

successful *bon-mot* established a claim to office, and a well-turned leg did more for a man than the best mind in Europe, Burr would have risen to distinction. He might have shone in the literary circles at Sceaux, and in the *petits soupers* at the Palais Royal. Among the wits, the *littérateurs*, the fashionable men and women of the time, he would have found society congenial to his tastes, and sufficient employment for his talents. He would have exhibited in his own life and character their vices and their superficial virtues, their extravagance, libertinism, and impiety, their politeness, courage, and wit. He might have borne a distinguished part in the petty statesmanship, the intriguing di-

plomacy, and the wild speculations of that period. But here, among the stern rebels of the Revolution and the practical statesmen of the early Republic, this trickster and shallow politician, this visionary adventurer and boaster of ladies' favors, was out of place. He has given to his country nothing except a pernicious example. The full light, which shows us that his vices may have been exaggerated, shows likewise that his talents have surely been overestimated. The contrast which gave fascination to his career is destroyed; and for a partial vindication of his character he will pay the penalty which he would most have dreaded, that of being forgotten.

## THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

### EVERY MAN HIS OWN BOSWELL.

A LYRIC conception—my friend, the Poet, said—hits me like a bullet in the forehead. I have often had the blood drop from my cheeks when it struck, and felt that I turned as white as death. Then comes a creeping as of centipedes running down the spine,—then a gasp and a great jump of the heart,—then a sudden flush and a beating in the vessels of the head,—then a long sigh,—and the poem is written.

It is an impromptu, I suppose, then, if you write it so suddenly,—I replied.

No,—said he,—far from it. I said written, but I did not say *copied*. Every such poem has a soul and a body, and it is the body of it, or the copy, that men read and publishers pay for. The soul of it is born in an instant in the poet's soul. It comes to him a thought, tangled in the meshes of a few sweet words,—words that have loved each other from the cradle of the language, but have never been wedded until now. Whether it will ever fully embody itself in a bridal

train of a dozen stanzas or not is uncertain; but it exists potentially from the instant that the poet turns pale with it. It is enough to stun and scare anybody, to have a hot thought come crashing into his brain, and ploughing up those parallel ruts where the wagon trains of common ideas were jogging along in their regular sequences of association. No wonder the ancients made the poetical impulse wholly external. *Μῆτιν ἄειδε, θεά*. Goddess,—Muse,—divine afflatus,—something outside always. I never wrote any verses worth reading. I can't. I am too stupid. If I ever copied any that were worth reading, I was only a medium.

[I was talking all this time to our boarders, you understand,—telling them what this poet told me. The company listened rather attentively, I thought, considering the literary character of the remarks.]

The old gentleman opposite all at once asked me if I ever read anything bet-

ter than Pope's "Essay on Man"? Had I ever perused McFingal? He was fond of poetry when he was a boy,—his mother taught him to say many little pieces,—he remembered one beautiful hymn;—and the old gentleman began, in a clear, loud voice, for his years,—

"The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue ethereal sky,  
And spangled heavens,"——

He stopped, as if startled by our silence, and a faint flush ran up beneath the thin white hairs that fell upon his cheek. As I looked round, I was reminded of a show I once saw at the Museum,—the Sleeping Beauty, I think they called it. The old man's sudden breaking out in this way turned every face towards him, and each kept his posture as if changed to stone. Our Celtic Bridget, or Biddy, is not a foolish fat scullion to burst out crying for a sentiment. She is of the serviceable, red-handed, broad-and-high-shouldered type; one of those imported female servants who are known in public by their amorphous style of person, their stoop forwards, and a headlong and as it were, precipitous walk,—the waist plunging downwards into the rocking pelvis at every heavy footfall. Bridget, constituted for action, not for emotion, was about to deposit a plate heaped with something upon the table, when I saw the coarse arm stretched by my shoulder arrested, —motionless as the arm of a terra-cotta caryatid; she couldn't set the plate down while the old gentleman was speaking!

He was quite silent after this, still wearing the slight flush on his cheek. Don't ever think the poetry is dead in an old man because his forehead is wrinkled, or that his manhood has left him when his hand trembles! If they ever *were* there, they *are* there still!

By and by we got talking again.—Does a poet love the verses written through him, do you think, Sir?—said the divinity-student.

So long as they are warm from his mind, carry any of his animal heat about them, *I know* he loves them,—I answer-

ed. When they have had time to cool, he is more indifferent.

A good deal as it is with buckwheat cakes,—said the young fellow whom they call John.

The last words, only, reached the ear of the economically organized female in black bombazine.—Buckwheat is skerce and high,—she remarked. [Must be a poor relation sponging on our landlady,—pays nothing,—so she must stand by the guns and be ready to repel boarders.]

I liked the turn the conversation had taken, for I had some things I wanted to say, and so, after waiting a minute, I began again.—I don't think the poems I read you sometimes can be fairly appreciated, given to you as they are in the green state.

