

The Silent Life

BY HENRY FLETCHER HARRIS

THE gray days close behind her; and Time's a wind that blows
Among her little snow-rimed hills and scant trees ashed with snows;
Her spinning-wheel sings to the blaze of vanished bloom and blade;
Her books are folden at old tales and rhymes that dead men made.

Yet all her years go softly, and the quiet of the stars
Is shed across her pallid couch between her window-bars,
And Death shall find her wise with prayer; and Death shall be no more
Than a friend who rideth late at night and knocks upon the door!

Editor's Easy Chair.

IN a passage of the record of his hermit life at Walden Pond, Thoreau dwells on the fatuous nature of news, or rather of the readers of news, who suppose themselves to be profitably employed in its perusal. He says that the news of yesterday is the news of to-day, and will be the news of to-morrow; and it must be allowed that he goes far to prove his saying, though he speaks of the recent events of the economic, political, and social world, with its accidents, crimes, scandals, its gossip, conjecture, inference, its discoveries, inventions, theories, of peace with its victories, of war and the rumors of it. He makes out a very good case; he causes you to sit up, if not to bow down, and obliges you to own that there is something, if not everything, in his philosophy. After you have read that passage you take up your morning paper without noticing that it is not your evening paper, but with a guilty sense of wasting your time in stealing a knowledge of what has happened to bring December 31st, 1905, up to date with December 31st, 905, or December 31st, 2905. You would of course not expect to find all those epochs synchronous; but if you were proposing to acquaint yourself with the fresh interests of the æsthetic or ethical or religious world, you would be very much disappointed

if you did not find them all equally historical and prophetic in their events.

Some such opinion or illusion has urged itself upon us from the examination of a literary journal professing to have been published in New York here in September, 1860, and alleging in corroboration the yellowed leaves and the tattered creases of a paper many times carefully folded and unfolded, and then laid away, and long forgotten even by the girl poet whose verses hold a place of honor on its first page. They are indeed lovely verses, and we wish we might reproduce them all here, but that would be showing them an unjust partiality, for the quality of that old copy of *The New York Saturday Press* is very uniformly good.

I have as neat a hat of pliant barley
As ever graced the head of country lass;
'Twas braided by the skilful hand of Charley,
And trimmed with a soft roll of prairie-grass.

I have a necklace red as Lincoln cherries,
And hard as any coral of the sea;
'Twas Charley made it of green whortle-berries;
He dried and stained it gorgeously for me.

I dared not kiss him 'neath the church-yard beeches,

Although 'twas my last look at one so dear;
 And now, though years have passed, my
 choicest riches
 Are the rude keepsakes I have shown you
 here.

So runs the pensive rhyme, and in another column, parted from it by several uplands of fiction concerning New York social and financial life, ripples a gayer song, by another girl-poet, probably no gayer in fact than the sad one. The furthestmost page from this begins with Mrs. Browning's new poem of "The Sword of Castruccio Castracani," after which comes another expanse of original fiction, "They meant no Harm," of, we fear, a romantic cast. Still another poem then succeeds, archly calling itself "Silence means Consent," for a reason obvious enough from a single stanza:

I asked to give some one a kiss,
 There in the oak-tree's shade:
 What reply do you think came back?
 Never a word was said!

It will be seen that the *Saturday Press* was much given to poetry, and on the inside of the same leaf is a letter to the editor from the most gifted of our young poets, who, we venture to predict, will never write anything better. The subject of the letter is a lyric which, under the different titles of "Abbassa" and "Fatima," has just appeared in the September number of both the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, and been copied into the *Press* with the inquiry, "characteristic and charming," from the editor "as to which is the author's favorite version." Mr. T. B. Aldrich responds, "The one read last, reading the two poems in any order you please," and he explains, with several flashing thrusts of his rapier into the vitals of the editor, who has "happily remarked" the substantial identity of the two pieces, how both happened to be printed simultaneously. He had sent "Fatima" to the *Atlantic*, and after waiting a year without hearing from it, he sent her twin sister "Abbassa" to the *Knickerbocker*. Their unforeseen publication in the two periodicals exposes the poet, as he thinks, to "a conclusion not particularly to his credit," and he ironically thanks the

editor for forestalling it. The young poet, we believe, is mistaken as to the general inference from his misfortune, and we are sure that the public, which he is destined to make his friend no less by his wit than by his poetry, will recompense him in admiration and affection for all loss of honorarium, if each magazine should refuse to pay on the ground that the other is his debtor.

