

**ALDRICH
THOMAS
BAILEY**

PONKAPOG PAPERS

Thomas Aldrich
Ponkapog Papers

«Public Domain»

Aldrich T.

Ponkapog Papers / T. Aldrich — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

LEAVES FROM A NOTE BOOK	6
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	16

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Ponkapog Papers

TO FRANCIS BARTLETT

THESE miscellaneous notes and essays are called *Ponkapog Papers* not simply because they chanced, for the most part, to be written within the limits of the old Indian Reservation, but, rather, because there is something typical of their unpretentiousness in the modesty with which Ponkapog assumes to being even a village. The little Massachusetts settlement, nestled under the wing of the Blue Hills, has no illusions concerning itself, never mistakes the cackle of the bourg for the sound that echoes round the world, and no more thinks of rivalling great centres of human activity than these slight papers dream of inviting comparison between themselves and important pieces of literature. Therefore there seems something especially appropriate in the geographical title selected, and if the author's choice of name need further excuse, it is to be found in the alluring alliteration lying ready at his hand.

REDMAN FARM, *Ponkapog*, 1903.

LEAVES FROM A NOTE BOOK

IN his Memoirs, Kropotkin states the singular fact that the natives of the Malayan Archipelago have an idea that something is extracted from them when their likenesses are taken by photography. Here is the motive for a fantastic short story, in which the hero—an author in vogue or a popular actor—might be depicted as having all his good qualities gradually photographed out of him. This could well be the result of too prolonged indulgence in the effort to “look natural.” First the man loses his charming simplicity; then he begins to pose in intellectual attitudes, with finger on brow; then he becomes morbidly self-conscious, and finally ends in an asylum for incurable egotists. His death might be brought about by a cold caught in going out bareheaded, there being, for the moment, no hat in the market of sufficient circumference to meet his enlarged requirement.

THE evening we dropped anchor in the Bay of Yedo the moon was hanging directly over Yokohama. It was a mother-of-pearl moon, and might have been manufactured by any of the delicate artisans in the Hanchodori quarter. It impressed one as being a very good imitation, but nothing more. Nammikawa, the cloisonne-worker at Tokio, could have made a better moon.

I NOTICE the announcement of a new edition of “The Two First Centuries of Florentine Literature,” by Professor Pasquale Villari. I am not acquainted with the work in question, but I trust that Professor Villari makes it plain to the reader how both centuries happened to be first.

THE walking delegates of a higher civilization, who have nothing to divide, look upon the notion of property as a purely artificial creation of human society. According to these advanced philosophers, the time will come when no man shall be allowed to call anything his. The beneficent law which takes away an author’s rights in his own books just at the period when old age is creeping upon him seems to me a handsome stride toward the longed-for millennium.

SAVE US from our friends—our enemies we can guard against. The well-meaning rector of the little parish of Woodgates, England, and several of Robert Browning’s local admirers have recently busied themselves in erecting a tablet to the memory of “the first known forefather of the poet.” This lately turned up ancestor, who does not date very far back, was also named Robert Browning, and is described on the mural marble as “formerly footman and butler to Sir John Bankes of Corfe Castle.” Now, Robert Browning the poet had as good right as Abou Ben Adhem himself to ask to be placed on the list of those who love their fellow men; but if the poet could have been consulted in the matter he probably would have preferred not to have that particular footman exhumed. However, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Sir John Bankes would scarcely have been heard of in our young century if it had not been for his footman. As Robert stood day by day, sleek and solemn, behind his master’s chair in Corfe Castle, how little it entered into the head of Sir John that his highly respectable name would be served up to posterity—like a cold relish—by his own butler! By Robert!

IN the east-side slums of New York, somewhere in the picturesque Bowery district, stretches a malodorous little street wholly given over to long-bearded, bird-beaked merchants of ready-made and second-hand clothing. The contents of the dingy shops seem to have revolted, and rushed pell-mell out of doors, and taken possession of the sidewalk. One could fancy that the rebellion had been quelled at this point, and that those ghastly rows of complete suits strung up on either side of the doorways were the bodies of the seditious ringleaders. But as you approach these limp figures, each dangling and gyrating on its cord in a most suggestive fashion, you notice, pinned to the lapel of a coat here and there, a strip of paper announcing the very low price at which you may become the happy possessor. That dissipates the illusion.

