VARIOUS

ESSAYS FROM THE CHAP-BOOK

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Essays from the Chap-Book / Being a Miscellany of Curious and interesting Tales, / Histories, &c; newly composed by Many Celebrated Writers / and very delightful to read.:

Содержание

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Ibsen's New Play
By
H. H. Boyesen

IBSEN'S NEW PLAY

NEVER has the great master written anything simpler and more human than "Little Eyolf." The two fundamental chords which sound with varying force through all his earlier works are

here struck anew with increased distinctness and resonance. The ennobling power of suffering, the educational value of pain, – that is the first lesson which the play conveys; and the second, which is closely akin to it, is the development of personality through the discipline of renunciation.

Alfred Allmers, a poor and obscure man of letters, has married Rita, a rich and beautiful heiress. During the first seven or eight years of their marriage they live frankly the life of the senses; and in amorous intoxication forget the world with its claims, being completely absorbed in each other. Their little son Eyolf they leave largely to his aunt, Asta (Allmers's supposed sister), and only interest themselves in him spasmodically, and then to very little purpose. Rita is, in fact, not very fond of the child, and feels vaguely annoyed whenever she is reminded of her duties toward it. It is directly due to her erotic intensity that the boy, who has been left in his high-chair at table, tumbles down and is crippled for life. He then becomes a reproach to his mother, and she rather shuns than seeks the sight of him.

I find this development of Rita to be true and consistent. Women, as a rule, after marriage, develop the wifely character at the expense of the maternal, or the maternal at the expense of the wifely. Rita Allmers belongs to the former class. She is young, beautiful, and passionate; her wifehood is all to her; her motherhood only incidental. But this condition cannot endure. The husband, at all events, feels a subtle change steal over his relation to his wife; and in order to make it clear to himself,

he goes on a long pedestrian tour into the mountains. On his return, at the end of two weeks, he is received by Rita with a bacchanalian seductiveness which ill befits his serious mood. He has resolved to introduce a radical change in the household. He will henceforth devote himself to the education of his son, and make that his chief concern. His book on "Human Responsibility," at which he has been writing in a desultory fashion, shall no longer divert his attention from the actual responsibility, which it were a sin to shirk. Rita, however, when he unfolds his plan to her, is anything but pleased. She wants him all to herself, and is not content to share him with anybody, even though it be her own child. She cannot be put off with crumbs of affection. She coaxes, she threatens; she hints at dire consequences. With the passionate vehemence of a spoiled and petted beauty, who believes her love disdained, she upbraids him, and cries out at last that she wishes the child had never been born. Presently a wild scream is heard from the pier, and little Eyolf's crutch is seen floating upon the still waters of the fiord.

The second act opens with a scene in which Asta is endeavoring to console Allmers in his affliction. He is trying to find the purpose, the meaning of his bereavement. "For there must be a meaning in it," he exclaims. "Life, existence, – destiny *cannot* be so utterly meaningless." Asta had loved the dead child, and he feels drawn to her by the communion of sorrow. From Rita, on the other hand, he feels repelled, because he cannot, in spite of her wild distraction, believe in the genuineness of her

grief. She demands black crape, flag at half mast, and all the outward symbols of mourning; but the sensation which now is torturing her is not pain at the loss of the boy, but self-reproach. The keen tooth of remorse is piercing the very marrow of her bones. For the first time in her life she forgets how she looks, – what impression she is making. And that is, psychologically, a wholesome change. The centre of her consciousness is wrenched violently out of herself, and she sees existence with a different vision. A most admirable symbol for this unsleeping remorse which is stinging and scorching her conscience is "the great, open eyes" of little Eyolf, as he was seen lying on the bottom of the fiord. These eyes pursue the guilty mother. "They will haunt me all my life long," she declares. Keen, simple, and soul-searching is the conversation between husband and wife, as the first quiverings of a spiritual life are awakened in both of them under the lash of an accusing conscience. Even while they upbraid each other, each trying to shift his share of responsibility upon the other, a vague shame takes possession of them, and the guilty heart knows and avows its guilt. They conceive of Eyolf's death as a judgment upon them, as a retribution for their shirking their parental duty. For the first time in their lives they stand soul to soul in all their naked paltriness. It is scarcely strange that they should shrink from each other. But a new sincerity is born of the very futility of embellishing pretences. The secret thoughts which each has had of the other, but never has dared to utter, pop forth, like toads out of their holes, and show their

ugly faces. His book, which Allmers had professed to regard as his great life-work, was, as Rita has long since guessed, a mere makeshift to give a spurious air of importance to his idleness, and he has abandoned it, not as a sacrifice to parental duty, but because he distrusted his ability to finish it. But when such things have been said – when each has stripped the other of all dissembling draperies – how is life to continue? How is their marriage to regain its former beauty and happiness? Alas, never! The old relation is definitely terminated and can never be renewed. It is because she feels this so deeply that Rita declares that henceforth she must have much company about her; for, she adds, "It will never do for Alfred and me to be alone." And Allmers, under the same profound revulsion of feeling, expresses his desire to separate from his wife. She wishes forgetfulness, and hopes to drown her remorse in social dissipations; while to him forgetfulness seems like disloyalty to the dead, and he determines to consecrate the future to his grief, with a dim idea that he may thus atone for his guilt. Being equally miserable alone or together, they turn in their despair to Asta and implore her to remain with them, and take the place of little Eyolf. But Asta, having discovered that Alfred is not her brother, is afraid to assume the dangerous rôle of consoler, and departs with the engineer Borgheim, who has long been in love with her.

