good to eat. There is something both amusing and fearful in this desire to make acquaintances regardless of all the forms of introduction and the usages of society; and no other animal possesses the trait. No one, so far as known, has ever waited to see what special line of conduct he would pursue after he came. The chances are that he would stay as long as

he had leisure, and then go without offence; yet no one can foretell his possible caprices. He might conclude to spend the afternoon with one; and, as he is known to be a pivotal animal, reversing himself, upon suspicion arising in his mind, with a celerity perhaps not fully appreciated until afterwards, one might find it at least irksome to remain so long idle and quite still. I knew a soldier once who had such a visit while walking his guard-beat. He did not dare to fire his gun in time, for fear of the serious accusation of wishing to kill game while on duty. He could not scare away the cat, and dared not leave his beat. He stood stock-still for an hour or two, and then called the corporal of the guard in a subdued and whining voice. When that non-commissioned autocrat at last appeared, he considered twenty yards a convenient distance for communication, and declined to come any nearer. Mephitis was at the moment engaged in stroking his sides against the sentinel's trousers, while his host did not dare to either move or speak in a voice the corporal could hear. The latter went away and obtained permission from the officer of the day to shoot something, and returned with four more armed men. The visitor here saw an opportunity to make new acquaintances, and started to meet the latest arrivals half way. They all ran, while the sentinel took the opportunity to walk off in a direction not included in his instructions. The animal was finally partially killed by a volley at forty paces, leaving a pungent reminiscence that did not depart during the remainder of the summer, and necessitated some new arrangements for the

lines of defence about the post.

In more recent times an entire company of hunters, with a dog to every man, have been driven from the field repeatedly by the persistency of the innocent gaze, or the foolish confidence of the approach, of this extraordinary bore; for one can't shoot him if he is looking – not because one can't, but because, if one did, a souvenir would be left, at least among the dogs, that would linger with them until the natural time for the shedding of hair should come again, and deprive their owners of the pleasure of their company for an indefinite period. And, in addition, the people with whom one might wish to stop for the night might make remarks accompanied by nasal contortions not usual in ordinary conversation, and would be likely to suggest the barn, or otherwheres out-of-doors, as being good and refreshing places to spend the night in. Even the hunter's own family will prove inhospitable to the verge of cruelty under such circumstances, and conduct unheard of before will become perfectly proper on the part of one's best friends. Such discomfitures have happened ere now to most sportsmen in Western preserves, and for some reason a crowning misfortune of the kind is apt to be considered a joke ever afterwards.

But an uncontrollable desire for human intimacy is only one item of the oddities of this little beast. As a vagabond of the wilderness he was like other vagabonds there, and got on well enough without any human association. Carnivorous entirely, he cannot be accused of looking for the well-filled granary of later

times; he invades no cabbage-patch, and is entirely guiltless of succulent sweet potatoes and milky roasting-ears. His presence in increased numbers among the fields and farms of civilization is accounted for by the fact that he has simply declined to move on. He will not retire to the wilds of the pan-handle or the neutral strip, driven thither by the too copious outpour of civilization. His conduct indicates the just conclusion that he can endure all the vicissitudes of the school-house States if they can, in turn, endure him. Doubly armed, this autocrat of the prairies holds in unique dignity the quality of absolute fearlessness, and, aside from any hydrophobic endowments, is now the chiefest terror of the free and boundless West.

A figure-head seems to be necessary in the conduct of all the larger affairs of life. From this idea have come all the griffins, and the sphinxes, and the St. Georges and Dragons, the hideous caryatids, gnomes, gorgons, chimeras dire, the eyes of Chinese junks, and the wooden cherubs that until later years looked over the waste of unknown waters beneath the bows of every ship that sailed. On the seals of one-half of all the Western States and territories mephitis might figure as the chiefest animal of their natural fauna, and for him might the buffalo and the bear be properly discarded. They are gone: he remains and impresses himself upon the community unmistakably. But mottoes and great seals and epitaphs are things not expected to be governed in their making by anything like actual fact.

