

# Urban Sketches eBook

## Urban Sketches by Bret Harte

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# Page 1

## A VENERABLE IMPOSTOR.

As I glance across my table, I am somewhat distracted by the spectacle of a venerable head whose crown occasionally appears beyond, at about its level. The apparition of a very small hand—whose fingers are bunchy and have the appearance of being slightly webbed—which is frequently lifted above the table in a vain and impotent attempt to reach the inkstand, always affects me as a novelty at each recurrence of the phenomenon. Yet both the venerable head and bunchy fingers belong to an individual with whom I am familiar, and to whom, for certain reasons hereafter described, I choose to apply the epithet written above this article.

His advent in the family was attended with peculiar circumstances. He was received with some concern—the number of retainers having been increased by one in honor of his arrival. He appeared to be weary,—his pretence was that he had come from a long journey,—so that for days, weeks, and even months, he did not leave his bed except when he was carried. But it was remarkable that his appetite was invariably regular and healthy, and that his meals, which he required should be brought to him, were seldom rejected. During this time he had little conversation with the family, his knowledge of our vernacular being limited, but occasionally spoke to himself in his own language,—a foreign tongue. The difficulties attending this eccentricity were obviated by the young woman who had from the first taken him under her protection,—being, like the rest of her sex, peculiarly open to impositions,—and who at once disorganized her own tongue to suit his. This was affected by the contraction of the syllables of some words, the addition of syllables to others, and an ingenious disregard for tenses and the governing powers of the verb. The same singular law which impels people in conversation with foreigners to imitate their broken English governed the family in their communications with him. He received these evidences of his power with an indifference not wholly free from scorn. The expression of his eye would occasionally denote that his higher nature revolted from them. I have no doubt myself that his wants were frequently misinterpreted; that the stretching forth of his hands toward the moon and stars might have been the performance of some religious rite peculiar to his own country, which was in ours misconstrued into a desire for physical nourishment. His repetition of the word “goo-goo,”—which was subject to a variety of opposite interpretations,—when taken in conjunction with his size, in my mind seemed to indicate his aboriginal or Aztec origin.



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I incline to this belief, as it sustains the impression I have already hinted at, that his extreme youth is a simulation and deceit; that he is really older and has lived before at some remote period, and that his conduct fully justifies his title as A Venerable Impostor. A variety of circumstances corroborate this impression: His tottering walk, which is a senile as well as a juvenile condition; his venerable head, thatched with such imperceptible hair that, at a distance, it looks like a mild aureola, and his imperfect dental exhibition. But beside these physical peculiarities may be observed certain moral symptoms, which go to disprove his assumed youth. He is in the habit of falling into reveries, caused, I have no doubt, by some circumstance which suggests a comparison with his experience in his remoter boyhood, or by some serious retrospection of the past years. He has been detected lying awake, at times when he should have been asleep, engaged in curiously comparing the bed-clothes, walls, and furniture with some recollection of his youth. At such moments he has been heard to sing softly to himself fragments of some unintelligible composition, which probably still linger in his memory as the echoes of a music he has long outgrown. He has the habit of receiving strangers with the familiarity of one who had met them before, and to whom their antecedents and peculiarities were matters of old acquaintance, and so unerring is his judgment of their previous character that when he withholds his confidence I am apt to withhold mine. It is somewhat remarkable that while the maturity of his years and the respect due to them is denied by man, his superiority and venerable age is never questioned by the brute creation. The dog treats him with a respect and consideration accorded to none others, and the cat permits a familiarity which I should shudder to attempt. It may be considered an evidence of some Pantheistic quality in his previous education, that he seems to recognize a fellowship even in inarticulate objects; he has been known to verbally address plants, flowers, and fruit, and to extend his confidence to such inanimate objects as chairs and tables. There can be little doubt that, in the remote period of his youth, these objects were endowed with not only sentient natures, but moral capabilities, and he is still in the habit of beating them when they collide with him, and of pardoning them with a kiss.

As he has grown older—rather let me say, as we have approximated to his years—he has, in spite of the apparent paradox, lost much of his senile gravity. It must be confessed that some of his actions of late appear to our imperfect comprehension inconsistent with his extreme age. A habit of marching up and down with a string tied to a soda-water bottle, a disposition to ride anything that could by any exercise of the liveliest fancy be made to assume equine proportions, a propensity to blacken his venerable white hair with ink and coal



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dust, and an omnivorous appetite which did not stop at chalk, clay, or cinders, were peculiarities not calculated to excite respect. In fact, he would seem to have become demoralized, and when, after a prolonged absence the other day, he was finally discovered standing upon the front steps addressing a group of delighted children out of his limited vocabulary, the circumstance could only be accounted for as the garrulity of age.

But I lay aside my pen amidst an ominous silence and the disappearance of the venerable head from my plane of vision. As I step to the other side of the table, I find that sleep has overtaken him in an overt act of hoary wickedness. The very pages I have devoted to an exposition of his deceit he has quietly abstracted, and I find them covered with cabalistic figures and wild-looking hieroglyphs traced with his forefinger dipped in ink, which doubtless in his own language conveys a scathing commentary on my composition. But he sleeps peacefully, and there is something in his face which tells me that he has already wandered away to that dim region of his youth where I cannot follow him. And as there comes a strange stirring at my heart when I contemplate the immeasurable gulf which lies between us, and how slight and feeble as yet is his grasp on this world and its strange realities, I find, too late, that I also am a willing victim of the Venerable Impostor.

### FROM A BALCONY

The little stone balcony, which, by a popular fallacy, is supposed to be a necessary appurtenance of my window, has long been to me a source of curious interest. The fact that the asperities of our summer weather will not permit me to use it but once or twice in six months does not alter my concern for this incongruous ornament. It affects me as I suppose the conscious possession of a linen coat or a nankeen trousers might affect a sojourner here who has not entirely outgrown his memory of Eastern summer heat and its glorious compensations,—a luxurious providence against a possible but by no means probable contingency. I do no longer wonder at the persistency with which San Franciscans adhere to this architectural superfluity in the face of climatical impossibilities. The balconies in which no one sits, the piazzas on which no one lounges, are timid advances made to a climate whose churlishness we are trying to temper by an ostentation of confidence. Ridiculous as this spectacle is at all seasons, it is never more so than in that bleak interval between sunset and dark, when the shrill scream of the factory whistle seems to have concentrated all the hard, unsympathetic quality of the climate into one vocal expression. Add to this the appearance of one or two pedestrians, manifestly too late for their dinners, and tasting in the shrewish air a bitter premonition of the welcome that awaits them at home, and you have one of those ordinary views from my balcony which makes the balcony itself ridiculous.



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But as I lean over its balustrade to-night—a night rare in its kindness and beauty—and watch the fiery ashes of my cigar drop into the abysmal darkness below, I am inclined to take back the whole of that preceding paragraph, although it cost me some labor to elaborate its polite malevolence. I can even recognize some melody in the music which comes irregularly and fitfully from the balcony of the Museum on Market Street, although it may be broadly stated that, as a general thing, the music of all museums, menageries, and circuses becomes greatly demoralized,—possibly through associations with the beasts. So soft and courteous is this atmosphere that I have detected the flutter of one or two light dresses on the adjacent balconies and piazzas, and the front parlor windows of a certain aristocratic mansion in the vicinity, which have always maintained a studious reserve in regard to the interior, to-night are suddenly thrown into the attitude of familiar disclosure. A few young people are strolling up the street with a lounging step which is quite a relief to that usual brisk, business-like pace which the chilly nights impose upon even the most sentimental lovers. The genial influences of the air are not restricted to the opening of shutters and front doors; other and more gentle disclosures are made, no doubt, beneath this moonlight. The bonnet and hat which passed beneath my balcony a few moments ago were suspiciously close together. I argued from this that my friend the editor will probably receive any quantity of verses for his next issue, containing allusions to “Luna,” in which the original epithet of “silver” will be applied to this planet, and that a “boon” will be asked for the evident purpose of rhyming with “moon,” and for no other. Should neither of the parties be equal to this expression, the pent-up feelings of the heart will probably find vent later in the evening over the piano, in “I Wandered by the Brookside,” or “When the Moon on the Lake is Beaming.” But it has been permitted me to hear the fulfilment of my prophecy even as it was uttered. From the window of number Twelve Hundred and Seven gushes upon the slumberous misty air the maddening ballad, “Ever of Thee,” while at Twelve Hundred and Eleven the “Star of the Evening” rises with a chorus. I am inclined to think that there is something in the utter vacuity of the refrain in this song which especially commends itself to the young. The simple statement, “Star of the evening,” is again and again repeated with an imbecile relish; while the adjective “beautiful” recurs with a steady persistency, too exasperating to dwell upon here. At occasional intervals, a base voice enunciates “Star-r! Star-r!” as a solitary and independent effort. Sitting here in my balcony, I picture the possessor of that voice as a small, stout young man, standing a little apart from the other singers, with his hands behind him, under his coat-tail, and a severe expression of countenance. He sometimes leans forward, with



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a futile attempt to read the music over somebody else's shoulder, but always resumes his old severity of attitude before singing his part. Meanwhile the celestial subjects of this choral adoration look down upon the scene with a tranquillity and patience which can only result from the security with which their immeasurable remoteness invests them. I would remark that the stars are not the only topics subject to this "damnable iteration." A certain popular song, which contains the statement, "I will not forget you, mother," apparently reposes all its popularity on the constant and dreary repetition of this unimportant information, which at least produces the desired result among the audience. If the best operatic choruses are not above this weakness, the unfamiliar language in which they are sung offers less violation to common sense.