POLONIUS, in the play, gets killed—and not any too soon. If it only were practicable to kill him in real life! A story—to be called *The Passing of Polonius*—in which a king issues a decree condemning to death every long-winded, didactic person in the kingdom, irrespective of rank, and

is himself instantly arrested and decapitated. The man who suspects his own tediousness is yet to be born.

WHENEVER I take up Emerson's poems I find myself turning automatically to his Bacchus. Elsewhere, in detachable passages embedded in mediocre verse, he rises for a moment to heights not reached by any other of our poets; but Bacchus is in the grand style throughout. Its texture can bear comparison with the world's best in this kind. In imaginative quality and austere richness of diction what other verse of our period approaches it? The day Emerson wrote Bacchus he had in him, as Michael Drayton said of Marlowe, "those brave translunary things that the first poets had."

IMAGINE all human beings swept off the face of the earth, excepting one man. Imagine this man in some vast city, New York or London. Imagine him on the third or fourth day of his solitude sitting in a house and hearing a ring at the door-bell!

No man has ever yet succeeded in painting an honest portrait of himself in an autobiography, however sedulously he may have set to work about it. In spite of his candid purpose he omits necessary touches and adds superfluous ones. At times he cannot help draping his thought, and the least shred of drapery becomes a disguise. It is only the diarist who accomplishes the feat of self-portraiture, and he, without any such end in view, does it unconsciously. A man cannot keep a daily record of his comings and goings and the little items that make up the sum of his life, and not inadvertently betray himself at every turn. He lays bare his heart with a candor not possible to the selfconsciousness that inevitably colors premeditated revelation. While Pepys was filling those small octavo pages with his perplexing cipher he never once suspected that he was adding a photographic portrait of himself to the world's gallery of immortals. We are more intimately acquainted with Mr. Samuel Pepys, the inner man—his little meannesses and his large generousities—then we are with half the persons we call our dear friends.

THE young girl in my story is to be as sensitive to praise as a prism is to light. Whenever anybody praises her she breaks into colors.

IN the process of dusting my study, the other morning, the maid replaced an engraving of Philip II. of Spain up-side down on the mantel-shelf, and his majesty has remained in that undignified posture ever since. I have no disposition to come to his aid. My abhorrence of the wretch is as hearty as if he had not been dead and—otherwise provided for these last three hundred years. Bloody Mary of England was nearly as merciless, but she was sincere and uncompromising in her extirpation of heretics.

Philip II., whose one recorded hearty laugh was occasioned by the news of the St. Bartholomew massacre, could mask his fanaticism or drop it for the time being, when it seemed politic to do so. Queen Mary was a maniac; but the successor of Torquemada was the incarnation of cruelty pure and simple, and I have a mind to let my counterfeit presentment of him stand on its head for the rest of its natural life. I cordially dislike several persons, but I hate nobody, living or dead, excepting Philip II. of Spain. He appears to give me as much trouble as Charles I. gave the amiable Mr. Dick.

AMONG the delightful men and women whom you are certain to meet at an English country house there is generally one guest who is supposed to be preternaturally clever and amusing—"so very droll, don't you know." He recites things, tells stories in costermonger dialect, and mimics public characters. He is a type of a class, and I take him to be one of the elementary forms of animal life, like the *acalephae*. His presence is capable of adding a gloom to an undertaker's establishment. The last time I fell in with him was on a coaching trip through Devon, and in spite of what I have said I must confess to receiving an instant of entertainment at his hands. He was delivering a little dissertation on "the English and American languages." As there were two Americans on the back seat—it seems we term ourselves "Amurricans"—his choice of subject was full of tact. It was exhilarating to get a lesson in pronunciation from a gentleman who said *boult* for bolt, called St. John *Sin' Jun*, and did not know how to pronounce the beautiful name of his own college at Oxford. Fancy a perfectly sober

man saying *Maudlin* for Magdalen! Perhaps the purest English spoken is that of the English folk who have resided abroad ever since the Elizabethan period, or thereabouts.

EVERY one has a bookplate these days, and the collectors are after it. The fool and his bookplate are soon parted. To distribute one's *ex libris* is inanely to destroy the only significance it has, that of indicating the past or present ownership of the volume in which it is placed.