In that dreary lethargy which follows violent grief, Rita and Allmers stand without the energy to readjust their lives to the changed conditions. The world is disenchanted for them; the very

daylight beats upon their eyes with a brazen fierceness, and all things are empty, futile, devoid of meaning. But in the midst of this oppressive stillness new thoughts are born; new sentiments begin to stir. They are bound together, if by nothing else, by their communion in guilt. Their past memories and their common remorse constitute a bond which is scarcely less powerful than love. Very simply and patiently is the new birth of the spiritual life in both of them indicated in the following dialogue: —

> Allmers – Yes, but you – you yourself – have bound me to you by our life together.
>
> Rita – Oh, in your eyes I am not – I am not – entrancingly beautiful any more.
>
> Allmers – The law of change may perhaps keep us together, none the less.
>
> Rita (*Nodding slowly*) – There is a change in me now – I feel the anguish of it.
>
> Allmers – Anguish?
>
> Rita – Yes, for change, too, is a sort of birth.
>
> Allmers – It is – or a resurrection. Transition to a higher life.
>
> Rita (*Gazing sadly before her*) – Yes, with the loss of all – all life's happiness.
>
> Allmers – That loss is just the gain.
>
> Rita – Oh, phrases! Good heavens! we are creatures of earth, after all.
>
> Allmers – But something akin to the sea and the heavens, too, Rita.
>
> Rita – You, perhaps; not I.

Allmers – Oh, yes – you, too; more than you suspect.

The force of the common memories asserts itself anew, and they resolve to remain together and help each other bear the burden of life. Death is no longer a horror, but a quiet fellow-traveller, neither welcomed nor dreaded. Very beautifully and naturally is the transition to the new altruistic endeavor indicated in their wonder why the little companions of Eyolf, who all could swim, made no effort to save him. Never had Eyolf's father and mother interested themselves in these boys; nor had they made the least effort to ameliorate the hard lot of the poor fishing population, settled about them. Having never sown love, they had never reaped it. Now, in order to fill the aching void of her heart with "something that is a little like love," Rita invites all the little ragamuffins from the village up into her luxurious house, clothes them in Eyolf's clothes, gives them Eyolf's toys to play with, and feeds them and warms them and lavishes upon them the homeless love which was her own child's due, but of which he was defrauded. In the opening up of this new well-spring of love in her heart, she suddenly perceives the meaning of Eyolf's death.

Rita – I suppose I must try if I cannot lighten – and ennoble their lot in life.

Allmers – If you can do that – then Eyolf was not born in vain.

Rita – Nor taken away from us in vain, either… (*Softly, with a melancholy smile*) I want to make my peace with the great open eyes, you see.

Allmers (*Struck, fixing his eyes upon her*) – Perhaps I could join you in that? And help you, too, Rita?

And so they begin together a new existence, with new aims and a deeper sense of human responsibility. The contrast between the old life in the senses and the new life in the spirit, is emphasized in a few striking and simple phrases. Their aspiration is now consciously "upwards – towards the peaks, – towards the great silence."

"Little Eyolf," though its theme is closely akin to those of Ibsen's previous plays, is yet written in a new key, and it strikes in its conclusion a note which is quite alien to the author's earlier work. The declaration of human responsibility – in the sense of accountability, on the part of the refined and prosperous, for the degradation of the poor or miserable – sounds very strange upon his lips. If Carlyle at three score and ten had lifted up his voice and sung "The Song of the Shirt," or "The Cry of the Children," we could not have been more surprised. Ibsen's scorn of the nameless herd – of its meanness, its baseness, its purblind gropings and coarse enjoyments – rings loudly enough through "Peer Gynt," "The League of Youth," and "An Enemy of the People." What means this wonderful softening of his heart toward Nature's step-children, if not that his own vision has been enlarged, a new warm spring has been opened up in his old age, watering the roots of his being. It is obvious that in returning to his native land and becoming a world-renowned man, he has celebrated his reconciliation with humanity. The world is no

longer so dark to him, nor destiny so cruel and meaningless as in the days of his obscurity. Very noble sound these mellow notes in the final scenes of “Little Eyolf,” even though we miss occasionally the cadence of the harsh voice that spoke so many wholesome truths in “Brand” and “Rusmersholm.” Interesting, too, it is to observe that the moral lesson of “Little Eyolf” is the very same as that of a score of Robert Browning’s poems and dramas. Though Browning never emphasizes altruism to the extent that Ibsen does in the present play, the arousing of man, through suffering, from the life of the senses to that of the spirit is succinctly stated, the very soul of the Gospel according to Browning.

Bits of Criticism
By
John Burroughs

BITS OF CRITICISM

THE difference between a precious stone and a common stone is not an essential difference – not a difference of substance, but of arrangement of the particles – the crystallization. In substance the charcoal and the diamond are one, but in form and effect how widely they differ. The pearl contains nothing that is not found in the coarsest oyster-shell.

Two men have the same thoughts; they use about the same words in expressing them; yet with one the product is real literature, with the other it is a platitude.

The difference is all in the presentation; a finer and more compendious process has gone on in the one case than in the other. The elements are better fused and knitted together; they are in some way heightened and intensified. Is not here a clew to what we mean by style? Style transforms common quartz into an Egyptian pebble. We are apt to think of style as something external, that can be put on, something in and of itself. But it

is not; it is in the inmost texture of the substance itself. Polish, choice words, faultless rhetoric, are only the accidents of style. Indeed, perfect workmanship is one thing; style, as the great writers have it, is quite another. It may, and often does, go with faulty workmanship. It is the use of words in a fresh and vital way, so as to give us a vivid sense of a new spiritual force and personality. In the best work the style is found and hidden in the matter.