In the column next that containing his letter is a very nice problem in chess, a game now commanding universal interest, and in the column beyond that is a lively "dramatic feuilleton," touching upon the present operatic season inaugurated by Max Maretzek, with the brilliant young Patti for its evening star. A glowing appreciation of that "celebrated juvenile performer," Miss Kate Bateman, is quoted from a Chicago journal by the feuilletoniste, who, being very French by adoption, if not by nature, calls himself Quelq'un. The editor is also adoptively very French, and he writes in Hugoish paragraphs of one or more syllables a leader on the New York *World*, which is devoted to the destruction of our latest evening contemporary. He makes a great deal of staccato fun of the *World's* assumption of pious respectability, which, to a Parisian like him, is ridiculous; but we doubt if it will have the effect of turning the *World* from the orbit of propriety, in which it is apparently destined to revolve forever.

The intention of the *Saturday Press* is to be *chic* at all costs, and to anticipate that useful word with the fact. There is a very chic letter from the eminent Russian refugee Count Gurovski, sketching his "Minor Experiences in America" from the moment of his landing in New York; but the editorial review of that newest novel, *The Ebony Idol*, written to counteract the baleful effects of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is rather stodgy than chic. The balance is trimmed again by some mocking paragraphs from the New York *Herald*, contrasting with our hysterical pride in the visit of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, the calm of the Brazilians' behavior in simultaneously receiving his brother, Prince Alfred, at Rio Janeiro.

When it has no *chic* of its own, the *Saturday Press* does not mind helping

itself out with another's, and lively passages are quoted from various sources concerning matters of literary interest. There is a lively passage from the *Tribune*, making fun of Mr. Charles Reade's difficulties with the title-page of his latest novel, *The Eighth Commandment*, where he fancies himself to have "done injustice to Moses," by the ambiguous phrasing. There are extracts from Mr. Buckle's great new book, *The History of Civilization*. There is the speech, reprinted at full length, of Artemus Ward, delivered at the Great Show Exhibition in Baldwinville, Indiana. Mr. John Lothrop Motley, we learn from the column of literary intelligence, is about publishing in London a new work entitled *The United Netherlands*. In a letter from Gadshill Place, Mr. Charles Dickens thanks Dr. Joseph E. Worcester for a copy of his Dictionary, "a most remarkable work, of which America will be justly proud." The editorial acknowledgment of publications received shows great activity in the book trade. In the publishers' advertisements a new and complete edition of Mr. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is announced, with, we regret to note, a line quoted from a private letter of Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson's to the author praising him for "incomparable things said incomparably well." Such an abuse of confidential correspondence for purposes of publicity is something that authors will shrink from with abhorrence and loathing forty-five years hence. It is quite different with the tribute to Webster's Quarto Dictionary, which scholars and teachers join in acclaiming with an obvious expectation of their opinions' appearance in the publishers' advertisement.

Marion Harland's *Nemesis* is heralded in the words of Dr. Shelton Mackenzie, our foremost critic, as "by far the best American novel published for very many years," a preeminence in which it now has the company of a host of our actual sellers, and books of the year, month, day, and hour. Messrs. Harper and Brothers announce Mr. Wilkie Collins's fascinating story of *The Woman in White* under the quoted sentence of some anonymous authority, declaring that "of all the living writers of English fiction, no one better understands the art of

story-telling than" he, for whom we ourselves confidently predict a popularity scarcely less than that of his contemporaries Thackeray and Dickens.