WHEN an Englishman is not highly imaginative he is apt to be the most matter-of-fact of mortals. He is rarely imaginative, and seldom has an alert sense of humor. Yet England has produced the finest of humorists and the greatest of poets. The humor and imagination which are diffused through other peoples concentrate themselves from time to time in individual Englishmen.

THIS is a page of autobiography, though not written in the first person: Many years ago a noted Boston publisher used to keep a large memorandum-book on a table in his personal office. The volume always lay open, and was in no manner a private affair, being the receptacle of nothing more important than hastily scrawled reminders to attend to this thing or the other. It chanced one day that a very young, unfledged author, passing through the city, looked in upon the publisher, who was also the editor of a famous magazine. The unfledged had a copy of verses secreted about his person. The publisher was absent, and young Milton, feeling that "they also serve who only stand and wait," sat down and waited. Presently his eye fell upon the memorandum-book, lying there spread out like a morning newspaper, and almost in spite of himself he read: "Don't forget to see the binder," "Don't forget to mail E— his contract," "Don't forget H—'s proofs," etc. An inspiration seized upon the youth; he took a pencil, and at the tail of this long list of "don't forgets" he wrote: "Don't forget to accept A's poem." He left his manuscript on the table and disappeared. That afternoon when the publisher glanced over his memoranda, he was not a little astonished at the last item; but his sense of humor was so strong that he did accept the poem (it required a strong sense of humor to do that), and sent the lad a check for it, though the verses remain to this day unprinted. That kindly publisher was wise as well as kind.

FRENCH novels with metaphysical or psychological prefaces are always certain to be particularly indecent.

I HAVE lately discovered that Master Harry Sandford of England, the priggish little boy in the story of "Sandford and Merton," has a worthy American cousin in one Elsie Dinsmore, who sedately pirouettes through a seemingly endless succession of girls' books. I came across a nest of fifteen of them the other day. This impossible female is carried from infancy up to grandmotherhood, and is, I believe, still leisurely pursuing her way down to the tomb in an ecstatic state of uninterrupted didacticism. There are twenty-five volumes of her and the granddaughter, who is also christened Elsie, and is her grandmother's own child, with the same precocious readiness to dispense ethical instruction to her elders. An interesting instance of hereditary talent!

H—'s intellect resembles a bamboo—slender, graceful, and hollow. Personally, he is long and narrow, and looks as if he might have been the product of a rope-walk. He is loosely put together, like an ill-constructed sentence, and affects me like one. His figure is ungrammatical.

AMERICAN humor is nearly as ephemeral as the flowers that bloom in the spring. Each generation has its own crop, and, as a rule, insists on cultivating a new kind. That of 1860, if it were to break into blossom at the present moment, would probably be left to fade upon the stem.

Humor is a delicate shrub, with the passing hectic flush of its time. The current-topic variety is especially subject to very early frosts, as is also the dialectic species. Mark Twain's humor is not to be classed with the fragile plants; it has a serious root striking deep down into rich earth, and I think it will go on flowering indefinitely.

I HAVE been imagining an ideal critical journal, whose plan should involve the discharge of the chief literary critic and the installment of a fresh censor on the completion of each issue. To place a man in permanent absolute control of a certain number of pages, in which to express his opinions, is to place him in a position of great personal danger. It is almost inevitable that he should come

to overrate the importance of those opinions, to take himself with far too much seriousness, and in the end adopt the dogma of his own infallibility. The liberty to summon this or that man-of-letters to a supposititious bar of justice is apt to beget in the self-appointed judge an exaggerated sense of superiority. He becomes impatient of any rulings not his, and says in effect, if not in so many words: "I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my lips let no dog bark." When the critic reaches this exalted frame of mind his slight usefulness is gone.

AFTER a debauch of thunder-shower, the weather takes the pledge and signs it with a rainbow.

I LIKE to have a thing suggested rather than told in full. When every detail is given, the mind rests satisfied, and the imagination loses the desire to use its own wings. The partly draped statue has a charm which the nude lacks. Who would have those marble folds slip from the raised knee of the Venus of Melos? Hawthorne knew how to make his lovely thought lovelier by sometimes half veiling it.