I heard a reader observe, after finishing one of Robert Louis Stevenson's books, "How well it is written!" I thought it a doubtful compliment. It should have been so well written that the reader would not have been conscious of the writing at all. If we could only get the writing, the craft, out of our stories and essays and poems, and make the reader feel he was face to face with the real thing! The complete identification of the style with the thought; the complete absorption of the man with his matter, so that the reader shall say, "How good, how real, how true!" that is the great success. Seek ye the kingdom of truth first, and all things shall be added. I think we do feel, with regard to some of Stevenson's books, like "An Inland Voyage," "Travels with a Donkey," etc., how well they are written. Certainly one would not have the literary skill any less, but would have one's attention kept from it by the richness of the matter. Hence I think a British critic hits the mark when he says Stevenson lacks homeliness.

Dr. Holmes wrote fine and eloquent poems, yet I think one does not feel that he is essentially a poet. His work has not the

inevitableness of nature; it is a skilful literary feat; we admire it, but seldom return to it. His poetry is a stream in an artificial channel; his natural channel is his prose; here we get his freest and most spontaneous activity.

One fault that I find with our younger and more promising school of novelists is that their aim is too literary; we feel that they are striving mainly for artistic effects. Do we feel this at all in Scott, Dickens, Hawthorne, or Tolstoi? These men are not thinking about art but about life; how to reproduce life. In essayists like Pater, Wilde, Lang, the same thing occurs; we are constantly aware of the literary artist; they are not in love with life, reality, so much as they are with words, style, literary effects. Their seriousness is mainly an artistic seriousness. It is not so much that they have something to say, as that they are filled with a desire to say something. Nearly all our magazine poets seem filled with the same desire; what labor, what art and technique; but what a dearth of feeling and spontaneity! I read a few lines or stanzas and then stop. I see it is only deft handicraft, and that the heart and soul are not in it. One day my boy killed what an old hunter told him was a mock duck. It looked like a duck, it acted like a duck, it quacked like a duck, but when it came upon the table – it mocked us. These mock poems of the magazines remind me of it.

Is it not unfair to take any book, certainly any great piece of literature, and deliberately sit down to pass judgment upon it? Great books are not addressed to the critical judgment, but to

the life, the soul. They need to slide into one's life earnestly, and find him with his guard down, his doors open, his attitude disinterested. The reader is to give himself to them, as they give themselves to him; there must be self-sacrifice. We find the great books when we are young, eager, receptive. After we grow hard and critical we find few great books. A recent French critic says: "It seems to me works of art are not made to be judged, but to be loved, to please, to dissipate the cares of real life. It is precisely by wishing to judge them that one loses sight of their true significance."

"How can a man learn to know himself?" inquires Goethe. "Never by reflection, only by action." Is not this a half-truth? One can only learn his powers of action by action, and his powers of thought by thinking. He can only learn whether or not he has power to command, to lead, to be an orator or legislator, by actual trial. Has he courage, self-control, self-denial, fortitude, etc.? In life alone can he find out. Action tests his moral virtues, reflection his intellectual. If he would define himself to himself he must think. "We are weak in action," says Renan, "by our best qualities; we are strong in action by will and a certain one-sidedness." "The moment Byron reflects," says Goethe, "he is a child." Byron had no self-knowledge. We have all known people who were ready and sure in action who did not know themselves at all. Your weakness or strength as a person comes out in action; your weakness or strength as an intellectual force comes out in reflection.

Verlaine: A Feminine Appreciation
By
Mrs. Reginald de Koven

VERLAINE: A FEMININE APPRECIATION

IN early days, when the triumphs and the torments of his overwhelming vitality swept at will across his soul, Paul Verlaine was sometimes god and sometimes satyr. From aspiring altitudes of spiritual emotions he swung like a pendulum to unspoken depths of vice.

The world spirit doubly charged his strange and terrible personality, pouring into it the essences and intuitions of the body and the soul. Into the alembic were dissolved the entities of Baudelaire and Villon, floating still upon the earth.

Then the whole was set to the vibration of a new rhythm as strange and as remote from the consciousness of men as the songs of inter-lunar space, so that his utterances with the naturalness of a bird's song or an infant's lisp should have the accents of melody undreamed of. And this is not all – strangest and most tragically terrible in its possibilities of pain – the chrism of conscience burns his sinister brow. The phantom of the immortal soul drives

him into the outer darkness.

What are the undiscovered laws of spiritual heredity and of a poetic paternity, such as are suggested in the likeness of Baudelaire and Verlaine to their prototype Villon? The secret is yet to find. It is all as strange as the mystery of Bernhardt's strayed existence in this modern day. An emanation from some Egyptian tomb, wild spirit of genius and of vice is she, vampire-like, inhuman, wandering among a people who have thrilled to her voice and wondered, not knowing whence she came.

Behind them both – Baudelaire with his luminous, despairing eyes, and Verlaine with his terrible glabrous head – the madcap figure of Villon shines out of a cloud of time, and we hear the sound of his reckless laughter and the music of his tears.

But if the relation between these two moderns and this singing renegade of the Middle Ages is that of mysterious paternity, between Baudelaire and Verlaine there is a brotherhood which is as wonderful as an oriental dream of metempsychosis.

Baudelaire's verses, read in early youth, so saturated and possessed the new-born soul of Paul Verlaine that he became more a reincarnation of Baudelaire than a separate existence. The passions and the madness of Baudelaire became his own – he heard the same strange music – saw the same visions. Incarnate of the mad poet, Verlaine, his second soul, fled a second slave in the footsteps of the same strange goddess – beauty in decay.