It will be conceded that no other beast approaches this in

the particulars of his armament. So confident of his resources is he that the idea that he can be worsted never enters his elongated cranium. Though he never uses his phenomenal powers except upon what he considers an emergency, these supposed emergencies arise quite too frequently for the general comfort and piety of his neighborhood. It is said that the little western church never thrives greatly in a neighborhood that is for some reason peculiarly infested by him. Yet it is a remarkable fact that when he visits the farmer's hen-roost, which he often does, the owner, if he came from some timbered country, nearly always lays the blame upon the much-maligned "coon;" meaning, of course, that pad-footed and ring-tailed creature who is credited with a slyness verging upon intellect, but who never visited a prairie in his life. He does this because there is no penetrating and abiding savor left behind – except in case of accident – in any of these maraudings. It is a mere piece of cunning. He wishes to come again some other time. The victims of his appetite, comprising everything smaller than himself in that region, are never subjected to his caudal essences, and a good reason for this would be that he wishes to eat them himself. Those who know mephitis well, and also know this trait of his character, are impressed anew by the mercifulness of some of nature's instincts and freaks.

And here arises the question of a certain occult power apparently possessed by this creature alone. It seems to be established by undisputed testimony that he is the most skilful

packer of meats, with the least trouble and expense, known in the annals of the art preservative. His hollow logs have been repeatedly split in his absence, and found full of dead fowls, killed in a neighboring farm-yard, squeezed in closely side by side for future use, and all untainted and fresh. How does he accomplish this? There are evidently various things to learn from the field of natural history which might be turned to the uses of man. To say nothing of the value of the patent, this would be a very useful household recipe if known. The inference is that there may be an occult quality in his strange and characteristic endowment not heretofore suspected.

Our western friend has an extensive family relationship. There are at least six varieties of him in various latitudes. No one branch of the family is believed to have any fellowship with any other branch, probably for weighty and sufficient family reasons; though to the ordinary human senses there is so little difference in the sachet that one cannot see reason for being so particular among themselves. Two of him are very common west of the Missouri – one as big as a poodle and variously striped, and the other of a smaller and more concentrated variety, more active also in his habits. It is the bigger of these two who goes about waving his plume and seeking new acquaintances, as though he contemplated going into the Bohemian oats business among the farmers, and who courts admiration while he spreads consternation. It is he who lies in ambush in the corn-shocks, in the early days of the yellow autumn, apparently for the express

purpose, through the media of the farmer's boys and the district school, of informing the whole neighborhood, and especially the little girls, that he is still about. It is he who is borne oftenest, in spirit and essence, through the open windows of the settler's house, causing the mistress thereof to wish, and to often say that she wishes, that she had never come away from Ohio, or wherever she used to reside, and where she declares mephitic to have been a nuisance utterly unknown. It is he who lopes innocently along the railroad track, declining to retire, meeting death without a murmur, knowing, perhaps, that his dire revenge will follow the fleeting train, whose wheels have murdered him, for many a mile, even across the plains and into mountain passes, and perhaps return with it and add a little something, a piquant mite, to the loud odors of the Missouri River terminus. The passengers all know he has been killed, and know it for the remainder of the journey, or else they wonder at the pungency of the atmosphere apparently pervading a stretch of country as big as all New England, and which they will talk about as one of the western drawbacks after they have returned home. It is he who rather rejoices than otherwise at the number and ferocity of the farmer's dogs, and who is indirectly blessed if they have the habit of going into the house and lying under the beds. Then indeed may he fulfil his mission. When they at first, and through inexperience, attack him, he routs them all without excitement or anger on his part, causes an armed domestic investigation of them, and their banishment without extradition, and through them impresses

himself upon the unappreciative western understanding.