—You don't know what I mean by the *green state*? Well, then, I will tell you. Certain things are good for nothing until they have been kept a long while; and some are good for nothing until they have been long kept and *used*. Of the first, wine is the illustrious and immortal example. Of those which must be kept and used I will name three,—meerscham pipes, violins, and poems. The meerscham is but a poor affair until it has burned a thousand offerings to the cloud-compelling deities. It comes to us without complexion or flavor,—born of the sea-foam, like Aphrodite, but colorless as *pallida Mors* herself. The fire is lighted in its central shrine, and gradually the juices which the broad leaves of the Great Vegetable had sucked up from an acre and curdled into a drachm are diffused through its thirsting pores. First a discoloration, then a stain, and at last a rich, glowing, umber tint spreading over the whole surface. Nature true to her old brown autumnal hue, you see,—as true in the fire of the meerscham as in the sunshine of October! And then the cumulative wealth of its fragrant reminiscences! he who inhales its vapors takes a thousand whiffs in a single breath; and one cannot touch it without awakening the

old joys that hang around it, as the smell of flowers clings to the dresses of the daughters of the house of Farina!

[Don't think I use a meerschaum myself, for *I do not*, though I have owned a calumet since my childhood, which from a naked Piet (of the Mohawk species) my grandsire won, together with a tomahawk and beaded knife-sheath; paying for the lot with a bullet-mark on his right cheek. On the maternal side I inherit the loveliest silver-mounted tobacco-stopper you ever saw. It is a little box-wood Triton, carved with charming liveliness and truth; I have often compared it to a figure in Raphael's "Triumph of Galatea." It came to me in an ancient shagreen case,—how old it is I do not know,—but it must have been made since Sir Walter Raleigh's time. If you are curious, you shall see it any day. Neither will I pretend that I am so unused to the more perishable smoking contrivance, that a few whiffs would make me feel as if I lay in a ground-swell on the Bay of Biscay. I am not unacquainted with that fusiform, spiral-wound bundle of chopped stems and miscellaneous incombustibles, the *cigar*, so called, of the shops,—which to "draw" asks the suction-power of a nursing infant Hercules, and to relish, the leathery palate of an old Silenus. I do not advise you, young man, even if my illustration strikes your fancy, to consecrate the flower of your life to painting the bowl of a pipe, for, let me assure you, the stain of a reverie-breeding narcotic may strike deeper than you think for. I have seen the green leaf of early promise grow brown before its time under such Nicotian regimen, and thought the umbered meerschaum was dearly bought at the cost of a brain enfeebled and a will enslaved.]

Violins, too,—the sweet old Amati!—the divine Straduarii! Played on by ancient *maestros* until the bow-hand lost its power and the flying fingers stiffened. Bequeathed to the passionate young enthusiast, who made it whisper his hidden love, and cry his inarticulate longings,

and scream his untold agonies, and wail his monotonous despair. Passed from his dying hand to the cold *virtuoso*, who let it slumber in its case for a generation, till, when his hoard was broken up, it came forth once more and rode the stormy symphonies of royal orchestras, beneath the rushing bow of their lord and leader. Into lonely prisons with improvident artists; into convents from which arose, day and night, the holy hymns with which its tones were blended; and back again to orgies in which it learned to howl and laugh as if a legion of devils were shut up in it; then again to the gentle *dilettante* who calmed it down with easy melodies until it answered him softly as in the days of the old *maestros*. And so given into our hands, its pores all full of music; stained, like the meerschaum, through and through, with the concentrated hue and sweetness of all the harmonies that have kindled and faded on its strings.

Now I tell you a poem must be kept *and used*, like a meerschaum, or a violin. A poem is just as porous as the meerschaum;—the more porous it is, the better. I mean to say that a genuine poem is capable of absorbing an indefinite amount of the essence of our own humanity,—its tenderness, its heroism, its regrets, its aspirations, so as to be gradually stained through with a divine secondary color derived from ourselves. So you see it must take time to bring the sentiment of a poem into harmony with our nature, by staining ourselves through every thought and image our being can penetrate.

Then again as to the mere music of a new poem; why, who can expect anything more from that than from the music of a violin fresh from the maker's hands? Now you know very well that there are no less than fifty-eight different pieces in a violin. These pieces are strangers to each other, and it takes a century, more or less, to make them thoroughly acquainted. At last they learn to vibrate in harmony, and the instrument becomes an organic whole, as

if it were a great seed-capsule that had grown from a garden-bed in Cremona, or elsewhere. Besides, the wood is juicy and full of sap for fifty years or so, but at the end of fifty or a hundred more gets tolerably dry and comparatively resonant.