It may be parenthetically stated here that the songs alluded to above may be found in sheet music on the top of the piano of any young lady who has just come from boarding-school. "The Old Arm-Chair," or "Woodman, spare that Tree," will be also found in easy juxtaposition. The latter songs are usually brought into service at the instance of an uncle or bachelor brother, whose request is generally prefaced by a remark deprecatory of the opera, and the gratuitous observation that "we are retrograding, sir,—retrograding," and that "there is no music like the old songs." He sometimes condescends to accompany "Marie" in a tremulous barytone, and is particularly forcible in those passages where the word "repeat" is written, for reasons stated above. When the song is over, to the success of which he feels he has materially contributed, he will inform you that you may talk of your "arias," and your "romanzas," "but for music, sir,—music—" at which point he becomes incoherent and unintelligible. It is this gentleman who suggests "China," or "Brattle Street," as a suitable and cheerful exercise for the social circle. There are certain amatory songs, of an arch and coquettish character, familiar to these localities, which the young lady, being called upon to sing, declines with a bashful and tantalizing hesitation. Prominent among these may be mentioned an erotic effusion entitled "I'm talking in my Sleep," which, when sung by a young person vivaciously and with appropriate glances, can be made to drive languishing swains to the verge of madness. Ballads of this quality afford splendid opportunities for bold young men, who, by ejaculating "Oh!" and "Ah!" at the affecting passages, frequently gain a fascinating reputation for wildness and scepticism.



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But the music which called up these parenthetical reflections has died away, and with it the slight animosities it inspired. The last song has been sung, the piano closed, the lights are withdrawn from the windows, and the white skirts flutter away from stoops and balconies. The silence is broken only by the rattle and rumble of carriages coming from theatre and opera. I fancy that this sound—which, seeming to be more distinct at this hour than at any other time, might be called one of the civic voices of the night—has certain urbane suggestions, not unpleasant to those born and bred in large cities. The moon, round and full, gradually usurps the twinkling lights of the city, that one by one seem to fade away and be absorbed in her superior lustre. The distant Mission hills are outlined against the sky, but through one gap the outlying fog which has stealthily invested us seems to have effected a breach, and only waits the co-operation of the laggard sea-breezes to sweep down and take the beleaguered city by assault. An ineffable calm sinks over the landscape. In the magical moonlight the shot-tower loses its angular outline and practical relations, and becomes a minaret from whose balcony an invisible muezzin calls the Faithful to prayer. “Prayer is better than sleep.” But what is this? A shuffle of feet on the pavement, a low hum of voices, a twang of some diabolical instrument, a preliminary hem and cough. Heavens! it cannot be! Ah, yes—it is—it is—SERENADERS!

Anathema Maranatha! May purgatorial pains seize you, William, Count of Poitou, Girard de Boreuil, Arnaud de Marveil, Bertrand de Born, mischievous progenitors of jongleurs, troubadours, provencals, minnesingers, minstrels, and singers of cansos and love chants! Confusion overtake and confound your modern descendants, the “metre ballad-mongers,” who carry the shamelessness of the Middle Ages into the nineteenth century, and awake a sleeping neighborhood to the brazen knowledge of their loves and wanton fancies! Destruction and demoralization pursue these pitiable imitators of a barbarous age, when ladies’ names and charms were shouted through the land, and modest maiden never lent presence to tilt or tourney without hearing a chronicle of her virtues go round the lists, shouted by wheezy heralds and taken up by roaring swashbucklers! Perdition overpower such ostentatious wooers! Marry! shall I shoot the amorous feline who nightly iterates his love songs on my roof, and yet withhold my trigger finger from yonder pranksome gallant? Go to! Here is an orange left of last week’s repast. Decay hath overtaken it,—it possesseth neither savor nor cleanliness. Ha! cleverly thrown! A hit—a palpable hit! Peradventure I have still a boot that hath done me service, and, barring a looseness of the heel, an ominous yawning at the side, ’tis in good case! Na’theless, ’twill serve. So! so! What! dispersed! Nay, then, I too will retire.

## MELONS

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As I do not suppose the most gentle of readers will believe that anybody's sponsors in baptism ever wilfully assumed the responsibility of such a name, I may as well state that I have reason to infer that Melons was simply the nickname of a small boy I once knew. If he had any other, I never knew it.

Various theories were often projected by me to account for this strange cognomen. His head, which was covered with a transparent down, like that which clothes very small chickens, plainly permitting the scalp to show through, to an imaginative mind might have suggested that succulent vegetable. That his parents, recognizing some poetical significance in the fruits of the season, might have given this name to an August child, was an Oriental explanation. That from his infancy, he was fond of indulging in melons, seemed on the whole the most likely, particularly as Fancy was not bred in McGinnis's Court. He dawned upon me as Melons. His proximity was indicated by shrill, youthful voices, as "Ah, Melons!" or playfully, "Hi, Melons!" or authoritatively, "You, Melons!"

McGinnis's Court was a democratic expression of some obstinate and radical property-holder. Occupying a limited space between two fashionable thoroughfares, it refused to conform to circumstances, but sturdily paraded its unkempt glories, and frequently asserted itself in ungrammatical language. My window—a rear room on the ground floor—in this way derived blended light and shadow from the court. So low was the window-sill, that had I been the least predisposed to somnambulism, it would have broken out under such favorable auspices, and I should have haunted McGinnis's Court. My speculations as to the origin of the court were not altogether gratuitous, for by means of this window I once saw the Past, as through a glass darkly. It was a Celtic shadow that early one morning obstructed my ancient lights. It seemed to belong to an individual with a pea-coat, a stubby pipe, and bristling beard. He was gazing intently at the court, resting on a heavy cane, somewhat in the way that heroes dramatically visit the scenes of their boyhood. As there was little of architectural beauty in the court, I came to the conclusion that it was McGinnis looking after his property. The fact that he carefully kicked a broken bottle out of the road somewhat strengthened me in the opinion. But he presently walked away, and the court knew him no more. He probably collected his rents by proxy—if he collected them at all.

Beyond Melons, of whom all this is purely introductory, there was little to interest the most sanguine and hopeful nature. In common with all such localities, a great deal of washing was done, in comparison with the visible results. There was always something whisking on the line, and always something whisking through the court, that looked as if it ought to be there. A fish-geranium—of all plants kept for the recreation of mankind, certainly the greatest illusion—straggled under the window. Through its dusty leaves I caught the first glance of Melons.

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His age was about seven. He looked older, from the venerable whiteness of his head, and it was impossible to conjecture his size, as he always wore clothes apparently belonging to some shapely youth of nineteen. A pair of pantaloons, that, when sustained by a single suspender, completely equipped him, formed his every-day suit. How, with this lavish superfluity of clothing, he managed to perform the surprising gymnastic feats it has been my privilege to witness, I have never been able to tell. His "turning the crab," and other minor dislocations, were always attended with success. It was not an unusual sight at any hour of the day to find Melons suspended on a line, or to see his venerable head appearing above the roofs of the outhouses. Melons knew the exact height of every fence in the vicinity, its facilities for scaling, and the possibility of seizure on the other side. His more peaceful and quieter amusements consisted in dragging a disused boiler by a large string, with hideous outcries, to imaginary fires.

Melons was not gregarious in his habits. A few youth of his own age sometimes called upon him, but they eventually became abusive, and their visits were more strictly predatory incursions for old bottles and junk which formed the staple of McGinnis's Court. Overcome by loneliness one day, Melons inveigled a blind harper into the court. For two hours did that wretched man prosecute his unhallowed calling, unrecompensed, and going round and round the court, apparently under the impression that it was some other place, while Melons surveyed him from an adjoining fence with calm satisfaction. It was this absence of conscientious motives that brought Melons into disrepute with his aristocratic neighbors. Orders were issued that no child of wealthy and pious parentage should play with him. This mandate, as a matter of course, invested Melons with a fascinating interest to them. Admiring glances were cast at Melons from nursery windows. Baby fingers beckoned to him. Invitations to tea (on wood and pewter) were lisped to him from aristocratic back-yards. It was evident he was looked upon as a pure and noble being, untrammelled by the conventionalities of parentage, and physically as well as mentally exalted above them. One afternoon an unusual commotion prevailed in the vicinity of McGinnis's Court. Looking from my window I saw Melons perched on the roof of a stable, pulling up a rope by which one "Tommy," an infant scion of an adjacent and wealthy house, was suspended in mid-air. In vain the female relatives of Tommy congregated in the back-yard, expostulated with Melons; in vain the unhappy father shook his fist at him. Secure in his position, Melons redoubled his exertions and at last landed Tommy on the roof. Then it was that the humiliating fact was disclosed that Tommy had been acting in collusion with Melons. He grinned delightedly back at his parents, as if "by merit raised to that bad eminence." Long

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before the ladder arrived that was to succor him, he became the sworn ally of Melons, and, I regret to say, incited by the same audacious boy, “chaffed” his own flesh and blood below him. He was eventually taken, though, of course, Melons escaped. But Tommy was restricted to the window after that, and the companionship was limited to “Hi, Melons!” and “You, Tommy!” and Melons, to all practical purposes, lost him forever. I looked afterward to see some signs of sorrow on Melons’s part, but in vain; he buried his grief, if he had any, somewhere in his one voluminous garment.