And where one had madly followed, so the other fled, enamoured of her fatal loveliness, wherever her fickle steps

should lead. Sometimes she would escape them, disappearing in mists and mysterious darkness, and sometimes they would come upon her suddenly in glimpses of green light, dancing strange frivolous steps, and the color of her robes would be mingled rose and mystic blue, and the halo of her head the phosphor of decay.

And she has led them through strange paths into the dwelling-place of death, and where love and life live together, for these two are never separated, and, through many places of terror and delight, to that ultimate spot, occult, remote, where dwells the soul of woman.

There the youngest of her slaves found himself one day outstripping his brother, and saw with living eyes the mystery, – and thenceforward he was no more Paul Verlaine; he was the prophet and interpreter of woman.

To him alone has the secret been revealed; to him alone, the mantle of deceit she wears, the slavish dress of the centuries, is no concealment. He has seen, has known, and he understands. "The very worst thing in the world," says an unknown writer, "is the soul of a woman." Forced to inaction, and fed on lies, her principal power, founded on man's weakness, curiosity, and the imagination of the intellect, lead her in many wandering ways. Tasting but few of the actual joys, the triumphs, and the trials of life, from the harem of her slavery her fancy has wandered with the winds. In her mind the unique and fatal experimenter, she has known all crimes, all horrors, as well as martyrdoms and joys. And this, while her gentle feminine hands have ministered

to suffering, her voice has cheered, her smile has illumined, and her divine patience has endured.

Consider these lines – their spiritual intuition is the parallel of Wordsworth in his limpid moods; their knowledge, like a single glow of summer lightning, illumines all the darkened land as the glimmering patient light of Bourget's candle in cycles of encyclopedics will never do.

Behold the woman!

> "Beauté des femmes, leur faiblesse et ces mains pâles,
> Qui font souvent le bien et peuvent tout le mal."

The appealing weakness of women is the first note, invariably stronger than command – and then the reference to their hands. This is very characteristic of Verlaine – they haunt him.

> "Les chères mains qui furent miennes,
> Toutes petites, toutes belles."

•••

> "Mains en songes – main sur mon âme."

The last is a very poignant line – and again in "Ariettes Oubliées," —

“Le piano que baise une main frêle.”

Then comes the reflection as to the eyes of women, profoundly true and observant, contained in the last two verses of the first stanza: —

> “Et ces yeux où plus rien ne reste d’animal
> Que juste assez pour dire ‘assez’ aux fureurs mâles!”

Then the next stanza: —

> “Et toujours, maternelle endormeuse des râles,
> Même quand elle ment – .”

Here is the creature who could be both nurse and courtesan – concise and convincing classification.

Then he continues relating how, as man as well as poet, he has vibrated to the clear soprano of

> “Cette voix! Matinal
> Appel, ou chant bien doux à vêpres, ou frais signal,
> Ou beau sanglot qui va mourir au pli des châles!..”

How he has dreamed over the tender sentiment of her twilight song, and been melted and conquered by the still greater, more beautiful appeal of the emotional soul for love and

understanding, – "*beau sanglot*" indeed!

Then comes the wonderful third stanza, and its denunciation of man's brutality and selfishness.

> "Hommes durs! Vie atroce et laide d'ici-bas!
> Ah! que du moins, loins des baisers et des combats,
> Quelque chose demeure un peu sur la montagne."

Here is the appeal for sentiment, for the love of the spirit, choked in the throats of dumb and suffering women.

"*Quelque chose du cœur*," he repeats and persuades, "*enfantin et subtil*."

> "Bonté, respect! car qu'est-ce qui nous accompagne,
> Et vraiment, quand la mort viendra, que reste-t-il?"

From him, the convict poet, from this heart rotten with all the sins of fancy and of deed, bursts this plea – as naive as it is earnest, for the spiritual in love – for sentiment, the essence of the soul. Strange anomaly – stranger still that it should be he who has understood.

Three lines more, from an early poem called "*Vœu*," of such condensed significance and biting truth as lacks a parallel.

> "O la femme à l'amour câlin et rechauffant,
> Douce, pensive et brune, et jamais étonnée,
> Et qui parfois vous baise au front, comme un enfant."

What a portrait, typical and individual – "*jamais étonnée*," my sisters, what an accusation!

•••

Verlaine is dead. The last shred of that ruined soul which has for years been rotting away in chance Parisian brasseries, has loosened its hold upon life and slipped into the unknown; but the poetry he has left behind him, with its sighs and bitter sobbings, and its few gleams of beauty and of joy, contains the essence of his strange nature.

Although repudiating the responsibility of the position, he was the founder and leader of that school of poetic expression which has most importantly distinguished the end of his century.

Half faun, half satyr, his nature was allied to baseness and brutal animalism, but possessed a strange and childish naïveté which remained with him to the last, and a spirit remotely intact in the chaos of his wayward senses, whence issued songs of matchless purity and inimitable music.

Degeneration
By
Alice Morse Earle

DEGENERATION

I WRITE this paper as a solemn, an earnest warning, an appeal to the unsuspecting and serene general public not to read Dr. Max Nordau's book "Degeneration." I give this word of admonition with much the same spirit of despairing yet powerless misery as might animate the warning of any slave to a despised habit, a hashish-eater, an opium smoker, an alcoholic inebriate. I have read this book of Dr. Nordau's, and through it I am become the unwilling victim of a most deplorable, most odious, most blighting habit, – that of searching for degenerates. I do not want or like to do this, but I do it instinctively, mechanically. The habit has poisoned all the social relations of my life, has entered into my views of the general public; it has sapped my delight in novelty, choked my admiration of genius, deadened my enthusiasm, silenced my opinions; and it has brought these wretched conditions not only into my regard of matters and persons of the present times, but retrospectively it has tainted

the glories of history. All this is exceeded by the introspective blight of the book through exacting a miserable and mortifying self-examination, which leads to the despairing, the unyielding conclusion that I am myself a degenerate.