Don't you see that all this is just as true of a poem? Counting each word as a piece, there are more pieces in an average copy of verses than in a violin. The poet has forced all these words together, and fastened them, and they don't understand it at first. But let the poem be repeated aloud and murmured over in the mind's muffled whisper often enough, and at length the parts become knit together in such absolute solidarity that you could not change a syllable without the whole world's crying out against you for meddling with the harmonious fabric. Observe, too, how the drying process takes place in the stuff of a poem just as in that of a violin. Here is a Tyrolese fiddle that is just coming to its hundredth birthday,—(Pedro Klauss, Tyroli, fecit, 1760,)—the sap is pretty well out of it. And here is the song of an old poet whom *Næra* cheated:—

“Nox erat, et cælo fulgebat Luna sereno  
Inter minora sidera,  
Cum tu magnorum numen læsura deorum  
In verba jurabas mea.”

Don't you perceive the sonorosity of these old dead Latin phrases? Now I tell you that every word fresh from the dictionary brings with it a certain succulence; and though I cannot expect the sheets of the “*Pactolian*,” in which, as I told you, I sometimes print my verses, to get so dry as the crisp papyrus that held those words of *Horatius Flaccus*, yet you may be sure, that, while the sheets are damp, and while the lines hold their sap, you can't fairly judge of my performances, and that, if made of the true stuff, they will ring better after a while.

[There was silence for a brief space, after my somewhat elaborate exposition of these self-evident analogies. Presently a person turned towards me—I do not choose to designate the individual—

and said that he rather expected my pieces had given pretty good “satisfaction.”—I had, up to this moment, considered this complimentary phrase as sacred to the use of secretaries of lyceums, and, as it has been usually accompanied by a small pecuniary testimonial, have acquired a certain relish for this moderately tepid and unstimulating expression of enthusiasm. But as a reward for gratuitous services, I confess I thought it a little below that blood-heat standard which a man's breath ought to have, whether silent, or vocal and articulate. I waited for a favorable opportunity, however, before making the remarks which follow.]

—There are single expressions, as I have told you already, that fix a man's position for you before you have done shaking hands with him. Allow me to expand a little. There are several things, very slight in themselves, yet implying other things not so unimportant. Thus, your French servant has *dévalisé* your premises and got caught. *Excusez*, says the *sergent-de-ville*, as he politely relieves him of his upper garments and displays his bust in the full daylight. Good shoulders enough,—a little marked,—traces of smallpox, perhaps,—but white. . . . *Crac!* from the *sergent-de-ville's* broad palm on the white shoulder! Now look! *Vogue la galère!* Out comes the big red V—mark of the hot iron;—he had blistered it out pretty nearly,—hadn't he?—the old rascal *VOLEUR*, branded in the galleys at *Marseilles!* [Don't! What if he has got something like this?—nobody supposes I *invented* such a story.]

My man John, who used to drive two of those six equine females which I told you I had owned,—for, look you, my friends, simple though I stand here, I am one that has been driven in his “ker-ridge,”—not using that term, as liberal shepherds do, for any battered old shabby-genteel go-cart that has more than one wheel, but meaning thereby a four-wheeled vehicle *with a pole*,—my man John, I say, was a retired soldier. He

retired unostentatiously, as many of Her Majesty's modest servants have done before and since. John told me, that when an officer thinks he recognizes one of these retiring heroes, and would know if he has really been in the service, that he may restore him, if possible, to a grateful country, he comes suddenly upon him, and says, sharply, "Strap!" If he has ever worn the shoulder-strap, he has learned the reprimand for its ill adjustment. The old word of command flashes through his muscles, and his hand goes up in an instant to the place where the strap used to be.

[I was all the time preparing for my grand *coup*, you understand; but I saw they were not quite ready for it, and so continued,—always in illustration of the general principle I had laid down.]

Yes, odd things come out in ways that nobody thinks of. There was a legend, that, when the Danish pirates made descents upon the English coast, they caught a few Tartars occasionally, in the shape of Saxons, that would not let them go,—on the contrary, insisted on their staying, and, to make sure of it, treated them as Apollo treated Marsyas, or as Bartholinus has treated a fellow-creature in his title-page, and, having divested them of the one essential and perfectly fitting garment, indispensable in the mildest climates, nailed the same on the church-door as we do the banns of marriage, *in terrorem*.

[There was a laugh at this among some of the young folks; but as I looked at our landlady, I saw that "the water stood in her eyes," as it did in Christina's when the interpreter asked her about the spider, and that the school-mistress blushed, as Mercy did in the same conversation, as you remember.]

That sounds like a cock-and-bull-story, —said the young fellow whom they call John. I abstained from making Hamlet's remark to Horatio, and continued.

Not long since, the church-wardens were repairing and beautifying an old Saxon church in a certain English village, and among other things thought the

doors should be attended to. One of them particularly, the front-door, looked very badly, crusted, as it were, and as if it would be all the better for scraping. There happened to be a microscopist in the village who had heard the old pirate story, and he took it into his head to examine the crust on this door. There was no mistake about it; it was a genuine historical document, of the Ziska drum-head pattern,—a real *cutis humana*, stripped from some old Scandinavian filibuster,—and the legend was true.