The little one, the other common variety, is perhaps more rarely seen, but he is at least frequently suspected. Not much bigger than a kitten, and almost or quite black, he lacks the look of innocence and the appearance of docility so falsely worn by his relative. Once they both hibernated: at least the books say so. Now, as one of the changes wrought by the settlement of the country, this small one becomes a frequent all-the-year tenant of the farmer's out-buildings. His battery is quite as formidable as the other's is, and may, indeed, be considered as an improvement in the way of rapidity and concentration, like the Gatling gun. The barn is not always his residence; and without inquiring if it is entirely convenient he frequently takes up his domicile in or under the dwelling. A mephitis in the cellar is one of the Kansas things. He does not, while there, produce any of the mysterious noises that indicate ghosts. The house is known not to be haunted, for everybody understands quite well who is there. But the owner must not attempt ejection. Peace and quiet he insists upon. You must bar him out some time when he is absent on business, wait until spring, or move to another house. It is the middle one of these remedies that is usually adopted, if any. While he stays, there are no joint occupants with him in the place he has pre-empted. He will catch mice like a cat, and the joy of his life is the breaking of a rat's back with one nip behind the head. He has a most formidable array of teeth, and eschews vegetables entirely. He is the foe of all the little animals who

live in walls or basements, or in holes or under stones. Even the weazel, that slim incarnation of predatory instinct, declines to enter into competition with him, and goes when he comes, or comes when the other goes. One of them is suspected, from this fact, of eating the other, and mankind, with the only form of disinterestedness of which we can justly boast, does not care which of the two it is.

The biggest one of the mephitis family lives in Texas, and that empire is not disposed to boast itself withal on that account. He came there from Mexico, possibly on account of his being preposterously considered a table luxury in the latter country. But it is a land of which such eccentricities may be expected. They eat the ground-lizard there, – a variety of the celebrated "Gila monster," – and some other creatures to our pampered notions not less repulsive; though they seem to avoid, by peculiar management, that quadrennial banquet of crow which constitutes our great national dish. Mephitis is, however, purely American wherever he comes from. Europe knows him not in quadrupedal form. He is one of the things got by discovery, though he may not take rank, perhaps, with the gigantic grass we call "corn," or with tobacco, or even with ginseng or sassafras, or the host of acquisitions which would distinguish us as a people even if we had him not at all. And now that we have got him, we must apparently cherish him; and with our usual thrift we have made many attempts to utilize him. He often appears in polite society under the name of sable, or some such thing, and no odor betrays

him. Of the strange fluid, which is one of the most wonderful natural defences ever bestowed upon an animal, pharmacy has concocted a medicine, and the perfumers an odor for the toilet. Yet it must be admitted that one of his chiefest uses, so far, is to furnish the western editor with a synonym and comparative, and a telling epithet in time of trouble. He often caps the climax of a controversial sentence as long as one's arm, and if you take the county paper you need not be long in discovering that while we scientific may call him *mephitis*, he hath another name not often heard by ears polite, or frequently mentioned in the society in which the reader moves.

That other vagabond who may be considered as being vaguely referred to at the head of this chapter has no possible kinship with him who has been desultorily sketched. Yet the two stand together in my mind in a kind of vague relationship of character. I was not surprised at my first sight of a coyote, but he grew greatly upon me afterwards. It was his voice. He is but a degenerate wolf, – the weakest of his family save in the one respect referred to, – but he is an old and persistent acquaintance of every frontiersman, ten times as numerous and prominent in every recollection of that far time of loneliness and silence as any other beast.

If you visit Lincoln Park, at Chicago, you will find a special pen devoted to the comfort and happiness of this little gray outcast of the wilderness; and I may add that he does not appear there to any advantage whatever. On the wide plains where there

was nothing, apparently, to eat, he was, for a coyote, usually in good condition. His coat was tolerably smooth sometimes, and he was industrious and alert. Here, where he is regularly fed at the public expense, he is so shabby that one hesitates to be caught looking at him as one goes by. There is that about an animal that expresses unhappiness as plainly as it is expressed by men, and the Lincoln Park coyote is unquestionably the most abject specimen of his entire disreputable family.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.