I HAVE just tested the nib of a new pen on a slight fancy which Herrick has handled twice in the "Hesperides." The fancy, however, is not Herrick's; it is as old as poetry and the exaggeration of lovers, and I have the same privilege as another to try my fortune with it:

UP ROOS THE SONNE, AND UP ROOS EMELYE CHAUCER

When some hand has partly drawn The cloudy curtains of her bed, And my lady's golden head Glimmers in the dusk like dawn, Then methinks is day begun. Later, when her dream has ceased And she softly stirs and wakes, Then it is as when the East A sudden rosy magic takes From the cloud-enfolded sun, And full day breaks!

Shakespeare, who has done so much to discourage literature by anticipating everybody, puts the whole matter into a nutshell:

But soft! what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

THERE is a phrase spoken by Hamlet which I have seen quoted innumerable times, and never once correctly. Hamlet, addressing Horatio, says:

Give me that man That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him In my heart's core, ay, in my *heart of heart*.

The words italicized are invariably written "heart of hearts"—as if a person possessed that organ in duplicate. Perhaps no one living, with the exception of Sir Henry Irving, is more familiar with the play of Hamlet than my good friend Mr. Bram Stoker, who makes his heart plural on two occasions in his recent novel, "The Mystery of the Sea." Mrs. Humphry Ward also twice misquotes the passage in "Lady Rose's Daughter."

BOOKS that have become classics—books that ave had their day and now get more praise than perusal—always remind me of venerable colonels and majors and captains who, having reached the age limit, find themselves retired upon half pay.

WHETHER or not the fretful porcupine rolls itself into a ball is a subject over which my friend John Burroughs and several brother naturalists have lately become as heated as if the question involved points of theology. Up among the Adirondacks, and in the very heart of the region of porcupines, I happen to have a modest cottage. This retreat is called The Porcupine, and I ought by good rights to know something about the habits of the small animal from which it derives its name. Last winter my dog Buster used to return home on an average of three times a month from an excursion up Mt. Pisgah with his nose stuck full of quills, and *he* ought to have some concrete ideas on the subject. We two, then, are prepared to testify that the porcupine in its moments of relaxation occasionally contracts itself into what might be taken for a ball by persons not too difficult to please in the matter of spheres. But neither Buster nor I—being unwilling to get into trouble—would like to assert that it is an actual ball. That it is a shape with which one had better not thoughtlessly meddle is a conviction that my friend Buster stands ready to defend against all comers.

WORDSWORTH'S characterization of the woman in one of his poems as "a creature not too bright or good for human nature's daily food" has always appeared to me too cannibalesque to be poetical. It directly sets one to thinking of the South Sea islanders.

THOUGH Iago was not exactly the kind of person one would select as a superintendent for a Sunday-school, his advice to young Roderigo was wisdom itself—"Put money in thy purse." Whoever disparages money disparages every step in the progress of the human race. I listened the other day to a sermon in which gold was personified as a sort of glittering devil tempting mortals to their ruin. I had an instant of natural hesitation when the contribution-plate was passed around immediately afterward. Personally, I believe that the possession of gold has ruined fewer men than the lack of it. What noble enterprises have been checked and what fine souls have been blighted in the gloom of poverty the world will never know. "After the love of knowledge," says Buckle, "there is no one passion which has done so much good to mankind as the love of money."

DIALECT tempered with slang is an admirable medium of communication between persons who have nothing to say and persons who would not care for anything properly said.

DR. HOLMES had an odd liking for ingenious desk-accessories in the way of pencil-sharpeners, paper-weights, penholders, etc. The latest contrivances in this fashion—probably dropped down to him by the inventor angling for a nibble of commendation—were always making one another's acquaintance on his study table. He once said to me: "I 'm waiting for somebody to invent a mucilage-brush that you can't by any accident put into your inkstand. It would save me frequent moments of humiliation."

THE deceptive Mr. False and the volatile Mrs. Giddy, who figure in the pages of seventeenth and eighteenth century fiction, are not tolerated in modern novels and plays. Steal the burglar and Palette the artist have ceased to be. A name indicating the quality or occupation of the bearer strikes us as a too transparent device. Yet there are such names in contemporary real life. That of our worthy Adjutant-General Drum may be instanced. Neal and Pray are a pair of deacons who linger in the memory of my boyhood. Sweet the confectioner and Lamb the butcher are individuals with whom I have had dealings. The old-time sign of Ketchum & Cheetam, Brokers, in Wall Street, New York, seems almost too good to be true. But it was once, if it is not now, an actuality.