The book is, unfortunately, so explicit in explanation as to lure every reader to amateur investigation. Indeed, such a vast array of mental and physical traits are enumerated as stigmata – the marks of the beast – as to paralyze the thoughtless, and to make the judicious grieve. Our mental traits we can ofttimes conceal from public view, our moral traits we always conceal, but many of our physical characteristics cannot, alas, be wholly hidden. Dr. Nordau enumerates many physical stigmata, all interesting, but perhaps the most prominent, most visible one, is the degenerate malformation of the ear.

I was present recently, at an interesting function whereat the subject of the evening was discussion of this book "Degeneration." In the course of a brilliant and convincing address one of the lecturers chanced to name that most hateful and evident stigma, the ear-mark, so to speak, of the accursed. Though simple were his words, as subtle as sewer-gas was his poison; as all-pervading and penetrating as the sandstorm in the desert, it entered every brain in the room. I speedily and furtively glanced from side to side at my neighbors' ears, only to find them regarding mine with expressions varying from inquisitiveness through surprise and apprehension, to something closely approaching disgust. After the discussion was ended,

friends advanced to speak with me; they shook hands, not looking with pleasant greeting into my eyes, but openly staring at my ears.

Now, that would be necessarily most abhorrent to every one, – to quote Spenser: —

> "For fear lest we like rogues should be reputed
> And for eare-marked beastes abroad be bruited."

And it is specially offensive to me – it would be anyway, for my ears are not handsome; but worse still must be admitted, they are not normal. They answer every purpose of hearing and of restraining my hat from slipping down over my eyes and on my neck, which is all I have demanded of them hitherto. But now I know that as emblems of my mental and moral characteristics they are wholly remiss, even degraded. They are .079 larger than normality; they stand out from my head at an angle which exhibits 2° too much obtusity; the lobule displays .17 too little pendulosity; and, worst of all, the fossa scaphoida of my pinna is basely unconvoluted. I am sore ashamed of all this. I think of having the twin base betrayers of my degenerate nature shaved off in spots, and already I tie them close to my head at night in a feeble attempt at improvement. But I am not in my callow youth; I fear they have not been bent in the way they should be inclined, that their degeneracy is irremediable.

It is not through physical stigmata alone that I find myself branded. I find that I am impulsive, I have a predilection for

inane reverie, and for search for the bases of phenomena – all sad traits. Worst of all, I have "the irresistible desire of the degenerate to accumulate useless trifles." Nordau says, "It is a stigmata of degeneration, and has had invented for it the name oniomania or buying craze. The oniomaniac is simply unable to pass by any lumber without feeling an impulse to acquire." When I read that sentence I glanced guiltily at my cabinets of old china – well, I could use it on the table and thus make it unstigmatic; at my Dutch silver – I might melt it up and sell it; my books, my autographs, my photographs, all may find some excuse; but how can I palliate my book-plates, or ever live down having gone for a year through every village, city, and town where I chanced or sought to wander, asking at every jeweller's, silversmith's, and watch-repairer's, "Have you any bridges of old verge watches?" I fear those watch-bridges stamp me an oniomaniac. And am I wholly free from Lombroso's graphomania? Have I not an insane desire to write? I conceal my obsession, but it ever influences me. I may confess also (since I confess at all) that I have rupophobia (fear of dirt), iophobia (fear of poison), nosophobia (fear of sickness), belenophobia (fear of needles – especially on the floor), and one or two other wretched obsessions, particularly an inordinate love for animals, upon which I had hitherto rather bridled as the mark of a tender nature.

But let me dwell no more on my own peculiar stigmata, but show how – to paraphrase Prior:

"All earth is by the ears together
Since first that horrid book come hither."

I haunt photograph shops, look over the frontispieces of illustrated magazines, and various collections of likenesses, until I am wearied to the core of looking at the ears of prominent persons, and it brings forth a sense of profound, of heartfelt gratitude that Daguerre was not born till this century, almost till our own day, and that thus the ears of centuries of countless geniuses are disguised in their counterfeit presentments by the meaningless conventionalities of the artist's brush, which represent in peaceful and happy monotony and perfection that unfortunate, that abhorred member. I plainly see, too, what the result of all this will be. I picture to myself the poet of the future, hooded, veiled, to conceal his features; robed in flowing drapery to cover his feet; with his hands in a muff; living alone to hide his personal habits; studiously avoiding the subject of his health; painstaking in showing no decided preferences; void of passion lest he be deemed erotic; void of epigram or humor lest his wit be taken as earnest; until I sigh mournfully for the time spoken of in Genesis, when "there was no more earing."

I will not sign my name to this heartfelt communication, since it would have no weight as the cognomen of either a genius or a mattoid, and perhaps the cry of warning will be more heeded from a suffering incognito. Besides, I do not wish to be shunned by my fellow-creatures as one who is determined to know their

innermost worst, with as cruel a mental insistence, and with a method genetic to that employed by the Inquisition in penetrating the brain of its victims by pouring boiling oil in the ears. Nor am I willing to have such an odious position in society that none of my friends will visit me, or come in my presence unless fortified with ear-muffs against my insinuating gaze.