At about this time my opportunities of knowing Melons became more extended. I was engaged in filling a void in the Literature of the Pacific Coast. As this void was a pretty large one, and as I was informed that the Pacific Coast languished under it, I set apart two hours each day to this work of filling in. It was necessary that I should adopt a methodical system, so I retired from the world and locked myself in my room at a certain hour each day, after coming from my office. I then carefully drew out my portfolio and read what I had written the day before. This would suggest some alteration, and I would carefully rewrite it. During this operation I would turn to consult a book of reference, which invariably proved extremely interesting and attractive. It would generally suggest another and better method of “filling in.” Turning this method over reflectively in my mind, I would finally commence the new method which I eventually abandoned for the original plan. At this time I would become convinced that my exhausted faculties demanded a cigar. The operation of lighting a cigar usually suggested that a little quiet reflection and meditation would be of service to me, and I always allowed myself to be guided by prudential instincts. Eventually, seated by my window, as before stated, Melons asserted himself, though our conversation rarely went further than “Hello, Mister!” and “Ah, Melons!” a vagabond instinct we felt in common implied a communion deeper than words. In this spiritual commingling the time passed, often beguiled by gymnastics on the fence or line (always with an eye to my window) until dinner was announced and I found a more practical void required my attention. An unlooked for incident drew us in closer relation.

A sea-faring friend just from a tropical voyage had presented me with a bunch of bananas. They were not quite ripe, and I hung them before my window to mature in the sun of McGinnis’s Court, whose forcing qualities were remarkable. In the mysteriously mingled odors of ship and shore which they diffused throughout my room, there was a lingering reminiscence of low latitudes. But even that joy was fleeting and evanescent: they never reached maturity.

Coming home one day, as I turned the corner of that fashionable thoroughfare before alluded to, I met a small boy eating a banana. There was nothing remarkable in that, but as I neared McGinnis’s Court I presently met another small boy, also eating a banana. A third small boy engaged in a like occupation obtruded a painful coincidence upon my mind. I leave the psychological reader to determine the exact co-relation

between this circumstance and the sickening sense of loss that overcame me on witnessing it. I reached my room—and found the bunch of bananas was gone.



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There was but one who knew of their existence, but one who frequented my window, but one capable of the gymnastic effort to procure them, and that was—I blush to say it—Melons. Melons the depredator—Melons, despoiled by larger boys of his ill-gotten booty, or reckless and indiscreetly liberal; Melons—now a fugitive on some neighboring house-top. I lit a cigar, and, drawing my chair to the window, sought surcease of sorrow in the contemplation of the fish-geranium. In a few moments something white passed my window at about the level of the edge. There was no mistaking that hoary head, which now represented to me only aged iniquity. It was Melons, that venerable, juvenile hypocrite.

He affected not to observe me, and would have withdrawn quietly, but that horrible fascination which causes the murderer to revisit the scene of his crime, impelled him toward my window. I smoked calmly and gazed at him without speaking. He walked several times up and down the court with a half-rigid, half-belligerent expression of eye and shoulder, intended to represent the carelessness of innocence.

Once or twice he stopped, and putting his arms their whole length into his capacious trousers, gazed with some interest at the additional width they thus acquired. Then he whistled. The singular conflicting conditions of John Brown's body and soul we're at that time beginning to attract the attention of youth, and Melons's performance of that melody was always remarkable. But to-day he whistled falsely and shrilly between his teeth. At last he met my eye. He winced slightly, but recovered himself, and going to the fence, stood for a few moments on his hands, with his bare feet quivering in the air. Then he turned toward me and threw out a conversational preliminary.

"They is a cirkis"—said Melons gravely, hanging with his back to the fence and his arms twisted around the palings—"a cirkis over yonder!"—indicating the locality with his foot—"with hosses, and hossback riders. They is a man wot rides six hosses to onct—six hosses to onct—and nary saddle"—and he paused in expectation.

Even this equestrian novelty did not affect me. I still kept a fixed gaze on Melons's eye, and he began to tremble and visibly shrink in his capacious garment. Some other desperate means—conversation with Melons was always a desperate means—must be resorted to. He recommenced more artfully.

"Do you know Carrots?"

I had a faint remembrance of a boy of that euphonious name, with scarlet hair, who was a playmate and persecutor of Melons. But I said nothing.

"Carrots is a bad boy. Killed a policeman onct. Wears a dirk knife in his boots, saw him to-day looking in your windy."

I felt that this must end here. I rose sternly and addressed Melons.



“Melons, this is all irrelevant and impertinent to the case. *You* took those bananas. Your proposition regarding Carrots, even if I were inclined to accept it as credible information, does not alter the material issue. You took those bananas. The offence under the statutes of California is felony. How far Carrots may have been accessory to the fact either before or after, is not my intention at present to discuss. The act is complete. Your present conduct shows the *animus furandi* to have been equally clear.”



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By the time I had finished this exordium, Melons had disappeared, as I fully expected.

He never reappeared. The remorse that I have experienced for the part I had taken in what I fear may have resulted in his utter and complete extermination, alas, he may not know, except through these pages. For I have never seen him since. Whether he ran away and went to sea to reappear at some future day as the most ancient of mariners, or whether he buried himself completely in his trousers, I never shall know. I have read the papers anxiously for accounts of him. I have gone to the Police Office in the vain attempt of identifying him as a lost child. But I never saw him or heard of him since. Strange fears have sometimes crossed my mind that his venerable appearance may have been actually the result of senility, and that he may have been gathered peacefully to his fathers in a green old age. I have even had doubts of his existence, and have sometimes thought that he was providentially and mysteriously offered to fill the void I have before alluded to. In that hope I have written these pages.

### **SURPRISING ADVENTURES OF MASTER CHARLES SUMMERTON.**

At exactly half past nine o'clock on the morning of Saturday, August 26, 1865, Master Charles Summerton, aged five years, disappeared mysteriously from his paternal residence on Folsom Street, San Francisco. At twenty-five minutes past nine he had been observed, by the butcher, amusing himself by going through that popular youthful exercise known as "turning the crab," a feat in which he was singularly proficient. At a court of inquiry summarily held in the back parlor at 10.15, Bridget, cook, deposed to have detected him at twenty minutes past nine, in the felonious abstraction of sugar from the pantry, which, by the same token, had she known what was a-comin', she'd have never previnted. Patsey, a shrill-voiced youth from a neighboring alley, testified to have seen "Chowley" at half past nine, in front of the butcher's shop round the corner, but as this young gentleman chose to throw out the gratuitous belief that the missing child had been converted into sausages by the butcher, his testimony was received with some caution by the female portion of the court, and with downright scorn and contumely by its masculine members. But whatever might have been the hour of his departure, it was certain that from half past ten A. M. until nine P. M., when he was brought home by a policeman, Charles Summerton was missing. Being naturally of a reticent disposition, he has since resisted, with but one exception, any attempt to wrest from him a statement of his whereabouts during that period. That exception has been myself. He has related to me the following in the strictest confidence.

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His intention on leaving the door-steps of his dwelling was to proceed without delay to Van Dieman's Land, by way of Second and Market streets. This project was subsequently modified so far as to permit a visit to Otaheite, where Captain Cook was killed. The outfit for his voyage consisted of two car-tickets, five cents in silver, a fishing-line, the brass capping of a spool of cotton, which, in his eyes, bore some resemblance to metallic currency, and a Sunday-school library ticket. His garments, admirably adapted to the exigencies of any climate, were severally a straw hat with a pink ribbon, a striped shirt, over which a pair of trousers, uncommonly wide in comparison to their length, were buttoned, striped balmoral stockings, which gave his youthful legs something of the appearance of wintergreen candy, and copper-toed shoes with iron heels, capable of striking fire from any flagstone. This latter quality, Master Charley could not help feeling, would be of infinite service to him in the wilds of Van Dieman's Land, which, as pictorially represented in his geography, seemed to be deficient in corner groceries and matches.

Exactly as the clock struck the half-hour, the short legs and straw hat of Master Charles Summerton disappeared around the corner. He ran rapidly, partly by way of inuring himself to the fatigues of the journey before him, and partly by way of testing his speed with that of a North Beach car which was proceeding in his direction. The conductor, not being aware of this generous and lofty emulation, and being somewhat concerned at the spectacle of a pair of very short, twinkling legs so far in the rear, stopped his car and generously assisted the youthful Summerton upon the platform. From this point a hiatus of several hours' duration occurs in Charles's narrative. He is under the impression that he "rode out" not only his two tickets, but that he became subsequently indebted to the company for several trips to and from the opposite termini, and that at last, resolutely refusing to give any explanation of his conduct, he was finally ejected, much to his relief, on a street corner. Although, as he informs us, he felt perfectly satisfied with this arrangement, he was impelled under the circumstances to hurl after the conductor an opprobrious appellation which he had ascertained from Patsey was the correct thing in such emergencies, and possessed peculiarly exasperating properties.

We now approach a thrilling part of the narrative, before which most of the adventures of the "Boys' Own Book" pale into insignificance. There are times when the recollection of this adventure causes Master Charles to break out in a cold sweat, and he has several times since its occurrence been awakened by lamentations and outcries in the night season by merely dreaming of it. On the corner of the street lay several large empty sugar hogsheads. A few young gentlemen disported themselves therein, armed with sticks, with which they removed the sugar which



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still adhered to the joints of the staves, and conveyed it to their mouths. Finding a cask not yet preempted, Master Charles set to work, and for a few moments revelled in a wild saccharine dream, whence he was finally roused by an angry voice and the rapidly retreating footsteps of his comrades. An ominous sound smote his ear, and the next moment he felt the cask wherein he lay uplifted and set upright against the wall. He was a prisoner, but as yet undiscovered. Being satisfied in his mind that hanging was the systematic and legalized penalty for the outrage he had committed, he kept down manfully the cry that rose to his lips.