I HAVE observed that whenever a Boston author dies, New York immediately becomes a great literary centre.

THE possession of unlimited power will make a despot of almost any man. There is a possible Nero in the gentlest human creature that walks.

EVERY living author has a projection of himself, a sort of eidolon, that goes about in near and remote places making friends or enemies for him among persons who never lay eyes upon the writer in the flesh. When he dies, this phantasmal personality fades away, and the author lives only in the impression created by his own literature. It is only then that the world begins to perceive what manner of man the poet, the novelist, or the historian really was. Not until he is dead, and perhaps some long time dead, is it possible for the public to take his exact measure. Up to that point contemporary criticism has either overrated him or underrated him, or ignored him altogether, having been misled by the eidolon, which always plays fantastic tricks with the writer temporarily under its dominion. It invariably represents him as either a greater or a smaller personage than he actually is. Presently the simulacrum works no more spells, good or evil, and the deception is unveiled. The hitherto disregarded author is recognized, and the idol of yesterday, which seemed so important, is taken down from his too large pedestal and carted off to the dumping-ground of inadequate things. To be sure, if he chanced to have been not entirely unworthy, and on cool examination is found to possess some appreciable degree of merit, then he is set up on a new slab of appropriate dimensions. The late colossal statue shrinks to a modest bas-relief. On the other hand, some scarcely noticed bust may suddenly become a revered full-length figure. Between the reputation of the author living and the reputation of the same author dead there is ever a wide discrepancy.

A NOT too enchanting glimpse of Tennyson is incidentally given by Charles Brookfield, the English actor, in his “Random Recollections.” Mr. Brookfield’s father was, on one occasion, dining at the Oxford and Cambridge Club with George Venables, Frank Lushington, Alfred Tennyson, and others. “After dinner,” relates the random recollector, “the poet insisted upon putting his feet on the table, tilting back his chair *more Americano*. There were strangers in the room, and he was expostulated with for his uncouthness, but in vain. ‘Do put down your feet!’ pleaded his host. ‘Why should I?’ retorted Tennyson. ‘I ‘m very comfortable as I am.’ ‘Every one’s staring at you,’ said another. ‘Let ‘em stare,’ replied the poet, placidly. ‘Alfred,’ said my father, ‘people will think you’re Longfellow.’ Down went the feet.” That *more Americano* of Brookfield the younger is delicious with its fine insular flavor, but the holding up of Longfellow—the soul of gentleness, the prince of courtesy—as a bugaboo of bad manners is simply inimitable. It will take England years and years to detect the full unconscious humor of it.

GREAT orators who are not also great writers become very indistinct historical shadows to the generations immediately following them. The spell vanishes with the voice. A man’s voice is almost the only part of him entirely obliterated by death. The violet of his native land may be made of his ashes, but nature in her economy seems to have taken no care of his intonations, unless she perpetuates them in restless waves of air surging about the poles. The well-graced actor who leaves no perceptible record of his genius has a decided advantage over the mere orator. The tradition of the player’s method and presence is associated with works of enduring beauty. Turning to the pages of the dramatist, we can picture to ourselves the greatness of Garrick or Siddons in this or that scene, in this or that character. It is not so easy to conjure up the impassioned orator from the pages of a dry and possibly illogical argument in favor of or against some long-ago-exploded measure of government. The laurels of an orator who is not a master of literary art wither quickly.

ALL the best sands of my life are somehow getting into the wrong end of the hour-glass. If I could only reverse it! Were it in my power to do so, would I?

SHAKESPEARE is forever coming into our affairs—putting in his oar, so to speak—with some pat word or sentence. The conversation, the other evening, had turned on the subject of watches, when one of the gentlemen present, the manager of a large watch-making establishment, told us a rather interesting fact. The component parts of a watch are produced by different workmen, who have no concern with the complex piece of mechanism as a whole, and possibly, as a rule, understand it imperfectly. Each worker needs to be expert in only his own special branch. When the watch has reached a certain advanced state, the work requires a touch as delicate and firm as that of an oculist performing an operation. Here the most skilled and trustworthy artisans are employed; they receive high wages, and have the benefit of a singular indulgence. In case the workman, through too continuous application, finds himself lacking the steadiness of nerve demanded by his task, he is allowed without forfeiture of pay to remain idle temporarily, in order that his hand may recover the requisite precision of touch. As I listened, Hamlet’s courtly criticism of the grave-digger’s want of sensibility came drifting into my memory. “The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense,” says Shakespeare, who has left nothing unsaid.