My friend, the Professor, settled an important historical and financial question once by the aid of an exceedingly minute fragment of a similar document. Behind the pane of plate-glass which bore his name and title burned a modest lamp, signifying to the passers-by that at all hours of the night the slightest favors (or fevers) were welcome. A youth who had freely partaken of the cup which cheers and likewise inebriates, following a moth-like impulse very natural under the circumstances, dashed his fist at the light and quenched the meek luminary, —breaking through the plate-glass, of course, to reach it. Now I don't want to go into *minutiæ* at table, you know, but a naked hand can no more go through a pane of thick glass without leaving some of its cuticle, to say the least, behind it, than a butterfly can go through a sausage-machine without looking the worse for it. The Professor gathered up the fragments of glass, and with them certain very minute but entirely satisfactory documents which would have identified and hanged any rogue in Christendom who had parted with them.—The historical question, *Who did it?* and the financial question, *Who paid for it?* were both settled before the new lamp was lighted the next evening.

You see, my friends, what immense conclusions, touching our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, may be reached by means of very insignificant premises. This is eminently true of manners and forms of speech; a movement or a phrase often tells you all you

want to know about a person. Thus, "How's your health?" (commonly pronounced *haillth*)—instead of, How do you do? or, How are you? Or calling your little dark entry a "hall," and your old rickety one-horse wagon a "kerridge." Or telling a person who has been trying to please you that he has given you pretty good "sahtisfahction." Or saying that you "remember of" such a thing, or that you have been "stoppin'" at Deacon Somebody's,—and other such expressions. One of my friends had a little marble statuette of Cupid in the parlor of his country-house,—bow, arrows, wings, and all complete. A visitor, indigenious to the region, looking pensively at the figure, asked the lady of the house "if that was a statoo of her deceased infant?" What a delicious, though somewhat voluminous biography, social, educational, and æsthetic in that brief question!

[Please observe with what Machiavelian astuteness I smuggled in the particular offence which it was my object to hold up to my fellow-boarders, without too personal an attack on the individual at whose door it lay.]

That was an exceedingly dull person who made the remark, *Ex pede Herculem*. He might as well have said, "From a peck of apples you may judge of the barrel." *EX PEDE*, to be sure! Read, instead, *Ex ungue minimi digiti pedis, Herculem, ejusque patrem, matrem, avos et proavos, filios, nepotes et pronepotes!* Talk to me about your δὲς πῶν στῶ! Tell me about Cuvier's getting up a megatherium from a tooth, or Agassiz's drawing a portrait of an undiscovered fish from a single scale! As the "O" revealed Giotto,—as the one word "moi" betrayed the Stratford-atte-Bowe-taught Anglais,—so all a man's antecedents and possibilities are summed up in a single utterance which gives at once the gauge of his education and his mental organization.

Possibilities, Sir?—said the divinity-student; can't a man who says *Haïw?* arrive at distinction?

Sir,—I replied,—in a republic all things

are possible. But the man with a future has almost of necessity sense enough to see that any odious trick of speech or manners must be got rid of. Doesn't Sidney Smith say that a public man in England never gets over a false quantity uttered in early life? Our public men are in little danger of this fatal misstep, as few of them are in the habit of introducing Latin into their speeches,—for good and sufficient reasons. But they are bound to speak decent English,—unless, indeed, they are rough old campaigners, like General Jackson or General Taylor; in which case, a few scars on Priscian's head are pardoned to old fellows that have quite as many on their own, and a constituency of thirty empires is not at all particular, provided they do not swear in their Presidential Messages.

However, it is not for me to talk. I have made mistakes enough in conversation and print. "Don't" for doesn't,—base misspelling of Clos Vougeot, (I wish I saw the label on the bottle a little often-er,)—and I don't know how many more. I never find them out until they are stereotyped, and then I think they rarely escape me. I have no doubt I shall make half a dozen slips before this breakfast is over, and remember them all before another. How one does tremble with rage at his own intense momentary stupidity about things he knows perfectly well, and to think how he lays himself open to the impertinences of the *captatores verborum*, those useful but humble scavengers of the language, whose business it is to pick up what might offend or injure, and remove it, hugging and feeding on it as they go! I don't want to speak too slightly of these verbal critics;—how can I, who am so fond of talking about errors and vulgarisms of speech? Only there is a difference between those clerical blunders which almost every man commits, knowing better, and that habitual grossness or meanness of speech which is unendurable to educated persons, from anybody that wears silk or broadcloth.



[I write down the above remarks this morning, January 26th, making this record of the date that nobody may think it was written in wrath, on account of any particular grievance suffered from the invasion of any individual *scarabæus grammæus*.]