The Pleasures of Historiography
By
Alice Morse Earle

THE PLEASURES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

THE PLEASURES OF THE CHASE

I AM an historiographer; and being desirous and assiduous of accuracy in my statements, I am given to recourse to first sources of authority, to the fountain springs of great events; I am a scientifically historical Gradgrind; I build up my histories inductively from facts by the most approved scientific processes. And I can say with feeling and with emphasis, in the words of Sir Thomas Browne: "Sure, a great deal of conscience goes into the making of a history."

A few days ago the need of exact knowledge upon a certain point in the criminal history of the colonies determined me to seek my information in the most unerring and unimpeachable historical records we have, those of the Criminal Court. Those I sought were of a large city, I might say of Chicago, only she has

no colonial records; so I frankly reveal that I wished to search the records of the criminal courts of New Amsterdam.

Now I had read a score of times, and heard a score of times more in the glibly-rounded sentences of elegant historical lectures, patriotic addresses, commemorative "papers" of patriotic-hereditary societies, that to the municipal honor of that very large frog in a puddle, viz.: New York, which grew out of the pollywog New Amsterdam, all records of colonial times of that city were still preserved, were cherished as sacred script in that fitting cabinet, the venerable Hall of Records in the City Hall Park. Thus introduced, I ventured to its gates.

It is an ancient, dingy building, whose opening portals thrust you upon a cage-like partition strongly suggestive of a menagerie, and also olfactorily suggestive of the menageries' accompaniment, "an ancient and a fish-like" – nay, more, a bird- and beast-like smell.

A doorway on either side of the cage lead to various desks and rooms, and enclosures and closets, all labelled with well-worn signs; and as I glanced bewildered from placard to placard, from sign to sign, there approached that blessed and gallant metropolitan engine for the succor of feminine ignorance, incapacity, and weakness – a policeman. Gladly did I follow in his sturdy wake to the office of the Clerk of Records, who would know all about it. Alas! he was out. A callow, inky youth, his deputy, had never heard of any Dutch records, and didn't believe there were any in New York. My policeman had vanished. The

youth leaned out of his latticed window, pointed round a corner to an enclosed office: "Go ask *him*, he can tell you." I went and asked him; for a third time I told my tale, already rehearsed to policeman and youth. "I wish to see the colonial records of the criminal courts in New York in the seventeenth century. Part are in Dutch. I hear they have been translated, and that the English translation is here, for the use of the public. If this is not so, I wish to see the original Dutch and English records from the year 1650 to 1700."

It is impossible to overstate the expression of blank surprise and incredulity with which this inquiry was greeted. The official vouchsafed one curt answer: "I never heard of such a thing as a Dutch trial in the criminal courts of New York, and I don't believe there ever was one. If so, *he* will know."

"He" was a haven, for his office was labelled Satisfaction – and he was satisfactory. After a fourth explanation of my desires, he answered me with the elaborately patient and compassionate politeness usually employed by men in business and public offices to a woman's apparently useless inquiries. He said gently: "Only deeds and transfers are here in the Hall of Records; those records you wish to see are all in the County Clerk's office, over there."

Over there was the court-house of Tweed's inglorious fame. Within the said office four transfers, from book-keeper to messenger, to civil clerk, to County Clerk, found me, after four more dogged repetitions, encaged myself in a dingy wire prison,

surrounded by millions of compartments with papers and deeds, and flanked by scores of spittoons. Errand boys, messengers, aged porters, young attorneys, came and went, papers were given and received with mechanical rapidity and precision by the monarch of the cage, an elderly Irishman, smooth-shaven, massive-featured, inscrutable, blank of expression, who finally turned to me with civil indifference. But this was not the right place for me to come; those records were at the court-house at Ninth Street, where the criminal courts were held. I patiently prepared to assail the Ninth Street abode of Themis, not without an unworthy suspicion that this Hibernian Sphinx sent me there to get rid of me. But a gentleman-like and eavesdropping bystander proffered his advice: "Those records you want are in the office of the Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, in the third story of this building." And he thrust me with speed in the ascending elevator. The room pointed out to me as my goal proved to be the Supreme Court, a scene of peaceful dignity, but, alas, there was no such officer anywhere as the Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas. Gloomily turning to the Surrogate's office to examine the will of this Dutch criminal whom I was running to earth, mine eyes encountered this sign: Office of the Court of Common Pleas. Certainly this was the office and the records were here, though the clerk was not. Other clerks there were; to the most urbane for the tenth time I told my tale, and finally was shown the records. "These are in Dutch," I said; "will you show me the English translation?" "Are they in Dutch?" he

answered with some animation. “I never knew that. I have been here twenty years, and no one has ever asked to see them before.”

Of course there was no English translation. I can read and translate printed Dutch with ease; but seventeenth century Dutch differs more from modern Dutch than does old French from the French of to-day. Add to this the unique variations in spelling of the Dutch clerks, the curious chirography, the faded ink, and no antiquary will be surprised to learn that an hour had passed ere I had read enough of those records to learn that they were wholly civil cases, boundary disputes, adjustment cases, etc. I wearily rose to leave, when a newly-arrived person of authority said airily: “I can tell you all about those old Criminal Court records. They are all over in the City Hall, in the office of the Superintendent of City Affairs.” I trust I showed becoming credulity and gratitude.

I walked out into the beautiful little park, aglow with beds of radiant scarlet and yellow tulips, that remembered and significantly commemorated their Holland ancestors and the old Dutch-American town, even if the city’s servants knew them not; and I strolled under the trees and breathed with delight the fresh air of heaven; for wherever men congregate in offices, there ventilation is as naught.