Among the strictly literary interests, some rumor finds its way from the high political excitement of the time, when the quadrangular campaign of Lincoln, Douglas, Bell, and Breckinridge is destined to eventuate no one dreams how. Mr. Walt Whitman's young Boston publishers, Messrs. Thayer and Eldridge, issue *An Eye-Opener for the Wide-Awakes*, by Elizer Wright, a "Zouave-drill, Garibaldian, up-to-the-times Abolitionist," as well as a hot-and-hot attack on slaveholding conditions, entitled *Southern Notes for National Circulation*, and a *Republican Campaign Songster by Thomas Drew*. Messrs. Brentanos, in the midst of this clamor, quietly suggest that they have all the English and Continental periodicals in their "news emporium" at 636 Broadway, hard by Pfaff's famous resort at 647 Broadway, where the reader will find the best of everything to eat, drink, and smoke in the most brilliant Bohemian company, with free access to the European papers.

He must not be disheartened if some other business seems to be carried on at that number. This will be a trick of the year 1906, seeking to difference itself from the year 1860, while there is and can be no essential difference between the two epochs. If his faith in our doctrine is shaken, as to Pfaff's, will he tell us what essential difference he expects to find between 1906 and 1951, if he should live so long? Or between 1951 and 2001, if he should, in support of the Metchnikoff theory, decide upon an antediluvian longevity? Our study of a time-worn copy of the *Saturday Press* must convince any reasonable being, worthy of even a provisional immortality, that in human events there is a succession of incident which, through the poverty of our conditioning, must result in repetition.

We venture to think that if the reader were to take up one of the romances advertised in the *Saturday Press*, he would find it very pleasingly parallel in style, plot, catastrophe, with the novel proclaiming itself this month in our own advertising pages, as about to appear and outsell all others. The woman who forty-

five years ago was "The Woman in White," may this season be "The Woman in Red," because the ladies are all wearing some shade of that color; and in 1951 she may be "The Woman in Yellow," because the tendency is towards that hue in everything. But otherwise she will not be very different from "The Woman in White." She will be quite as good, for there will be no one who "better understands the art of storytelling than" the Wilkie Collins of that delightful day. If this is so, and it seems extremely probable, arguing from analogy, why should we be troubled about the future? We are not troubled about the past, of which we observe that we are a faint or forceful reverberation, and if the future is a faint or forceful reverberation of the present, we should perhaps no more hold ourselves responsible for its traits than for its facts, for its qualities than for its events.

We say, perhaps; for we come at this point to a question which we wish some one else would answer. Logically the answer is very easy, but illogically it is difficult, and the illogicality seems to go deeper into our mixed nature than the logicity. It ought to be very plain that the future, like the past, should take care of itself. We did not invent the past. Do we invent the future? Or are past, present, and future all alike the effect of a cause—exterior to ourselves, and moving through cycles of recurrence forever from beginnings to endings, and from endings back to beginnings? Are our poor ancestors, in the invisible scheme of a moral government of the universe, suffering for our sins as well as their own? Could not we as justly pay the penalty for their transgressions? We do not care the least for their transgressions. We repeat them, indeed, and so far make their transgressions ours, but who shall say that if our grandsires had not committed them long ago, we should not be sinning quite the same sins now? In ill-doing there seems to be very little originality; it is only in well-doing that there is proof of a personal incentive, possibly because well-doing is so much more difficult, and puts us so much more on our mettle.