—I wonder if anybody ever finds fault with anything I say at this table when it is repeated? I hope they do, I am sure. I should be very certain that I had said nothing of much significance, if they did not.

Did you never, in walking in the fields, come across a large flat stone, which had lain, nobody knows how long, just where you found it, with the grass forming a little hedge, as it were, all round it, close to its edges,—and have you not, in obedience to a kind of feeling that told you it had been lying there long enough, insinuated your stick or your foot or your fingers under its edge and turned it over as a housewife turns a cake, when she says to herself, “It’s done brown enough by this time”? What an odd revelation, and what an unforeseen and unpleasant surprise to a small community, the very existence of which you had not suspected, until the sudden dismay and scattering among its members produced by your turning the old stone over! Blades of grass flattened down, colorless, matted together, as if they had been bleached and ironed; hideous crawling creatures, some of them coleopterous or horny-shelled,—turtle-bugs one wants to call them; some of them softer, but cunningly spread out and compressed like *Lepine* watches; (Nature never loses a crack or a crevice, mind you, or a joint in a tavern bedstead, but she always has one of her flat-pattern live timekeepers to slide into it;) black, glossy crickets, with their long filaments sticking out like the whips of four-horse stage-coaches; motionless, slug-like creatures, larvæ, perhaps, more horrible in their pulpy stillness than even in the infernal wriggle of maturity! But no sooner is the stone turned and the wholesome light of day let upon this compressed and

blinded community of creeping things, than all of them that enjoy the luxury of legs—and some of them have a good many—rush round wildly, butting each other and everything in their way, and end in a general stampede for underground retreats from the region poisoned by sunshine. *Next year* you will find the grass growing tall and green where the stone lay; the ground-bird builds her nest where the beetle had his hole; the dandelion and the buttercup are growing there, and the broad fans of insect-angels open and shut over their golden disks, as the rhythmic waves of blissful consciousness pulsate through their glorified being.

—The young fellow whom they call John saw fit to say, in his very familiar way,—at which I do not choose to take offence, but which I sometimes think it necessary to repress,—that I was coming it rather strong on the butterflies.

No, I replied; there is meaning in each of those images,—the butterfly as well as the others. The stone is ancient error. The grass is human nature borne down and bleached of all its color by it. The shapes that are found beneath are the crafty beings that thrive in darkness, and the weaker organisms kept helpless by it. He who turns the stone over is whosoever puts the staff of truth to the old lying incubus, no matter whether he do it with a serious face or a laughing one. The next year stands for the coming time. Then shall the nature which had lain blanched and broken rise in its full stature and native hues in the sunshine. Then shall God’s minstrels build their nests in the hearts of a new-born humanity. Then shall beauty—Divinity taking outlines and color—light upon the souls of men as the butterfly, image of the beatified spirit rising from the dust, soars from the shell that held a poor grub, which would never have found wings, had not the stone been lifted.

You never need think you can turn over any old falsehood without a terrible squirming and scattering of the horrid little population that dwells under it.

—Every real thought on every real subject knocks the wind out of somebody or other. As soon as his breath comes back, he very probably begins to expend it in hard words. These are the best evidence a man can have that he has said something it was time to say. Dr. Johnson was disappointed in the effect of one of his pamphlets. "I think I have not been attacked enough for it," he said;—"attack is the reaction; I never think I have hit hard unless it rebounds."

—If a fellow attacked my opinions in print, would I reply? Not I. Do you think I don't understand what my friend, the Professor, long ago called the *hydrostatic paradox of controversy*?

Don't know what that means?—Well, I will tell you. You know, that, if you had a bent tube, one arm of which was of the size of a pipe-stem, and the other big enough to hold the ocean, water would stand at the same height in one as in the other. Controversy equalizes fools and wise men in the same way,—and the fools know it.

—No, but I often read what they say about other people. There are about a dozen phrases that all come tumbling along together, like the tongs, and the shovel, and the poker, and the brush, and the bellows, in one of those domestic avalanches that everybody knows. If you get one, you get the whole lot.

What are they?—Oh, that depends a good deal on latitude and longitude. Epithets follow the isothermal lines pretty accurately. Grouping them in two families, one finds himself a clever, genial, witty, wise, brilliant, sparkling, thoughtful, distinguished, celebrated, illustrious scholar and perfect gentleman, and first writer of the age; or a dull, foolish, wicked, pert, shallow, ignorant, insolent, traitorous, black-hearted out-cast, and disgrace to civilization.

What do I think determines the set of phrases a man gets?—Well, I should say a set of influences something like these:—1st. Relationships, political, religious, social, domestic. 2d. Oysters; in

the form of suppers given to gentlemen connected with criticism. I believe in the school, the college, and the clergy; but my sovereign logic for regulating public opinion—which means commonly the opinion of half a dozen of the critical gentry—is the following: *Major proposition.* Oysters *au naturel.* *Minor proposition.* The same "scalloped." *Conclusion.* That—(here insert entertainer's name) is clever, witty, wise, brilliant,—and the rest.