In a few moments he felt the cask again lifted by a powerful hand, which appeared above him at the edge of his prison, and which he concluded belonged to the ferocious giant Blunderbore, whose features and limbs he had frequently met in colored pictures. Before he could recover from his astonishment, his cask was placed with several others on a cart, and rapidly driven away. The ride which ensued he describes as being fearful in the extreme. Rolled around like a pill in a box, the agonies which he suffered may be hinted at, not spoken. Evidences of that protracted struggle were visible in his garments, which were of the consistency of syrup, and his hair, which for several hours, under the treatment of hot water, yielded a thin treacle. At length the cart stopped on one of the wharves, and the cartman began to unload. As he tilted over the cask in which Charles lay, an exclamation broke from his lips, and the edge of the cask fell from his hands, sliding its late occupant upon the wharf. To regain his short legs, and to put the greatest possible distance between himself and the cartman, were his first movements on regaining his liberty. He did not stop until he reached the corner of Front Street.

Another blank succeeds in this veracious history. He cannot remember how or when he found himself in front of the circus tent. He has an indistinct recollection of having passed through a long street of stores which were all closed, and which made him fear that it was Sunday, and that he had spent a miserable night in the sugar cask. But he remembers hearing the sound of music within the tent, and of creeping on his hands and knees, when no one was looking, until he passed under the canvas. His description of the wonders contained within that circle; of the terrific feats which were performed by a man on a pole, since practised by him in the back yard; of the horses, one of which was spotted and resembled an animal in his Noah's Ark, hitherto unrecognized and undefined; of the female equestrians, whose dresses could only be equalled in magnificence by the frocks of his sister's doll; of the painted clown, whose jokes excited a merriment, somewhat tinged by an undefined fear, was an effort of language which this pen could but weakly transcribe, and which no quantity of exclamation points could sufficiently illustrate. He is not quite certain what followed. He remembers that almost immediately on leaving the circus it became dark, and that he fell asleep, waking up at intervals on the corners of the streets, on front steps, in somebody's arms, and finally in his own bed. He was not aware of experiencing any

regret for his conduct; he does not recall feeling at any time a disposition to go home; he remembers distinctly that he felt hungry.

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He has made this disclosure in confidence. He wishes it to be respected. He wants to know if you have five cents about you.

### SIDEWALKINGS

The time occupied in walking to and from my business I have always found to yield me a certain mental enjoyment which no other part of the twenty-four hours could give. Perhaps the physical exercise may have acted as a gentle stimulant of the brain, but more probably the comfortable consciousness that I could not reasonably be expected to be doing anything else—to be studying or improving my mind, for instance—always gave a joyous liberty to my fancy. I once thought it necessary to employ this interval in doing sums in arithmetic,—in which useful study I was and still am lamentably deficient,—but after one or two attempts at peripatetic computation, I gave it up. I am satisfied that much enjoyment is lost to the world by this nervous anxiety to improve our leisure moments, which, like the “shining hours” of Dr. Watts, unfortunately offer the greatest facilities for idle pleasure. I feel a profound pity for those misguided beings who are still impelled to carry text-books with them in cars, omnibuses, and ferry-boats, and who generally manage to defraud themselves of those intervals of rest they most require. Nature must have her fallow moments, when she covers her exhausted fields with flowers instead of grain. Deny her this, and the next crop suffers for it. I offer this axiom as some apology for obtruding upon the reader a few of the speculations which have engaged my mind during these daily perambulations.

Few Californians know how to lounge gracefully. Business habits, and a deference to the custom, even with those who have no business, give an air of restless anxiety to every pedestrian. The exceptions to this rule are apt to go to the other extreme, and wear a defiant, obtrusive kind of indolence which suggests quite as much inward disquiet and unrest. The shiftless lassitude of a gambler can never be mistaken for the lounge of a gentleman. Even the brokers who loiter upon Montgomery Street at high noon are not loungers. Look at them closely and you will see a feverishness and anxiety under the mask of listlessness. They do not lounge—they lie in wait. No surer sign, I imagine, of our peculiar civilization can be found than this lack of repose in its constituent elements. You cannot keep Californians quiet even in their amusements. They dodge in and out of the theatre, opera, and lecture-room; they prefer the street cars to walking because they think they get along faster. The difference of locomotion between Broadway, New York, and Montgomery Street, San Francisco, is a comparative view of Eastern and Western civilization.



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There is a habit peculiar to many walkers, which Punch, some years ago, touched upon satirically, but which seems to have survived the jester's ridicule. It is that custom of stopping friends in the street, to whom we have nothing whatever to communicate, but whom we embarrass for no other purpose than simply to show our friendship. Jones meets his friend Smith, whom he has met in nearly the same locality but a few hours before. During that interval, it is highly probable that no event of any importance to Smith, nor indeed to Jones, which by a friendly construction Jones could imagine Smith to be interested in, has occurred, or is likely to occur. Yet both gentlemen stop and shake hands earnestly. "Well, how goes it?" remarks Smith with a vague hope that something may have happened. "So so," replies the eloquent Jones, feeling intuitively the deep vacuity of his friend answering to his own. A pause ensues, in which both gentlemen regard each other with an imbecile smile and a fervent pressure of the hand. Smith draws a long breath and looks up the street; Jones sighs heavily and gazes down the street. Another pause, in which both gentlemen disengage their respective hands and glance anxiously around for some conventional avenue of escape. Finally, Smith (with a sudden assumption of having forgotten an important engagement) ejaculates, "Well, I must be off"—a remark instantly echoed by the voluble Jones, and these gentlemen separate, only to repeat their miserable formula the next day. In the above example I have compassionately shortened the usual leave-taking, which, in skilful hands, may be protracted to a length which I shudder to recall. I have sometimes, when an active participant in these atrocious transactions, lingered in the hope of saying something natural to my friend (feeling that he, too, was groping in the mazy labyrinths of his mind for a like expression), until I have felt that we ought to have been separated by a policeman. It is astonishing how far the most wretched joke will go in these emergencies, and how it will, as it were, convulsively detach the two cohering particles. I have laughed (albeit hysterically) at some witticism under cover of which I escaped, that five minutes afterward I could not perceive possessed a grain of humor. I would advise any person who may fall into this pitiable strait, that, next to getting in the way of a passing dray and being forcibly disconnected, a joke is the most efficacious. A foreign phrase often may be tried with success; I have sometimes known *Au revoir* pronounced "O-reveer," to have the effect (as it ought) of severing friends.

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But this is a harmless habit compared to a certain reprehensible practice in which sundry feeble-minded young men indulge. I have been stopped in the street and enthusiastically accosted by some fashionable young man, who has engaged me in animated conversation, until (quite accidentally) a certain young belle would pass, whom my friend, of course, saluted. As, by a strange coincidence, this occurred several times in the course of the week, and as my young friend's conversational powers invariably flagged after the lady had passed, I am forced to believe that the deceitful young wretch actually used me as a conventional background to display the graces of his figure to the passing fair. When I detected the trick, of course I made a point of keeping my friend, by strategic movements, with his back toward the young lady, while I bowed to her myself. Since then, I understand that it is a regular custom of these callow youths to encounter each other, with simulated cordiality, some paces in front of the young lady they wish to recognize, so that she cannot possibly cut them. The corner of California and Montgomery streets is their favorite haunt. They may be easily detected by their furtive expression of eye, which betrays them even in the height of their apparent enthusiasm.

Speaking of eyes, you can generally settle the average gentility and good breeding of the people you meet in the street by the manner in which they return or evade your glance. "A gentleman," as the Autocrat has wisely said, is always "calm-eyed." There is just enough abstraction in his look to denote his individual power and the capacity for self-contemplation, while he is, nevertheless, quietly and unobtrusively observant. He does not seek, neither does he evade your observation. Snobs and prigs do the first; bashful and mean people do the second. There are some men who, on meeting your eye, immediately assume an expression quite different from the one which they previously wore, which, whether an improvement or not, suggests a disagreeable self-consciousness. Perhaps they fancy they are betraying something. There are others who return your look with unnecessary defiance, which suggests a like concealment. The symptoms of the eye are generally borne out in the figure. A man is very apt to betray his character by the manner in which he appropriates his part of the sidewalk. The man who resolutely keeps the middle of the pavement, and deliberately brushes against you, you may be certain would take the last piece of pie at the hotel table, and empty the cream-jug on its way to your cup. The man who sidles by you, keeping close to the houses, and selecting the easiest planks, manages to slip through life in some such way, and to evade its sternest duties. The awkward man, who gets in your way, and throws you back upon the man behind you, and so manages to derange the harmonious procession of an entire block, is very apt to do the same thing in political and social economy. The



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inquisitive man, who deliberately shortens his pace, so that he may participate in the confidence you impart to your companion, has an eye not unfamiliar to keyholes, and probably opens his wife's letters. The loud man, who talks with the intention of being overheard, is the same egotist elsewhere. If there was any justice in Iago's sneer, that there were some "so weak of soul that in their sleep they mutter their affairs," what shall be said of the walking revery-babblers? I have met men who were evidently rolling over, "like a sweet morsel under the tongue," some speech they were about to make, and others who were framing curses. I remember once that, while walking behind an apparently respectable old gentleman, he suddenly uttered the exclamation, "Well, I'm d—d!" and then quietly resumed his usual manner. Whether he had at that moment become impressed with a truly orthodox disbelief in his ultimate salvation, or whether he was simply indignant, I never could tell.