I sought the Superintendent’s office. To him, ignominiously but cheerfully ensconced in the cellar-like basement, I descended, where glimmered a light so dim, so humid, that I had a sense of being in subaqueous rather than subterranean

depths, and I was struck with the civic humor that placed the Superintendent *subter omnia*.

He really knew nothing about these records, but there was a man in the Library who would know. Through underground tunnels and cemented passages and up a narrow staircase, I reached the noble aboveground abode of our municipal corporation.

Here all was radiant with prosperity. No lean and hungry race filled those corridors and chambers; jocund and ruddy were all, as were our city fathers of yore who drank vast tuns of sack-posset and ale. Well may we say when on those men and on these we gaze: Nobly wert thou named Manhattan! —*the place where all drank together*!

Mighty is Manhattan and great even the reflection of her power. Neither poverty-stricken nor meagre of flesh am I, but I shrank into humble insignificance before those well-fed aggrandizations of the city's glory and prosperity who bourgeoned through the corridors of our modern Stadt Huys; and I fain would have saluted them with respectful mien and words as of yore as "Most Worshipful, Most Prudent, and Very Discreet, their High Mightinesses," – not Burgomasters and Schepens, but Aldermen and Councilmen, – but the tame conventionalities of modern life kept me silent.

In the Library the sought-for man sent me to the Clerk of the Common Council, who in turn bade me be seated while he lured from an adjoining "closet," as old Pepys called his office,

one who would be glad to tell me all about everything relating to those ancient days.

Here was something tangible. Glad to tell me! In truth he was. Never have I seen such a passion for talking. Forth poured a flood of elaborate Milesian eloquence, in which intricate suggestions, noble patriotic sentiments, ardent historical interest, warm sympathy in my researches, and unbounded satisfaction and glowing pride over New York's honorable preservation of the records of her ancestors all joined. Nevertheless and notwithstanding, when I ran my fat but sly and agile political fox to earth, and made him answer me directly, I simmered down merely this one solid fact: "If ye go to Mr. De Lancy's office in the Vanderbilt Building, he can tell ye where thim ricords is, an' no one ilse in this city can."

I tendered as floriated and declamatory a farewell expression of gratitude as my dull tongue could command to my city authority, who was, I am led to believe from the tablet on the office from which he emerged, a common councilman, but who might have been a score of glorious aldermen distilled and expressed and condensed into one, so rotund, so ruby-colored, so shining, so truly grand was he, so elegant, albeit loose, of attire, so glittering with gold and precious stones. As I thanked him in phrases sadly etiolated in comparison with his own glowing pauses, "Madam," said he, "are you satisfied, and may I ask your name and residence?" "You may," said I, "I came to study history, and I was sent to the Satisfaction Clerk, and I found

satisfaction, though not in the wonted legal form." "But ye haven't told me yer name," said he. "I have not," said I; "good day."

The Bureau of Literary Revision
By
Alice Morse Earle

THE BUREAU OF LITERARY REVISION

OUR beloved friend Charles Lamb once wrote of his Essays of Elia: —

"One of these professors, on my complaining that these little sketches of mine were anything but methodical, and that I was unable to make them otherwise, kindly offered to instruct me on the method by which the young gentlemen in his seminary were taught to compose English themes."

When, with the solemn thoughts brought to each soul at the "turn of the year," we recount to ourselves our many mercies, let us never fail to remember with gratitude that the magnanimous offer of that seminary professor was never accepted.

We do not have to wait to-day for chance offers from solemn professors of instruction and revision in literary composition; "the method by which young gentlemen in the seminary are taught to compose" is thrust upon us at every hand. "Bureaus of revision" and "Offices of literary criticism" abound and thrive

and become opulent through examining, correcting, and revising the work of confiding authors. We are told with pride that in one bureau alone three thousand manuscripts a year were thus revised. Among those three thousand young fledglings of authors there may *not* have been a Charles Lamb, but the lamentable thought also will arise that there *may* have been a Charles Lamb, and that his unmethodical little "sketches" may have been pruned or amplified, or arranged and revised till they proved true "English themes."

There is a wearying monotony in the make-up of many of our periodicals, some of those even of large circulation. There is a lack of literary color, a precise and proper formation of each sentence, and a regularity of ensemble which is certainly grammatical but is fully as uninteresting as grammar. A surfeit of these exactly formal "English themes" has made the gasping public turn to some of our literary freaks and comets with a sensation as if seeking an inspiration of fresh air after mental smothering.

I attribute this too frequent monotony, and even stultification of composition, to the "literary reviser" – the trail of the serpent is over all our press.

And what does this literary revision offer for the large fees paid? One alleged benefit is the correction of punctuation. It certainly performs this service; but the editor and proofreader in any responsible publishing-house will, as a duty, correct with precision the punctuation of any paper or book printed by the

house. A benefit alleged by one circular is "a pruning of too riotous imagination." I groaned aloud as I read this threat. Too riotous imagination to-day! when we long for imagination and long in vain; when a wooden realism thrusts its angular outlines in our faces from every printed page. "To curb the use of adjectives" is another of the reviser's duties. The meagre style too often seen of late may arise from this curbing.

The most astonishing aspect of this bureau of revision is shown in the patience with which authors endure its devastations. They confidingly send into this machine the tenderly nourished children of their brains, dressed with natural affection in all the frills and ruffles of rhetoric, and receive them home again with ornaments torn away, laid in a strait-jacket which has been cut with rigid uniformity, and made with mathematical precision – and yet they kiss the rod that turned the natural children of their brains into wretched little automatons.