IT was a festival in honor of Dai Butsu or some one of the auxiliary deities that preside over the destinies of Japland. For three days and nights the streets of Tokio—where the squat little brown houses look for all the world as if they were mimicking the favorite sitting posture of the Japanese—were crowded with smiling holiday makers, and made gay with devices of tinted tissue paper, dolphins, devils, dragons, and mythical winged creatures which at night amiably turned themselves into lanterns. Garlands of these, arranged close together, were stretched across the streets from ridgepoles to ridgepole, and your jinrikisha whisked you through interminable arbors of soft illumination. The spectacle gave one an idea of fairyland, but then all Japan does that.

A land not like ours, that land of strange flowers,

Of daemons and spooks with mysterious powers—
Of gods who breathe ice, who cause peach-blooms and rice
And manage the moonshine and turn on the showers.

Each day has its fair or its festival there,
And life seems immune to all trouble and care—
Perhaps only seems, in that island of dreams,
Sea-girdled and basking in magical air.

They've streets of bazaars filled with lacquers and jars,
And silk stuffs, and sword-blades that tell of old wars;
They've Fuji's white cone looming up, bleak and lone,
As if it were trying to reach to the stars.

They've temples and gongs, and grim Buddhas in throngs,
And pearl-powdered geisha with dances and songs:
Each girl at her back has an imp, brown or black,
And dresses her hair in remarkable prongs.

On roadside and street toddling images meet,
And smirk and kotow in a way that is sweet;
Their obis are tied with particular pride,
Their silken kimonos hang scant to the feet.

With purrs like a cat they all giggle and chat,
Now spreading their fans, and now holding them flat;
A fan by its play whispers, "Go now!" or "Stay!"
"I hate you!" "I love you!"—a fan can say that!
Beneath a dwarf tree, here and there, two or three
Squat coolies are sipping small cups of green tea;
They sputter, and leer, and cry out, and appear
Like bad little chessmen gone off on a spree.

At night—ah, at night the long streets are a sight,
With garlands of soft-colored lanterns alight—
Blue, yellow, and red twinkling high overhead,
Like thousands of butterflies taking their flight.

Somewhere in the gloom that no lanterns illumine
Stand groups of slim lilies and jonquils in bloom;
On tiptoe, unseen 'mid a tangle of green,
They offer the midnight their cups of perfume.

At times, sweet and clear from some tea-garden near,
A ripple of laughter steals out to your ear;
Anon the wind brings from a samisen's strings
The pathos that's born of a smile and a tear.

THE difference between an English audience and a French audience at the theatre is marked. The Frenchman brings down a witticism on the wing. The Briton pauses for it to alight and give him reasonable time for deliberate aim. In English playhouses an appreciable number of seconds usually precede the smile or the ripple of laughter that follows a facetious turn of the least fineness. I disclaim all responsibility for this statement of my personal observation, since it has recently been indorsed by one of London's most eminent actors.

AT the next table, taking his opal drops of absinthe, was a French gentleman with the blase aspect of an empty champagne-bottle, which always has the air of saying: "I have lived!"

WE often read of wonderful manifestations of memory, but they are always instances of the faculty working in some special direction. It is memory playing, like Paganini, on one string. No doubt the persons performing the phenomenal feats ascribed to them have forgotten more than they remember. To be able to repeat a hundred lines of verse after a single reading is no proof of a retentive mind, excepting so far as the hundred lines go. A man might easily fail under such a test, and yet have a good memory; by which I mean a catholic one, and that I imagine to be nearly the rarest of gifts. I have never met more than four or five persons possessing it. The small boy who defined memory as "the thing you forget with" described the faculty as it exists and works in the majority of men and women.

THE survival in publishers of the imitative instinct is a strong argument in support of Mr. Darwin's theory of the descent of man. One publisher no sooner brings out a new style of book-cover than half a dozen other publishers fall to duplicating it.