I have been hesitating for some time to speak—or if indeed to speak at all—of that lovely and critic-defying sex, whose bright eyes and voluble prattle have not been without effect in tempering the austerities of my peripatetic musing. I have been humbly thankful that I have been permitted to view their bright dresses and those charming bonnets which seem to have brought the birds and flowers of spring within the dreary limits of the town, and—I trust I shall not be deemed unkind in saying it—my pleasure was not lessened by the reflection that the display, to me at least, was inexpensive. I have walked in—and I fear occasionally on—the train of the loveliest of her sex who has preceded me. If I have sometimes wondered why two young ladies always began to talk vivaciously on the approach of any good-looking fellow; if I have wondered whether the minor-like qualities of all large show-windows at all influenced their curiosity regarding silks and calicoes; if I have ever entertained the same ungentlemanly thought concerning daguerreotype show-cases; if I have ever misinterpreted the eye-shot which has passed between two pretty women—more searching, exhaustive and sincere than any of our feeble ogles; if I have ever committed these or any other impertinences, it was only to retire beaten and discomfited, and to confess that masculine philosophy, while it soars beyond Sirius and the ring of Saturn, stops short at the steel periphery which encompasses the simplest school-girl.

### A BOYS' DOG

As I lift my eyes from the paper, I observe a dog lying on the steps of the opposite house. His attitude might induce passers-by and casual observers to believe him to belong to the people who live there, and to accord to him a certain standing position. I have seen visitors pat him, under the impression that they were doing an act of courtesy to his master, he lending himself to the fraud by hypocritical contortions of the body. But his attitude is one of deceit and simulation. He has neither master nor habitation. He is a very Pariah and outcast; in brief, "A Boys' Dog."

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There is a degree of hopeless and irreclaimable vagabondage expressed in this epithet, which may not be generally understood. Only those who are familiar with the roving nature and predatory instincts of boys in large cities will appreciate its strength. It is the lowest step in the social scale to which a respectable canine can descend. A blind man's dog, or the companion of a knife-grinder, is comparatively elevated. He at least owes allegiance to but one master. But the Boys' Dog is the thrall of an entire juvenile community, obedient to the beck and call of the smallest imp in the neighborhood, attached to and serving not the individual boy so much as the boy element and principle. In their active sports, in small thefts, raids into back-yards, window-breaking, and other minor juvenile recreations, he is a full participant. In this way he is the reflection of the wickedness of many masters, without possessing the virtues or peculiarities of any particular one.

If leading a "dog's life" be considered a peculiar phase of human misery, the life of a Boys' Dog is still more infelicitous. He is associated in all schemes of wrong-doing, and unless he be a dog of experience is always the scapegoat. He never shares the booty of his associates. In absence of legitimate amusement, he is considered fair game for his companions; and I have seen him reduced to the ignominy of having a tin kettle tied to his tail. His ears and tail have generally been docked to suit the caprice of the unholy band of which he is a member; and if he has any spunk, he is invariably pitted against larger dogs in mortal combat. He is poorly fed and hourly abused; the reputation of his associates debars him from outside sympathies; and once a Boys' Dog, he cannot change his condition. He is not unfrequently sold into slavery by his inhuman companions. I remember once to have been accosted on my own doorsteps by a couple of precocious youths, who offered to sell me a dog which they were then leading by a rope. The price was extremely moderate, being, if I remember rightly, but fifty cents. Imagining the unfortunate animal to have lately fallen into their wicked hands, and anxious to reclaim him from the degradation of becoming a Boys' Dog, I was about to conclude the bargain, when I saw a look of intelligence pass between the dog and his two masters. I promptly stopped all negotiation, and drove the youthful swindlers and their four-footed accomplice from my presence. The whole thing was perfectly plain. The dog was an old, experienced, and hardened Boys' Dog, and I was perfectly satisfied that he would run away and rejoin his old companions at the first opportunity. This I afterwards learned he did, on the occasion of a kind-hearted but unsophisticated neighbor buying him; and a few days ago I saw him exposed for sale by those two Arcadians, in another neighborhood, having been bought and paid for half a dozen times in this.

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But, it will be asked, if the life of a Boys' Dog is so unhappy, why do they enter upon such an unenviable situation, and why do they not dissolve the partnership when it becomes unpleasant? I will confess that I have been often puzzled by this question. For some time I could not make up my mind whether their unholy alliance was the result of the influence of the dog on the boy, or vice versa, and which was the weakest and most impressible nature. I am satisfied now that, at first, the dog is undoubtedly influenced by the boy, and, as it were, is led, while yet a puppy, from the paths of canine rectitude by artful and designing boys. As he grows older and more experienced in the ways of his Bohemian friends, he becomes a willing decoy, and takes delight in leading boyish innocence astray, in beguiling children to play truant, and thus revenges his own degradation on the boy nature generally. It is in this relation, and in regard to certain unhallowed practices I have detected him in, that I deem it proper to expose to parents and guardians the danger to which their offspring is exposed by the Boys' Dog.

The Boys' Dog lays his plans artfully. He begins to influence the youthful mind by suggestions of unrestrained freedom and frolic which he offers in his own person. He will lie in wait at the garden gate for a very small boy, and endeavor to lure him outside its sacred precincts, by gambolling and jumping a little beyond the inclosure. He will set off on an imaginary chase and run around the block in a perfectly frantic manner, and then return, breathless, to his former position, with a look as of one who would say, "There, you see how perfectly easy it's done!" Should the unhappy infant find it difficult to resist the effect which this glimpse of the area of freedom produces, and step beyond the gate, from that moment he is utterly demoralized. The Boys' Dog owns him body and soul. Straightway he is led by the deceitful brute into the unhallowed circle of his Bohemian masters. Sometimes the unfortunate boy, if he be very small, turns up eventually at the station-house as a lost child. Whenever I meet a stray boy in the street looking utterly bewildered and astonished, I generally find a Boys' Dog lurking on the corner. When I read the advertisements of lost children, I always add mentally to the description, "was last seen in company with a Boys' Dog." Nor is his influence wholly confined to small boys. I have seen him waiting patiently for larger boys on the way to school, and by artful and sophisticated practices inducing them to play truant. I have seen him lying at the school-house door, with the intention of enticing the children on their way home to distant and remote localities. He has led many an unsuspecting boy to the wharves and quays by assuming the character of a water-dog, which he was not, and again has induced others to go with him on a gunning excursion by pretending to be a sporting dog, in which quality he was knowingly

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deficient. Unscrupulous, hypocritical, and deceitful, he has won many children's hearts by answering to any name they might call him, attaching himself to their persons until they got into trouble, and deserting them at the very moment they most needed his assistance. I have seen him rob small school-boys of their dinners by pretending to knock them down by accident; and have seen larger boys in turn dispossess him of his ill-gotten booty for their own private gratification. From being a tool, he has grown to be an accomplice; through much imposition, he has learned to impose on others; in his best character, he is simply a vagabond's vagabond.

I could find it in my heart to pity him, as he lies there through the long summer afternoon, enjoying brief intervals of tranquillity and rest which he surreptitiously snatches from a stranger's doorstep. For a shrill whistle is heard in the streets, the boys are coming home from school, and he is startled from his dreams by a deftly thrown potato, which hits him on the head, and awakens him to the stern reality that he is now and forever—a Boys' Dog.

### CHARITABLE REMINISCENCES

As the new Benevolent Association has had the effect of withdrawing beggars from the streets, and as Professional Mendicancy bids fair to be presently ranked with the Lost Arts, to preserve some records of this noble branch of industry, I have endeavored to recall certain traits and peculiarities of individual members of the order whom I have known, and whose forms I now miss from their accustomed haunts. In so doing, I confess to feeling a certain regret at this decay of Professional Begging, for I hold the theory that mankind are bettered by the occasional spectacle of misery, whether simulated or not, on the same principle that our sympathies are enlarged by the fictitious woes of the Drama, though we know that the actors are insincere. Perhaps I am indiscreet in saying that I have rewarded the artfully dressed and well-acted performance of the begging impostor through the same impulse that impelled me to expend a dollar in witnessing the counterfeited sorrows of poor "Triplet," as represented by Charles Wheatleigh. I did not quarrel with deceit in either case. My coin was given in recognition of the sentiment; the moral responsibility rested with the performer.

The principal figure that I now mourn over as lost forever is one that may have been familiar to many of my readers. It was that of a dark-complexioned, black-eyed, foreign-looking woman, who supported in her arms a sickly baby. As a pathological phenomenon the baby was especially interesting, having presented the Hippocratic face and other symptoms of immediate dissolution, without change, for the past three years. The woman never verbally solicited alms. Her appearance was always mute, mysterious, and sudden. She made no other appeal than that which the dramatic tableau of herself and baby suggested, with an outstretched

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hand and deprecating eye sometimes superadded. She usually stood in my doorway, silent and patient, intimating her presence, if my attention were preoccupied, by a slight cough from her baby, whom I shall always believe had its part to play in this little pantomime, and generally obeyed a secret signal from the maternal hand. It was useless for me to refuse alms, to plead business, or affect inattention. She never moved; her position was always taken with an appearance of latent capabilities of endurance and experience in waiting which never failed to impress me with awe and the futility of any hope of escape. There was also something in the reproachful expression of her eye which plainly said to me, as I bent over my paper, "Go on with your mock sentimentalities and simulated pathos; portray the imaginary sufferings of your bodiless creations, spread your thin web of philosophy, but look you, sir, here is real misery! Here is genuine suffering!" I confess that this artful suggestion usually brought me down. In three minutes after she had thus invested the citadel I usually surrendered at discretion, without a gun having been fired on either side. She received my offering and retired as mutely and mysteriously as she had appeared. Perhaps it was well for me that she did not know her strength. I might have been forced, had this terrible woman been conscious of her real power, to have borrowed money which I could not pay, or have forged a check to purchase immunity from her awful presence. I hardly know if I make myself understood, and yet I am unable to define my meaning more clearly when I say that there was something in her glance which suggested to the person appealed to, when in the presence of others, a certain idea of some individual responsibility for her sufferings, which, while it never failed to affect him with a mingled sense of ludicrousness and terror, always made an impression of unqualified gravity on the minds of the bystanders. As she has disappeared within the last month, I imagine that she has found a home at the San Francisco Benevolent Association,—at least, I cannot conceive of any charity, however guarded by wholesome checks or sharp-eyed almoners, that could resist that mute apparition. I should like to go there and inquire about her, and also learn if the baby was convalescent or dead, but I am satisfied that she would rise up, a mute and reproachful appeal, so personal in its artful suggestions, that it would end in the Association instantly transferring her to my hands.