But the lesson we may read from an old copy of that poor *Saturday Press*, which

tried above all things to be unmoral, can only incidentally be ethical. Its perusal can hardly warn us even against our blunders. We shall commit these as surely as our sins from generation to generation with the same amazing monotony. But what we can consolingly desire from any acquaintance with the past is a sense of the strong family likeness it bears to the present, and doubtless to the future. When we have once received this fact of the unity and contemporaneity of epochs into our consciousness, there must eventually be a great saving of time and expense to the purveyors and commentators of news. The murder of to-day is so much like the murder of yesterday and tomorrow that the reporter assigned to work it up can safely and profitably, with a very few verbal changes, turn in to the city editor a "story" taken from the files of the journal employing him, and keep on almost uninterruptedly devoting himself to the pursuit of creative fiction. A society scandal so little varies in character from year to year that the writer inferring a dramatic depravity from it may use the editorial comment in any old divorce case of the past as aptly as a fresh expression. Is there something so novel in political or financial graft that we need study especially the insurance and election frauds of our own day?

To ask such a question is to answer it, and the answer applies to all other contemporaneous events. We must first release ourselves from the delusion of news before we can achieve the opportunity of true culture. If we mean to be immortal we must begin living in eternity here and now. Time is a toy of the childish mind. Time itself has been telling us from its beginning that it never was. There is in history no lesson but that of the simultaneity of past, present, and future. Doubtless there were among the cave-dwellers spirits as elect and fine and wise as any now walking the earth, if such a sequence is implied by the survival of the cave-dwellers in actual civilization. These, as they sat at the doors of their grotts, carving the thigh-bones of the fellow men, on whom they had supped, with quaint studies of war or the chase, are one with those who

find a justification for their social greed and cruelty in their devotion to their country, right or wrong, and feed the vast and foolish vacancy of their minds with the fiction of adventure. To the end of that foot-rule measure of eternity which we call time there will be the same forerunners of the present, the same belated stragglers from the past. The thing, then, is for the forerunners to get together as much as they can, and continue in a calm philosophy of life, to which events shall appear as mere infusorial phenomena. Their culture should be some such culture as that in which the scientist studies the malignant or beneficent bacillus, and plans to pit the last against the first for its extirpation, and the preservation of our species. The old, inexact methods of dealing with human events by means of morality or religion must be discarded, for if these had been efficacious, all evil events would have been averted long ago. The continual recurrence of evil events teaches that these means have failed, and now we must seek the benignant bacillus which will prey upon the malignant, and prevent its outbreak in far-spread epidemics of vice and crime, culminating in some such devouring pestilence as war. If science could have been allowed to deal with the murder-bacillus in the minds of the Russian Grand Dukes, who believes that there would have been any war with Japan? Or that if, in the winter of 1904, the germ of hate and contempt in the Russian rulers had been extirpated, the same microbe would now be raging in the hearts of the Russian people?

But is it indeed in the presence of a Russian revolution that we now stand? The accounts of it read very like those of the French revolution, which were exciting us so much the other day, or the other century. There are the same curious advances, pauses, reversions; the same furious actions and timid reactions. There is a mild, weak sovereign again inheriting the savage absolutism of his predecessors, and bit by bit vainly renouncing it in a pity which his people despise. They have so long eaten grass that now they will not eat even cake, much less bread; they have no stomach for anything but blood. Who is it at

the head of affairs, M. Witté or M. Necker? Is it indeed Nicholas II. who is Czar, or Louis XVI.? Will his feeble head, in whatever case, again pay for the crimes of his dynasty? Which of the Grand Dukes will be the Philippe Egalité of the new anarchy, and vote his cousin's death? Who will be Girondists, the Jacobins? What is the name of the cynical, radical, sentimental young Polish lieutenant, nourishing a new 18th Brumaire in his cold heart? As yet we know him as the Italian Napoleone Buonaparte, but soon enough he will reveal himself under his Slavonic patronymic, by which he will smell as rank of blood and tears as his prototype.