THE cavalry sabre hung over the chimney-place with a knot of violets tied to the dented guard, there being no known grave to decorate. For many a year, on each Decoration Day, a sorrowful woman had come and fastened these flowers there. The first time she brought her offering she was a slender girl, as fresh as her own violets. It is a slender figure still, but there are threads of silver in the black hair.

FORTUNATE was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who in early youth was taught "to abstain from rhetoric, and poetry, and fine writing"—especially the fine writing. Simplicity is art's last word.

The man is clearly an adventurer. In the seventeenth century he would have worn huge flintlock pistols stuck into a wide leather belt, and been something in the seafaring line. The fellow is always smartly dressed, but where he lives and how he lives are as unknown as "what song the Sirens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women." He is a man who apparently has no appointment with his breakfast and whose dinner is a chance acquaintance. His probable banker is the next person. A great city like this is the only geography for such a character. He would be impossible in a small country town, where everybody knows everybody and what everybody has for lunch.

I HAVE been seeking, thus far in vain, for the proprietor of the saying that "Economy is second or third cousin to Avarice." I went rather confidently to Rochefoucauld, but it is not among that gentleman's light luggage of cynical maxims.

THERE is a popular vague impression that butchers are not allowed to serve as jurors on murder trials. This is not really the case, but it logically might be. To a man daily familiar with the lurid incidents of the *abattoir*, the summary extinction of a fellow creature (whether the victim or the criminal) can scarcely seem a circumstance of so serious moment as to another man engaged in less strenuous pursuits. WE do not, and cannot, read many of the novels that most delighted our ancestors. Some of our popular fiction is doubtless as poor, but poor with a difference. There is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity. In every generation the least cultivated taste has the largest appetite. There is ragtime literature as well as ragtime music for the many.

G— is a man who had rather fail in a great purpose than not accomplish it in precisely his own way. He has the courage of his conviction and the intolerance of his courage. He is opposed to the death penalty for murder, but he would willingly have any one electrocuted who disagreed with him on the subject.

I HAVE thought of an essay to be called “On the Art of Short-Story Writing,” but have given it up as smacking too much of the shop. It would be too *intime*, since I should have to deal chiefly with my own ways, and so give myself the false air of seeming to consider them of importance. It would interest nobody to know that I always write the last paragraph first, and then work directly up to that, avoiding all digressions and side issues. Then who on earth would care to be told about the trouble my characters cause me by talking too much? They will talk, and I have to let them; but when the story is finished, I go over the dialogue and strike out four fifths of the long speeches. I fancy that makes my characters pretty mad.

THIS is the golden age of the inventor. He is no longer looked upon as a madman or a wizard, incontinently to be made away with. Two or three centuries ago Marconi would not have escaped a ropeless end with his wireless telegraphy. Even so late as 1800, the friends of one Robert Fulton seriously entertained the luminous idea of hustling the poor man into an asylum for the unsound before he had a chance to fire up the boiler of his tiny steamboat on the Hudson river. In olden times the pillory and the whipping-post were among the gentler forms of encouragement awaiting the inventor. If a man devised an especially practical apple-peeler he was in imminent danger of being peeled with it by an incensed populace. To-day we hail with enthusiasm a scientific or a mechanical discovery, and stand ready to make a stock company of it.

A MAN is known by the company his mind keeps. To live continually with noble books, with “high-erected thoughts seated in the heart of courtesy,” teaches the soul good manners.

THE unconventional has ever a morbid attraction for a certain class of mind. There is always a small coterie of highly intellectual men and women eager to give welcome to whatever is eccentric, obscure, or chaotic. Worshipers at the shrine of the Unpopular, they tingle with a sense of tolerant superiority when they say: “Of course this is not the kind of thing *you* would like.” Sometimes these impressionable souls almost seem to make a sort of reputation for their fetish.

I HEAR that B— directed to have himself buried on the edge of the pond where his duckstand was located, in order that flocks of migrating birds might fly over his grave every autumn. He did not have to die, to become a dead shot. A comrade once said of him: “Yes, B— is a great sportsman. He has peppered everything from grouse in North Dakota to his best friend in the Maine woods.”