My next familiar mendicant was a vender of printed ballads. These effusions were so stale, atrocious, and unsalable in their character, that it was easy to detect that hypocrisy, which—in imitation of more ambitious beggary—veiled the real eleemosynary appeal under the thin pretext of offering an equivalent. This beggar—an aged female in a rusty bonnet—I unconsciously precipitated upon myself in an evil moment. On our first meeting, while distractedly turning over



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the ballads, I came upon a certain production entitled, I think, "The Fire Zouave," and was struck with the truly patriotic and American manner in which "Zouave" was made to rhyme in different stanzas with "grave, brave, save, and glaive." As I purchased it at once, with a gratified expression of countenance, it soon became evident that the act was misconstrued by my poor friend, who from that moment never ceased to haunt me. Perhaps in the whole course of her precarious existence she had never before sold a ballad. My solitary purchase evidently made me, in her eyes, a customer, and in a measure exalted her vocation; so thereafter she regularly used to look in at my door, with a chirping, confident air, and the question, "Any more songs to-day?" as though it were some necessary article of daily consumption. I never took any more of her songs, although that circumstance did not shake her faith in my literary taste; my abstinence from this exciting mental pabulum being probably ascribed to charitable motives. She was finally absorbed by the S. F. B. A., who have probably made a proper disposition of her effects. She was a little old woman, of Celtic origin, predisposed to melancholy, and looking as if she had read most of her ballads.

My next reminiscence takes the shape of a very seedy individual, who had, for three or four years, been vainly attempting to get back to his relatives in Illinois, where sympathizing friends and a comfortable almshouse awaited him. Only a few dollars, he informed me,—the uncontributed remainder of the amount necessary to purchase a steerage ticket,—stood in his way. These last few dollars seem to have been most difficult to get, and he had wandered about, a sort of antithetical Flying Dutchman, forever putting to sea, yet never getting away from shore. He was a "49-er," and had recently been blown up in a tunnel, or had fallen down a shaft, I forget which. This sad accident obliged him to use large quantities of whiskey as a liniment, which, he informed me, occasioned the mild fragrance which his garments exhaled. Though belonging to the same class, he was not to be confounded with the unfortunate miner who could not get back to his claim without pecuniary assistance, or the desolate Italian, who hopelessly handed you a document in a foreign language, very much bethumbed and illegible,—which, in your ignorance of the tongue, you couldn't help suspiciously feeling might have been a price current, but which you could see was proffered as an excuse for alms. Indeed, whenever any stranger handed me, without speaking, an open document, which bore the marks of having been carried in the greasy lining of a hat, I always felt safe in giving him a quarter and dismissing him without further questioning. I always noticed that these circular letters, when written in the vernacular, were remarkable for their beautiful calligraphy and grammatical inaccuracy, and that they all seem to have been written by the same hand. Perhaps indigence exercises a peculiar and equal effect upon the handwriting.

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I recall a few occasional mendicants whose faces were less familiar. One afternoon a most extraordinary Irishman, with a black eye, a bruised hat, and other traces of past enjoyment, waited upon me with a pitiful story of destitution and want, and concluded by requesting the usual trifle. I replied, with some severity, that if I gave him a dime he would probably spend it for drink. "Be Gorra! but you're roight—I wad that!" he answered promptly. I was so much taken aback by this unexpected exhibition of frankness that I instantly handed over the dime. It seems that Truth had survived the wreck of his other virtues; he did get drunk, and, impelled by a like conscientious sense of duty, exhibited himself to me in that state a few hours after, to show that my bounty had not been misapplied.

In spite of the peculiar characters of these reminiscences, I cannot help feeling a certain regret at the decay of Professional Mendicancy. Perhaps it may be owing to a lingering trace of that youthful superstition which saw in all beggars a possible prince or fairy, and invested their calling with a mysterious awe. Perhaps it may be from a belief that there is something in the old-fashioned alms-givings and actual contact with misery that is wholesome for both donor and recipient, and that any system which interposes a third party between them is only putting on a thick glove, which, while it preserves us from contagion, absorbs and deadens the kindly pressure of our hand. It is a very pleasant thing to purchase relief from the annoyance and trouble of having to weigh the claims of an afflicted neighbor. As I turn over these printed tickets, which the courtesy of the San Francisco Benevolent Association has—by a slight stretch of the imagination in supposing that any sane unfortunate might rashly seek relief from a newspaper office—conveyed to these editorial hands, I cannot help wondering whether, when in our last extremity we come to draw upon the Immeasurable Bounty, it will be necessary to present a ticket.

*"Seeing the steamer off"*

I have sometimes thought, while watching the departure of an Eastern steamer, that the act of parting from friends—so generally one of bitterness and despondency—is made by an ingenious Californian custom to yield a pleasurable excitement. This luxury of leave-taking, in which most Californians indulge, is often protracted to the hauling in of the gang-plank. Those last words, injunctions, promises, and embraces, which are mournful and depressing perhaps in that privacy demanded on other occasions, are here, by reason of their very publicity, of an edifying and exhilarating character. A parting kiss, blown from the deck of a steamer into a miscellaneous crowd, of course loses much of that sacred solemnity with which foolish superstition is apt to invest it. A broadside of endearing epithets, even when properly aimed and apparently raking the whole wharf, is apt

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to be impotent and harmless. A husband who prefers to embrace his wife for the last time at the door of her stateroom, and finds himself the centre of an admiring group of unconcerned spectators, of course feels himself lifted above any feeling save that of ludicrousness which the situation suggests. The mother, parting from her offspring, should become a Roman matron under the like influences; the lover who takes leave of his sweetheart is not apt to mar the general hilarity by any emotional folly. In fact, this system of delaying our parting sentiments until the last moment—this removal of domestic scenery and incident to a public theatre—may be said to be worthy of a stoical and democratic people, and is an event in our lives which may be shared with the humblest coal-passer or itinerant vender of oranges. It is a return to that classic out-of-door experience and mingling of public and domestic economy which so ennobled the straight-nosed Athenian.

So universal is this desire to be present at the departure of any steamer that, aside from the regular crowd of loungers who make their appearance confessedly only to look on, there are others who take advantage of the slightest intimacy to go through the leave-taking formula. People whom you have quite forgotten, people to whom you have been lately introduced, suddenly and unexpectedly make their appearance and wring your hands with fervor. The friend, long estranged, forgives you nobly at the last moment, to take advantage of this glorious opportunity of “seeing you off.” Your bootmaker, tailor, and hatter—haply with no ulterior motives and unaccompanied by official friends—visit you with enthusiasm. You find great difficulty in detaching your relatives and acquaintances from the trunks on which they resolutely seat themselves, up to the moment when the paddles are moving, and you are haunted continually by an ill-defined idea that they may be carried off, and foisted on you—with the payment of their passage, which, under the circumstances, you could not refuse—for the rest of the voyage. Your friends will make their appearance at the most inopportune moments, and from the most unexpected places,—dangling from hawsers, climbing up paddle-boxes, and crawling through cabin windows at the imminent peril of their lives. You are nervous and crushed by this added weight of responsibility. Should you be a stranger, you will find any number of people on board, who will cheerfully and at a venture take leave of you on the slightest advances made on your part. A friend of mine assures me that he once parted, with great enthusiasm and cordiality, from a party of gentlemen, to him personally unknown, who had apparently mistaken his state-room. This party,—evidently connected with some fire company,—on comparing notes on the wharf, being somewhat dissatisfied with the result of their performances, afterward rendered my friend’s position on the hurricane deck one of extreme peril and inconvenience, by reason of skilfully



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projected oranges and apples, accompanied with some invective. Yet there is certainly something to interest us in the examination of that cheerless damp closet, whose painted wooden walls no furniture or company can make habitable, wherein our friend is to spend so many vapid days and restless nights. The sight of these apartments, yclept *state-rooms*,—Heaven knows why, except it be from their want of cosiness,—is full of keen reminiscences to most Californians who have not outgrown the memories of that dreary interval when, in obedience to nature's wise compensations, homesickness was blotted out by sea-sickness, and both at last resolved into a chaotic and distempered dream, whose details we now recognize. The steamer chair that we used to drag out upon the narrow strip of deck and doze in, over the pages of a well-thumbed novel; the deck itself, of afternoons, redolent with the skins of oranges and bananas, of mornings, damp with salt-water and mopping; the netted bulwark, smelling of tar in the tropics, and fretted on the weather side with little saline crystals; the villanously compounded odors of victuals from the pantry, and oil from the machinery; the young lady that we used to flirt with, and with whom we shared our last novel, adorned with marginal annotations; our own chum; our own bore; the man who was never sea-sick; the two events of the day, breakfast and dinner, and the dreary interval between; the tremendous importance giver, to trifling events and trifling people; the young lady who kept a journal; the newspaper, published on board, filled with mild pleasantries and impertinences, elsewhere unendurable; the young lady who sang; the wealthy passenger; the popular passenger; the—

[Let us sit down for a moment until this qualmishness, which these associations and some infectious quality of the atmosphere seem to produce, has passed away. What becomes of our steamer friends? Why are we now so apathetic about them? Why is it that we drift away from them so unconcernedly, forgetting even their names and faces? Why, when we do remember them, do we look at them so suspiciously, with an undefined idea that, in the unrestrained freedom of the voyage, they became possessed of some confidence and knowledge of our weaknesses that we never should have imparted? Did we make any such confessions? Perish the thought. The popular man, however, is not now so popular. We have heard finer voices than that of the young lady who sang so sweetly. Our chum's fascinating qualities, somehow, have deteriorated on land; so have those of the fair young novel-reader, now the wife of an honest miner in Virginia City.]