—No, it isn't exactly bribery. One man has oysters, and another epithets. It is an exchange of hospitalities; one gives a "spread" on linen, and the other on paper,—that is all. Don't you think you and I should be apt to do just so, if we were in the critical line? I am sure I couldn't resist the softening influences of hospitality. I don't like to dine out, you know,—I dine so well at our own table, [our landlady looked radiant,] and the company is so pleasant [a rustling movement of satisfaction among the boarders]; but if I did partake of a man's salt, with such additions as that article of food requires to make it palatable, I could never abuse him, and if I had to speak of him, I suppose I should hang my set of jingling epithets round him like a string of sleigh-bells. Good feeling helps society to make liars of most of us,—not absolute liars, but such careless handlers of truth that its sharp corners get terribly rounded. I love truth as chiefest among the virtues; I trust it runs in my blood; but I would never be a critic, because I know I could not always tell it. I might write a criticism of a book that happened to please me; that is another matter.

—Listen, Benjamin Franklin! This is for you, and such others of tender age as you may tell it to.

When we are as yet small children, long before the time when those two grown ladies offer us the choice of Hercules, there comes up to us a youthful angel, holding in his right hand cubes like dice, and in his left spheres like marbles. The cubes are of stainless ivory, and on each is written in letters of gold



—TRUTH. The spheres are veined and streaked and spotted beneath, with a dark crimson flush above, where the light falls on them, and in a certain aspect you can make out upon every one of them the three letters L, I, E. The child to whom they are offered very probably clutches at both. The spheres are the most convenient things in the world; they roll with the least possible impulse just where the child would have them. The cubes will not roll at all; they have a great talent for standing still, and always keep right side up. But very soon the young philosopher finds that things which roll so easily are very apt to roll into the wrong corner, and to get out of his way when he most wants them, while he always knows where to find the others, which stay where they are left. Thus he learns—thus we learn—to drop the streaked and speckled globes of falsehood and to hold fast the white angular blocks of truth. But then comes Timidity, and after her Good-nature, and last of all Polite-behavior, all insisting that truth must *roll* or nobody can do anything with it; and so the first with her coarse rasp, and the second with her broad file, and the third with her silken sleeve, do so round off and smooth and polish the snow-white cubes of truth, that, when they have got a little dingy by use, it becomes hard to tell them from the rolling spheres of falsehood.

The schoolmistress was polite enough to say that she was pleased with this, and that she would read it to her little flock the next day. But she should tell the children, she said, that there were better reasons for truth than could be found in mere experience of its convenience and the inconvenience of lying.

Yes,—I said,—but education always begins through the senses, and works up to the idea of absolute right and wrong. The first thing the child has to learn about this matter is, that lying is unprofitable,—afterwards, that it is against the peace and dignity of the universe.

—Do I think that the particular form of lying often seen in newspapers, un-

der the title, "From our Foreign Correspondent," does any harm?—Why, no,—I don't know that it does. I suppose it doesn't really deceive people any more than the "Arabian Nights" or "Gulliver's Travels" do. Sometimes the writers compile *too* carelessly, though, and mix up facts out of geographies, and stories out of the penny papers, so as to mislead those who are desirous of information. I cut a piece out of one of the papers, the other day, that contains a number of improbabilities, and, I suspect, misstatements. I will send up and get it for you, if you would like to hear it.—Ah, this is it; it is headed

#### "OUR SUMATRA CORRESPONDENCE.

"This island is now the property of the Stamford family,—having been won, it is said, in a raffle, by Sir — Stamford, during the stock-gambling mania of the South-Sea Scheme. The history of this gentleman may be found in an interesting series of questions (unfortunately not yet answered) contained in the 'Notes and Queries.' This island is entirely surrounded by the ocean, which here contains a large amount of saline substance, crystallizing in cubes remarkable for their symmetry, and frequently displays on its surface, during calm weather, the rainbow tints of the celebrated South-Sea bubbles. The summers are oppressively hot, and the winters very probably cold; but this fact cannot be ascertained precisely, as, for some peculiar reason, the mercury in these latitudes never shrinks, as in more northern regions, and thus the thermometer is rendered useless in winter.

"The principal vegetable productions of the island are the pepper tree and the bread-fruit tree. Pepper being very abundantly produced, a benevolent society was organized in London during the last century for supplying the natives with vinegar and oysters, as an addition to that delightful condiment. [Note received from Dr. D. P.] It is said, however, that, as the oysters were of the kind called *natives* in England, the natives of

Sumatra, in obedience to a natural instinct, refused to touch them, and confined themselves entirely to the crew of the vessel in which they were brought over. This information was received from one of the oldest inhabitants, a native himself, and exceedingly fond of missionaries. He is said also to be very skilful in the *cuisine* peculiar to the island.