I would not judge all revision bureaus by one; but I must give my experience at the hands of a very reputable one. I had written four books of more than average sale, and had been ever commended by the press for my grammatical construction, when I sent to a bureau for criticism a short magazine-paper. It was returned to me full of very large and legible corrections – or rather alterations such as these: Where I wrote of my heroine being *dressed in*, etc., my reviser placed *gowned in*; where I wrote *the little child*, the reviser altered to *the young babe*; where I said *nothing happened after this*, to my horror, in heroic blue-

pencilled letters, I read my pet aversion, *nothing transpired*. Where a compound sentence contained several clauses with verbs in the past tense, all dependent clauses were made participial in form; not always to the advantage in elegance, never of moment or indeed of real difference in grammatical construction.

I must confess that I did not send to this bureau my real name, as palpably too well known to men of literary ilk. My three dollars' worth of advice was contained in a single sentence: "Your style is fair, but commonplace; if you practise literary composition you may succeed; but this article is, in our judgment, not salable."

I had the pleasure of sending the paper immediately to a well-known magazine and receiving therefrom in payment a check for fifty dollars.

Mr. Meredith and his Aminta
By
Lewis E. Gates

MR. MEREDITH AND HIS AMINTA

IN his latest book the choppiness of Mr. Meredith's style and the restless tacking of his method are as great as ever, and those worthy people who delight in the smooth seas and the steady zephyrs of ordinary English fiction will find their experience of "Lord Ormont and his Aminta" very much of a stormy channel-passage. But to people with sound nerves and adventurous spirits the experience is sure to be bracing and exhilarating. Perhaps the most surprising single effect that you get from "Lord Ormont" is that of the tingling vitality of the author. You can hardly realize while reading the book that you have to do with a writer who has been for forty years a tireless worker in literature, and who published his first venture in fiction two years before George Eliot's first story. The style in "Lord Ormont" has all the audacity of a first rebellion against tradition and convention; the sentences rush forward in all possible rhythms except the languorous ones of the dilettante or the "faultily faultless" ones

of the precisian or pedant; the imagination is restlessly self-assertive in its embodiment of every abstract idea in an image for eye or for ear; the tone is almost boisterous in its hilarity or brusqueness; and finally the book sounds everywhere the note of the future, and prophesies change and new social conditions without a touch of misgiving or regret. Perhaps in no earlier work has Mr. Meredith been so aggressive and, at the same time, so confident and buoyant.

As for Mr. Meredith's technique, it remains in the new book substantially what it has always been, and many of the general effects he produces are familiar to his admirers and delightful in their recurrence. Where save in Mr. Meredith's fiction can there be found such brilliance of surface? such vividness of dramatic portrayal? Or at any rate where is vividness so reconciled with suggestiveness of interpretation? concrete beauty with abstract truth? In all his novels he sends our imaginations flashing over the surface of some portion of life; he calls up before us this portion of life in all its fine contrasts of color and form, of storm and sunshine, of mid-day and moonlight; and yet at the same time he constrains us to pierce below the surface and to understand intuitively why the drama moves this way or that, what forces are in conflict, what passions are flushing or blanching the cheek, what fancies or ideals are making the eyes dream on a distant goal.

More nearly than any other living novelist, Mr. Meredith succeeds in overcoming the difficulties forced on the writer of

fiction by the double appeal of life. Life is a pageant and life is a problem; it smites on the senses and allures the imagination, but it also challenges the intellect; it has power and beauty, but it has also significance. Now most writers of fiction who reveal to us the inner meaning of life allow its beauty and power to fade into shadowy vagueness; and those who give us the dramatic value of life too often lack penetration and philosophic insight. One of Mr. Meredith's greatest claims to distinction lies in the fact that he, better than any other English novelist, has reconciled this conflict between vividness of portrayal and depth of interpretation. He has grasped English life in all its enormous range and mass and complexity; he has flashed it before us in all its splendid vividness for eye and ear and imagination; and at the same time he has made it suggestive to thought, has comprehended it through and through in its subtlest relations, and in portraying it has breathed into it the breath of a philosophical spirit.

If we analyze Mr. Meredith's pages carefully, we find very few of those long disquisitions on character with which the pages of a psychological novelist are covered. He deals almost as constantly with acts, with dialogue, with what meets the senses, the eye and the ear, as the elder Dumas. It is a mimic world of images he gives, not a globe of the earth with scientific terms and black marks on yellow pasteboard. He is always primarily an artist, not a psychologist or a descriptive sociologist. Too often when we finish one of George Eliot's stories we feel that she has explained

her characters so exhaustively that we should not know them if we met them on the street. We have had so much to do with their ganglia and their nervous systems, and with the ashes of their ancestors, that we have little notion of the characters as actual living people. If a psychological novelist were to write out a professional analysis of one's best friend, it may fairly be doubted whether one would recognize the description. In fact, in real life it is only criminals whom we are expected to recognize by anthropometric memoranda, – by the length of the index finger, the breadth of the ear, the distance between the eyes, and by the lines on the finger-tips.

Now Mr. Meredith avoids all anthropometric statistics and chemical analysis, and gives us the very counterfeit presentment of men and women as in actual life they go visibly and audibly past us; and yet he so seizes his moments for portraiture that the soul, the inner life, the character, photographs itself on the retina of a sensitive on-looker like a composite picture. He makes all his characters and scenes, and all the life he portrays, instinct with truth; and yet this truth is implicit; the author very rarely indulges in pretentious talk on these topics. For the most part, he is apparently busy putting before us the picturesque aspects of life and its dramatic moments.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.