—The passenger who made so many trips, and exhibited a reckless familiarity with the officers; the officers themselves, now so modest and undemonstrative, a few hours later so all-powerful and important,—these are among the reminiscences of most Californians, and these are to be remembered among the experiences of our friend. Yet he feels, as we all do, that his past experience will be of profit to him, and has already the confident air of an old voyager.



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As you stand on the wharf again, and listen to the cries of itinerant fruit venders, you wonder why it is that grief at parting and the unpleasant novelties of travel are supposed to be assuaged by oranges and apples, even at ruinously low prices. Perhaps it may be, figuratively, the last offering of the fruitful earth, as the passenger commits himself to the bosom of the sterile and unproductive ocean. Even while the wheels are moving and the lines are cast off, some hardy apple merchant, mounted on the top of a pile, concludes a trade with a steerage passenger,—twenty feet interposing between buyer and seller,—and achieves, under these difficulties, the delivery of his wares. Handkerchiefs wave, hurried orders mingle with parting blessings, and the steamer is “off.” As you turn your face cityward, and glance hurriedly around at the retreating crowd, you will see a reflection of your own wistful face in theirs, and read the solution of one of the problems which perplex the California enthusiast. Before you lies San Francisco, with her hard angular outlines, her brisk, invigorating breezes, her bright, but unsympathetic sunshine, her restless and energetic population; behind you fades the recollection of changeful, but honest skies; of extremes of heat and cold, modified and made enjoyable through social and physical laws, of pastoral landscapes, of accessible Nature in her kindest forms, of inherited virtues, of long-tested customs and habits, of old friends and old faces,—in a word of *home!*

## NEIGHBORHOODS I HAVE MOVED FROM

### I.

A bay-window once settled the choice of my house and compensated for many of its inconveniences. When the chimney smoked, or the doors alternately shrunk and swelled, resisting any forcible attempt to open them, or opening of themselves with ghostly deliberation, or when suspicious blotches appeared on the ceiling in rainy weather, there was always the bay-window to turn to for comfort. And the view was a fine one. Alcatraz, Lime Point, Fort Point, and Saucelito were plainly visible over a restless expanse of water that changed continually, glittering in the sunlight, darkening in rocky shadow, or sweeping in mimic waves on a miniature beach below.

Although at first the bay-window was supposed to be sacred to myself and my writing materials, in obedience to some organic law, it by and by became a general lounging-place. A rocking-chair and crochet basket one day found their way there. Then the baby invaded its recesses, fortifying himself behind intrenchments of colored worsteds and spools of cotton, from which he was only dislodged by concerted assault, and carried lamenting into captivity. A subtle glamour crept over all who came within its influence. To apply one's self to serious work there was an absurdity. An incoming ship, a gleam on the water, a cloud lingering about Tamalpais, were enough to distract the attention. Reading or writing, the bay-window was always showing something to be

looked at. Unfortunately, these views were not always pleasant, but the window gave equal prominence and importance to all, without respect to quality.



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The landscape in the vicinity was unimproved, but not rural. The adjacent lots had apparently just given up bearing scrub-oaks, but had not seriously taken to bricks and mortar. In one direction the vista was closed by the Home of the Inebriates, not in itself a cheerful-looking building, and, as the apparent terminus of a ramble in a certain direction, having all the effect of a moral lesson. To a certain extent, however, this building was an imposition. The enthusiastic members of my family, who confidently expected to see its inmates hilariously disporting themselves at its windows in the different stages of inebriation portrayed by the late W. E. Burton, were much disappointed. The Home was reticent of its secrets. The County Hospital, also in range of the bay-window, showed much more animation. At certain hours of the day convalescents passed in review before the window on their way to an airing. This spectacle was the still more depressing from a singular lack of sociability that appeared to prevail among them. Each man was encompassed by the impenetrable atmosphere of his own peculiar suffering. They did not talk or walk together. From the window I have seen half a dozen sunning themselves against a wall within a few feet of each other, to all appearance utterly oblivious of the fact. Had they but quarrelled or fought, —anything would have been better than this horrible apathy.

The lower end of the street on which the bay-window was situate, opened invitingly from a popular thoroughfare; and after beckoning the unwary stranger into its recesses, ended unexpectedly at a frightful precipice. On Sundays, when the travel North-Beachwards was considerable, the bay-window delighted in the spectacle afforded by unhappy pedestrians who were seduced into taking this street as a short-cut somewhere else. It was amusing to notice how these people invariably, on coming to the precipice, glanced upward to the bay-window and endeavored to assume a careless air before they retraced their steps, whistling ostentatiously, as if they had previously known all about it. One high-spirited young man in particular, being incited thereto by a pair of mischievous bright eyes in an opposite window, actually descended this fearful precipice rather than return, to the great peril of life and limb, and manifest injury to his Sunday clothes.

Dogs, goats, and horses constituted the fauna of our neighborhood. Possessing the lawless freedom of their normal condition, they still evinced a tender attachment to man and his habitations. Spirited steeds got up extempore races on the sidewalks, turning the street into a miniature Corso; dogs wrangled in the areas; while from the hill beside the house a goat browsed peacefully upon my wife's geraniums in the flower-pots of the second-story window. "We had a fine hail-storm last night," remarked a newly arrived neighbor, who had just moved into the adjoining house. It would have been a pity to set him right, as he was quite enthusiastic about the view and the general sanitary qualifications of the locality. So I didn't tell him anything about the goats who were in the habit of using his house as a stepping-stone to the adjoining hill.

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But the locality was remarkably healthy. People who fell down the embankments found their wounds heal rapidly in the steady sea-breeze. Ventilation was complete and thorough. The opening of the bay-window produced a current of wholesome air which effectually removed all noxious exhalations, together with the curtains, the hinges of the back door, and the window-shutters. Owing to this peculiarity, some of my writings acquired an extensive circulation and publicity in the neighborhood, which years in another locality might not have produced. Several articles of wearing apparel, which were mysteriously transposed from our clothes-line to that of an humble though honest neighbor, was undoubtedly the result of these sanitary winds. Yet in spite of these advantages I found it convenient in a few months to move. And the result whereof I shall communicate in other papers.

### II.

“A house with a fine garden and extensive shrubbery, in a genteel neighborhood,” were, if I remember rightly, the general terms of an advertisement which once decided my choice of a dwelling. I should add that this occurred at an early stage of my household experience, when I placed a trustful reliance in advertisements. I have since learned that the most truthful people are apt to indulge a slight vein of exaggeration in describing their own possessions, as though the mere circumstance of going into print were an excuse for a certain kind of mendacity. But I did not fully awaken to this fact until a much later period, when, in answering an advertisement which described a highly advantageous tenement, I was referred to the house I then occupied, and from which a thousand inconveniences were impelling me to move.

The “fine garden” alluded to was not large, but contained several peculiarly shaped flower-beds. I was at first struck with the singular resemblance which they bore to the mutton-chops that are usually brought on the table at hotels and restaurants,—a resemblance the more striking from the sprigs of parsley which they produced freely. One plat in particular reminded me, not unpleasantly, of a peculiar cake, known to my boyhood as “a bolivar.” The owner of the property, however, who seemed to be a man of original aesthetic ideas, had banked up one of these beds with bright-colored sea-shells, so that in rainy weather it suggested an aquarium, and offered the elements of botanical and conchological study in pleasing juxtaposition. I have since thought that the fish-geraniums, which it also bore to a surprising extent, were introduced originally from some such idea of consistency. But it was very pleasant, after dinner, to ramble up and down the gravelly paths (whose occasional boulders reminded me of the dry bed of a somewhat circuitous mining stream), smoking a cigar, or inhaling the rich aroma of fennel, or occasionally stopping to pluck one of the hollyhocks with which the garden abounded. The prolific qualities of this plant alarmed us greatly, for although, in the first transport of enthusiasm, my wife planted several different kinds of flower-seeds, nothing ever came up but hollyhocks; and although, impelled by the same laudable impulse, I

procured a copy of “Downing’s Landscape Gardening,” and a few gardening tools, and worked for several hours in the garden, my efforts were equally futile.



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The “extensive shrubbery” consisted of several dwarfed trees. One was a very weak young weeping willow, so very limp and maudlin, and so evidently bent on establishing its reputation, that it had to be tied up against the house for support. The dampness of that portion of the house was usually attributed to the presence of this lachrymose shrub. And to these a couple of highly objectionable trees, known, I think, by the name of Malva, which made an inordinate show of cheap blossoms that they were continually shedding, and one or two dwarf oaks, with scaly leaves and a generally spiteful exterior, and you have what was not inaptly termed by our Milesian handmaid “the scrubbery.”