"During the season of gathering the pepper, the persons employed are subject to various incommodities, the chief of which is violent and long-continued sternutation, or sneezing. Such is the vehemence of these attacks, that the unfortunate subjects of them are often driven backwards for great distances at immense speed, on the well-known principle of the *æolipile*. Not being able to see where they are going, these poor creatures dash themselves to pieces against the rocks or are precipitated over the cliffs, and thus many valuable lives are lost annually. As, during the whole pepper-harvest, they feed exclusively on this stimulant, they become exceedingly irritable. The smallest injury is resented with ungovernable rage. A young man suffering from the *pepper-fever*, as it is called, cudgelled another most severely for appropriating a superannuated relative of trifling value, and was only pacified by having a present made him of a pig of that peculiar species of swine called the *Peccavi* by the Catholic Jews, who, it is well known, abstain from swine's flesh in imitation of the Mahometan Buddhists.

"The bread-tree grows abundantly. Its branches are well known to Europe and America under the familiar name of *macaroni*. The smaller twigs are called *vermicelli*. They have a decided animal flavor, as may be observed in the soups containing them. *Macaroni*, being tubular, is the favorite habitat of a very dangerous insect, which is rendered peculiarly ferocious by being boiled. The government of the island, therefore, never allows a stick of it to be exported without being accompanied by a piston with

which its cavity may at any time be thoroughly swept out. These are commonly lost or stolen before the *macaroni* arrives among us. It therefore always contains many of these insects, which, however, generally die of old age in the shops, so that accidents from this source are comparatively rare.

"The fruit of the bread-tree consists principally of hot rolls. The buttered-muffin variety is supposed to be a hybrid with the cocoa-nut palm, the cream found on the milk of the cocoa-nut exuding from the hybrid in the shape of butter, just as the ripe fruit is splitting, so as to fit it for the tea-table, where it is commonly served up with cold" —

—There,—I don't want to read any more of it. You see that many of these statements are highly improbable.—No, I shall not mention the paper.—No, neither of them wrote it, though it reminds me of the style of these popular writers. I think the fellow that wrote it must have been reading some of their stories, and got them mixed up with his history and geography. I don't suppose *he* lies; —he sells it to the editor, who knows how many squares off "*Sumatra*" is. The editor, who sells it to the public —By the way, the papers have been very civil—haven't they?—to the—the—what d'ye call it?—"Northern Magazine,"—isn't it?—got up by some of those Come-outers, down East, as an organ for their local peculiarities.

—The Professor has been to see me. Came in, glorious, at about twelve o'clock, last night. Said he had been with "the boys." On inquiry, found that "the boys" were certain baldish and grayish old gentlemen that one sees or hears of in various important stations of society. The Professor is one of the same set, but he always talks as if he had been out of college about ten years, whereas . . . . . [Each of these dots was a little nod, which the company understood, as the reader will, no doubt.] He calls them sometimes "the boys," and sometimes "the old fellows." Call him by the latter title, and see how he likes it.—Well, he

came in last night, glorious, as I was saying. Of course I don't mean vinously exalted; he drinks little wine on such occasions, and is well known to all the Johns and Patricks as the gentleman that always has indefinite quantities of black tea to kill any extra glass of red claret he may have swallowed. But the Professor says he always gets tipsy on old memories at these gatherings. He was, I forget how many years old when he went to the meeting; just turned of twenty now,—he said. He made various youthful proposals to me, including a duet under the landlady's daughter's window. He had just learned a trick, he said, of one of "the boys," of getting a splendid bass out of a door-panel by rubbing it with the palm of his hand,—offered to sing "The sky is bright," accompanying himself on the front-door, if I would go down and help in the chorus. Said there never was such a set of fellows as the old boys of the set he has been with. Judges, mayors, Congress-men, Mr. Speakers, leaders in science, clergymen better than famous, and famous too, poets by the half-dozen, singers with voices like angels, financiers, wits, three of the best laughers in the Commonwealth, engineers, agriculturists,—all forms of talent and knowledge he pretended were represented in that meeting. Then he began to quote Byron about Santa Croce, and maintained that he could "furnish out creation" in all its details from that set of his. He would like to have the whole boodle of them, (I remonstrated against this word, but the Professor said it was a diabolish good word, and he would have no other,) with their wives and children, shipwrecked on a remote island, just to see how splendidly they would reorganize society. They could build a city,—they have done it; make constitutions and laws; establish churches and lyceums; teach and practise the healing art; instruct in every department; found observatories; create commerce and manufactures; write songs and hymns, and sing 'em, and make instruments to accompany the songs with; lastly, publish a journal almost as good as

the "Northern Magazine," edited by the Come-outers. There was nothing they were not up to, from a christening to a hanging; the last, to be sure, could never be called for, unless some stranger got in among them.