There ought really to be some way out of it, this vicious circle in which the world eddies round and round, seeing always the same phases of the moon and stars, and herself showing the same phase. To what end have we perfecting-presses, if always they print the same news, twenty thousand monotonous copies of it an hour? It may be that the Franco-Russian revolution, now whirling so wildly in one direction, may turn and whirl as wildly in the other. But will there be any novelty in that? Will it be the first time that a mighty people has resumed its chains because it can find peace in no other wear? Peace, after all, is the aspiration of the soul, and if freedom did not look like peace none would desire her; we should not know her from slavery. But whether the revolution will go backwards or forwards, the news of to-morrow will be the news of yesterday. There is no way of escape from that "damnable iterance" except through a new principle which itself is not new save as it is still almost untried. We Americans tried it in the war for independence and the war for emancipation; and then, did we seem to leave off trying it? Let us not be too hard upon ourselves, and endeavor to believe that we still have a little faith in the Golden Rule, and are willing to let others practise it, and even give it another chance ourselves if the occasion offers. So, and no otherwise, we shall have tidings that are both good and fresh, and the newspapers without which, even as it is, we cannot get on, will bring us every day the great joy of them.

Editor's Study.

WE recently received an interesting letter from a subscriber asking whether we are not giving more space to fiction than usual.

Following our own impression, we should at once have replied that we were giving considerably more fiction than formerly, and that we thought it a good thing to do. We had every reason for believing that on that account, as we supposed, the number of our readers had increased in recent years. We knew that we did not give so much space to serial fiction as we did twenty years ago, when sometimes three novels would have been running their course at the same time, while now we very carefully confined ourselves to one. Of course this now left much more room for short stories, and we thought we were so generous in our allotment to these that the whole space accorded to fiction far exceeded the limit fixed in earlier years. The short story is peculiarly an American institution, and we are as proud of it as we are of the "Bird of Freedom." To develop this species of literature has seemed always the most distinctive feature of a genuinely American magazine. To make the most of it, by giving as many examples as possible of the best of it, has seemed the one surest way of nourishing and gratifying a distinctively national instinct. While novels, of every degree of excellence, are readily accessible to everybody, yet for the current short story the reader must almost wholly depend upon his magazine.

Our correspondent, though the tenor of his letter suggests the fear on his part that he may to a too great extent be defrauded of another kind of matter, more perhaps to his liking, admits that the fiction in the Magazine makes the latter more interesting to a larger number of readers, and that this implies no reflection upon their intelligence.

The editorial mind instinctively deprecates the reasonable apprehension of any reader on any ground. We determined to investigate closely the matter covered by this reader's inquiry. He must have just received his January number. We

looked up the corresponding number for 1896, just ten years ago, and made a comparison. In the old number there were seventy-nine pages of fiction; and in the new, one and three-quarter pages more. It appeared that now as then the proportion of fiction was as nearly as possible the same as that of other matter. But we saw at a glance why it now seemed greater. In the old number two serial novels occupied forty-two and one-half pages, and, including one in the "Drawer," there were four short stories; in the new—ten years after—only one serial novel was in course of publication, occupying twenty and one-half pages, and there were, including one in the "Drawer," eight short stories—the entire space given to fiction being in the two numbers substantially the same. The seven plate pictures (besides the frontispiece) added to the January number, 1906, far more than made up for the scant two pages of excess in fiction.

Our correspondent intimates no deterioration in the quality of the fiction now presented as compared with that of former years. Fortunately for that particular January number, ten years ago, Mark Twain's "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc" was one of the serial novels appearing in its pages. There could have been nothing better than that, though this brilliant author is still a frequent contributor. The other serial novel for 1896 was "Briseis," by William Black. Mrs. Deland's novel, now running, is certainly of more vital interest to our readers. As to the writers of short stories, as against Julian Ralph, J. J. Eakins, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and (in the "Drawer") Ruth McEnery Stuart, for January, 1896, there are, for the corresponding number in 1906, James Branch Cabell, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, W. D. Howells, van Tassel Sutphen, Grace Ellery Channing, Alice MacGowan, Abby Meguire Roach, and (in the "Drawer") George T. Weston. These names speak for themselves.

Now, as to matter other than fiction, if we were to include it in our com-