WHEN the novelist introduces a bore into his novel he must not let him bore the reader. The fellow must be made amusing, which he would not be in real life. In nine cases out of ten an exact reproduction of real life would prove tedious. Facts are not necessarily valuable, and frequently they add nothing to fiction. The art of the realistic novelist sometimes seems akin to that of the Chinese tailor who perpetuated the old patch on the new trousers. True art selects and paraphrases, but seldom gives a verbatim translation.

THE last meeting I had with Lowell was in the north room of his house at Elmwood, the sleeping-room I had occupied during a two years’ tenancy of the place in his absence abroad. He was lying half propped up in bed, convalescing from one of the severe attacks that were ultimately to prove fatal. Near the bed was a chair on which stood a marine picture in aquarelle—a stretch of calm sea, a bit of rocky shore in the foreground, if I remember, and a vessel at anchor. The afternoon sunlight, falling through the window, cast a bloom over the picture, which was turned toward Lowell. From time to time, as he spoke, his eyes rested thoughtfully on the water-color. A friend, he said, had just sent it to him. It seemed to me then, and the fancy has often haunted me since, that that ship, in the golden haze, with topsails loosened, was waiting to bear his spirit away.

CIVILIZATION is the lamb’s skin in which barbarism masquerades. If somebody has already said that, I forgive him the mortification he causes me. At the beginning of the twentieth century barbarism can throw off its gentle disguise, and burn a man at the stake as complacently as in the Middle Ages.

WHAT is slang in one age sometimes goes into the vocabulary of the purist in the next. On the other hand, expressions that once were not considered inelegant are looked at askance in the period

following. The word “brass” was formerly an accepted synonym for money; but at present, when it takes on that significance, it is not admitted into genteel circles of language. It may be said to have seen better days, like another word I have in mind—a word that has become slang, employed in the sense which once did not exclude it from very good society. A friend lately informed me that he had “fired” his housekeeper—that is, dismissed her. He little dreamed that he was speaking excellent Elizabethan.

THE “Journal des Goncourt” is crowded with beautiful and hideous things, like a Japanese Museum.

“AND she shuddered as she sat, still silent, on her seat, and he saw that she shuddered.” This is from Anthony Trollope’s novel, “Can You Forgive Her?” Can you forgive him? is the next question.

A LITTLE thing may be perfect, but perfection is not a little thing. Possessing this quality, a trifle “no bigger than an agate-stone on the forefinger of an alderman” shall outlast the Pyramids. The world will have forgotten all the great masterpieces of literature when it forgets Lovelace’s three verses to Lucasta on his going to the wars. More durable than marble or bronze are the words, “I could not love thee, deare, so much, loved I not honor more.”

I CALLED on the dear old doctor this afternoon to say good-by. I shall probably not find him here when I come back from the long voyage which I have in front of me. He is very fragile, and looks as though a puff of wind would blow him away. He said himself, with his old-time cheerfulness, that he was attached to this earth by only a little piece of twine. He has perceptibly failed since I saw him a month ago; but he was full of the wise and radiant talk to which all the world has listened, and will miss. I found him absorbed in a newly made card-catalogue of his library. “It was absurd of me to have it done,” he remarked. “What I really require is a little bookcase holding only two volumes; then I could go from one to the other in alternation and always find each book as fresh as if I never had read it.” This arraignment of his memory was in pure jest, for the doctor’s mind was to the end like an unclouded crystal. It was interesting to note how he studied himself, taking his own pulse, as it were, and diagnosing his own case in a sort of scientific, impersonal way, as if it were somebody else’s case and he were the consulting specialist. I intended to spend a quarter of an hour with him, and he kept me three hours. I went there rather depressed, but I returned home leavened with his good spirits, which, I think, will never desert him, here or hereafter. To keep the heart unwrinkled, to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful, reverent—that is to triumph over old age.

THE thing one reads and likes, and then forgets, is of no account. The thing that stays, and haunts one, and refuses to be forgotten, that is the sincere thing. I am describing the impression left upon me by Mr. Howells’s blank-verse sketch called “Father and Mother: A Mystery”—a strangely touching and imaginative piece of work, not unlike in effect to some of Maeterlinck’s psychical dramas. As I read on, I seemed to be standing in a shadow cast by some half-remembered experience of my own in a previous state of existence. When I went to bed that night I had to lie awake and think it over as an event that had actually befallen me. I should call the effect *weird*

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.