—I let the Professor talk as long as he liked; it didn't make much difference to me whether it was all truth, or partly made up of pale Sherry and similar elements. All at once he jumped up and said,—

Don't you want to hear what I just read to the boys?

I have had questions of a similar character asked me before, occasionally. A man of iron mould might perhaps say, No! I am not a man of iron mould, and said that I should be delighted.

The Professor then read—with that slightly sing-song cadence which is observed to be common in poets reading their own verses—the following stanzas; holding them at a focal distance of about two feet and a half, with an occasional movement back or forward for better adjustment, the appearance of which has been likened by some impertinent young folks to that of the act of playing on the trombone. His eyesight was never better; I have his word for it.

#### MARE RUBRUM.

FLASH out a stream of blood-red wine!—

For I would drink to other days;  
And brighter shall their memory shine,  
Seen flaming through its crimson blaze.  
The roses die, the summers fade;  
But every ghost of boyhood's dream  
By Nature's magic power is laid  
To sleep beneath this blood-red stream.

It filled the purple grapes that lay  
And drank the splendors of the sun  
Where the long summer's cloudless day  
Is mirrored in the broad Garonne;  
It pictures still the bacchant shapes  
That saw their hoarded sunlight shed,—  
The maidens dancing on the grapes,—  
Their milk-white ankles splashed with red.

Beneath these waves of crimson lie,  
In rosy fetters prisoned fast,  
Those flitting shapes that never die,  
The swift-winged visions of the past.

Kiss but the crystal's mystic rim,  
Each shadow rends its flowery chain,  
Springs in a bubble from its brim,  
And walks the chambers of the brain.

Poor Beauty! time and fortune's wrong  
No form nor feature may withstand,—  
Thy wrecks are scattered all along,  
Like emptied sea-shells on the sand;—  
Yet, sprinkled with this blushing rain,  
The dust restores each blooming girl,  
As if the sea-shells moved again  
Their glistening lips of pink and pearl.

Here lies the home of school-boy life,  
With creaking stair and wind-swept hall,  
And, scarred by many a truant knife,  
Our old initials on the wall;  
Here rest—their keen vibrations mute—  
The shout of voices known so well,

The ringing laugh, the wailing flute,  
The chiding of the sharp-tongued bell.

Here, clad in burning robes, are laid  
Life's blossomed joys, untimely shed;  
And here those cherished forms have strayed  
We miss awhile, and call them dead.  
What wizard fills the maddening glass?  
What soil the enchanted clusters grew,  
That buried passions wake and pass  
In beaded drops of fiery dew?

Nay, take the cup of blood-red wine,—  
Our hearts can boast a warmer glow,  
Filled from a vintage more divine,—  
Calmed, but not chilled by winter's snow!  
To-night the palest wave we sip  
Rich as the priceless draught shall be  
That wet the bride of Cana's lip,—  
The wedding wine of Galilee!

### CHILD-LIFE BY THE GANGES.

WE are told—and, being philosophers, we will amuse ourselves by believing—that there are towns in India, somewhere between Cape Comorin and the Himalayas, wherein everything is *butcha*,—that is, “a little chap”; where inhabitants and inhabited are alike in the estate of urchins; where little Brahmins extort little offerings from little dupes at the foot of little altars, and ring little bells, and blow little horns, and pound little gongs, and mutter little rigmaroles before stupid little Krishnas and Sivas and Vishnus, doing their little wooden best to look solemn, mounted on little bulls or snakes, under little canopies; where little Brahminee bulls, in all the little insolence of their little sacred privileges, poke their little noses into the little rice-baskets of pious little maidens in little bazaars, and help their little selves to their little hearts' content, without “begging your little pardons,” or “by your little leaves”; where dirty little fakirs and yogees hold their dirty little arms above their dirty little heads, until their dirty little muscles are shrunk

to dirty little rags, and their dirty little finger-nails grow through the backs of their dirty little hands,—or wear little ten-penny nails thrust through their little tongues till they acquire little chronic impediments in their decidedly dirty little speech,—or, by means of little hooks through the little smalls-of-their-backs, circumgyrate from little *churruck*-posts for the edification of infatuated little crowds and the honor of horrid little goddesses; where plucky little widows perform their little suttees for defunct little husbands, grilling on little funeral piles; where mangy little Pariah dogs defile the little dinners of little high-caste folks, by stealing hungry little sniffs from sacred little pots; where omnivorous little adjutant-birds gobble up little glass bottles, and bones, and little dead cats, and little old slippers, and bits of little bricks, in front of little shops in little bazaars; where vociferous little *circars* are driving little bargains with obese little *banyans*, and consequential little *chowkedars*—that is, policemen—are bullying inoffensive little poor people, and