The gentility of our neighbor suffered a blight from the unwholesome vicinity of McGinnis Court. This court was a kind of cul de sac that, on being penetrated, discovered a primitive people living in a state of barbarous freedom, and apparently spending the greater portion of their lives on their own door-steps. Many of those details of the toilet which a popular prejudice restricts to the dressing-room in other localities, were here performed in the open court without fear and without reproach. Early in the week the court was hid in a choking, soapy mist, which arose from innumerable washtubs. This was followed in a day or two later by an extraordinary exhibition of wearing apparel of divers colors, fluttering on lines like a display of bunting on ship-board, and whose flapping in the breeze was like irregular discharges of musketry. It was evident also that the court exercised a demoralizing influence over the whole neighborhood. A sanguine property-owner once put up a handsome dwelling on the corner of our street, and lived therein; but although he appeared frequently on his balcony, clad in a bright crimson dressing-gown, which made him look like a tropical bird of some rare and gorgeous species, he failed to woo any kindred dressing-gown to the vicinity, and only provoked opprobrious epithets from the gamins of the court. He moved away shortly after, and on going by the house one day, I noticed a bill of “Rooms to let, with board,” posted conspicuously on the Corinthian columns of the porch. McGinnis Court had triumphed. An interchange of civilities at once took place between the court and the servants’ area of the palatial mansion, and some of the young men boarders exchange playful slang with the adolescent members of the court. From that moment we felt that our claims to gentility were forever abandoned.

Yet, we enjoyed intervals of unalloyed contentment. When the twilight toned down the hard outlines of the oaks, and made shadowy clumps and formless masses of other bushes, it was quite romantic to sit by the window and inhale the faint, sad odor of the fennel in the walks below. Perhaps this economical pleasure was much enhanced by a picture in my memory, whose faded colors the odor of this humble plant never failed to restore. So I often sat there of evenings



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and closed my eyes until the forms and benches of a country schoolroom came back to me, redolent with the incense of fennel covertly stowed away in my desk, and gazed again in silent rapture on the round, red cheeks and long black braids of that peerless creature whose glance had often caused my cheeks to glow over the preternatural collar, which at that period of my boyhood it was my pride and privilege to wear. As I fear I may be often thought hypercritical and censorious in these articles, I am willing to record this as one of the advantages of our new house, not mentioned in the advertisement, nor chargeable in the rent. May the present tenant, who is a stock-broker, and who impresses me with the idea of having always been called "Mr." from his cradle up, enjoy this advantage, and try sometimes to remember he was a boy!

### III.

Soon after I moved into Happy Valley I was struck with the remarkable infelicity of its title. Generous as Californians are in the use of adjectives, this passed into the domain of irony. But I was inclined to think it sincere,—the production of a weak but gushing mind, just as the feminine nomenclature of streets in the vicinity was evidently bestowed by one in habitual communion with "Friendship's Gifts" and "Affection's Offerings."

Our house on Laura Matilda Street looked somewhat like a toy Swiss Cottage,—a style of architecture so prevalent, that in walking down the block it was quite difficult to resist an impression of fresh glue and pine shavings. The few shade-trees might have belonged originally to those oval Christmas boxes which contain toy villages; and even the people who sat by the windows had a stiffness that made them appear surprisingly unreal and artificial. A little dog belonging to a neighbor was known to the members of my household by the name of "Glass," from the general suggestion he gave of having been spun of that article. Perhaps I have somewhat exaggerated these illustrations of the dapper nicety of our neighborhood,—a neatness and conciseness which I think have a general tendency to belittle, dwarf, and contract their objects. For we gradually fell into small ways and narrow ideas, and to some extent squared the round world outside to the correct angles of Laura Matilda Street.

One reason for this insincere quality may have been the fact that the very foundations of our neighborhood were artificial. Laura Matilda Street was "made ground." The land, not yet quite reclaimed, was continually struggling with its old enemy. We had not been long in our new home before we found an older tenant, not yet wholly divested of his rights, who sometimes showed himself in clammy perspiration on the basement walls, whose damp breath chilled our dining-room, and in the night struck a mortal chilliness through the house. There were no patent fastenings that could keep him out,—no writ of unlawful detainer that could eject him. In the winter



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his presence was quite palpable; he sapped the roots of the trees, he gurgled under the kitchen floor, he wrought an unwholesome greenness on the side of the veranda. In summer he became invisible, but still exercised a familiar influence over the locality. He planted little stitches in the small of the back, sought out old aches and weak joints, and sportively punched the tenants of the Swiss Cottage under the ribs. He inveigled little children to play with him, but his plays generally ended in scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping-cough, and measles. He sometimes followed strong men about until they sickened suddenly and took to their beds. But he kept the green-plants in good order, and was very fond of verdure, bestowing it even upon lath and plaster and soulless stone. He was generally invisible, as I have said; but some time after I had moved, I saw him one morning from the hill stretching his gray wings over the valley, like some fabulous vampire, who had spent the night sucking the wholesome juices of the sleepers below, and was sluggish from the effects of his repast. It was then that I recognized him as Malaria, and knew his abode to be the dread Valley of the shadow of Miasma,—miscalled the Happy Valley!

On week days there was a pleasant melody of boiler-making from the foundries, and the gas works in the vicinity sometimes lent a mild perfume to the breeze. Our street was usually quiet, however,—a footfall being sufficient to draw the inhabitants to their front windows, and to oblige an incautious trespasser to run the gauntlet of batteries of blue and black eyes on either side of the way. A carriage passing through it communicated a singular thrill to the floors, and caused the china on the dining-table to rattle. Although we were comparatively free from the prevailing winds, wandering gusts sometimes got bewildered and strayed unconsciously into our street, and finding an unencumbered field, incontinently set up a shriek of joy, and went gleefully to work on the clothes-lines and chimney-pots, and had a good time generally until they were quite exhausted. I have a very vivid picture in my memory of an organ-grinder who was at one time blown into the end of our street, and actually blown through it in spite of several ineffectual efforts to come to a stand before the different dwellings, but who was finally whirled out of the other extremity, still playing and vainly endeavoring to pursue his unhallowed calling. But these were noteworthy exceptions to the calm and even tenor of our life.

There was contiguity but not much sociability in our neighborhood. From my bedroom window I could plainly distinguish the peculiar kind of victuals spread on my neighbor's dining-table; while, on the other hand, he obtained an equally uninterrupted view of the mysteries of my toilet. Still, that "low vice, curiosity," was regulated by certain laws, and a kind of rude chivalry invested our observation. A pretty girl, whose bedroom window was the cynosure of neighboring eyes, was once brought under the focus of an opera-glass in the hands of one of our ingenuous youth; but this act met such prompt and universal condemnation, as an unmanly advantage, from the lips of married men and bachelors who didn't own opera-glasses, that it was never repeated.

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With this brief sketch I conclude my record of the neighborhoods I have moved from. I have moved from many others since then, but they have generally presented features not dissimilar to the three I have endeavored to describe in these pages. I offer them as types containing the salient peculiarities of all. Let no inconsiderate reader rashly move on account of them. My experience has not been cheaply bought. From the nettle Change I have tried to pluck the flower Security. Draymen have grown rich at my expense. House-agents have known me and were glad, and landlords have risen up to meet me from afar. The force of habit impels me still to consult all the bills I see in the streets, nor can the war telegrams divert my first attention from the advertising columns of the daily papers. I repeat, let no man think I have disclosed the weaknesses of the neighborhood, nor rashly open that closet which contains the secret skeleton of his dwelling. My carpets have been altered to fit all sized odd-shaped apartments from paralleliped to hexagons. Much of my furniture has been distributed among my former dwellings. These limbs have stretched upon uncarpeted floors, or have been let down suddenly from imperfectly established bedsteads. I have dined in the parlor and slept in the back kitchen. Yet the result of these sacrifices and trials may be briefly summed up in the statement that I am now on the eve of removal from my *present neighborhood*.

### MY SUBURBAN RESIDENCE.

I live in the suburbs. My residence, to quote the pleasing fiction of the advertisement, "is within fifteen minutes' walk of the City Hall." Why the City Hall should be considered as an eligible terminus of anybody's walk, under any circumstances, I have not been able to determine. Never having walked from my residence to that place, I am unable to verify the assertion, though I may state as a purely abstract and separate proposition, that it takes me the better part of an hour to reach Montgomery Street.

My selection of locality was a compromise between my wife's desire to go into the country, and my own predilections for civic habitation. Like most compromises, it ended in retaining the objectionable features of both propositions; I procured the inconveniences of the country without losing the discomforts of the city. I increased my distance from the butcher and green-grocer, without approximating to herds and kitchen-gardens. But I anticipate.

Fresh air was to be the principal thing sought for. That there might be too much of this did not enter into my calculations. The first day I entered my residence, it blew; the second day was windy; the third, fresh, with a strong breeze stirring; on the fourth, it blew; on the fifth, there was a gale, which has continued to the present writing.



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That the air is fresh, the above statement sufficiently establishes. That it is bracing, I argue from the fact that I find it impossible to open the shutters on the windward side of the house. That it is healthy, I am also convinced, believing that there is no other force in Nature that could so buffet and ill-use a person without serious injury to him. Let me offer an instance. The path to my door crosses a slight eminence. The unconscious visitor, a little exhausted by the ascent and the general effects of the gentle gales which he has faced in approaching my hospitable mansion, relaxes his efforts, smooths his brow, and approaches with a fascinating smile. Rash and too confident man! The wind delivers a succession of rapid blows, and he is thrown back. He staggers up again, in the language of the P. R., "smiling and confident." The wind now makes for a vulnerable point, and gets his hat in chancery. All ceremony is now thrown away; the luckless wretch seizes his hat with both hands, and charges madly at the front door. Inch by inch, the wind contests the ground; another struggle, and he stands upon the veranda. On such occasions I make it a point to open the door myself, with a calmness and serenity that shall offer a marked contrast to his feverish and excited air, and shall throw suspicion of inebriety upon him. If he be inclined to timidity and bashfulness, during the best of the evening he is all too conscious of the disarrangement of his hair and cravat. If he is less sensitive, the result is often more distressing. A valued elderly friend once called upon me after undergoing a twofold struggle with the wind and a large Newfoundland dog (which I keep for reasons hereinafter stated), and not only his hat, but his wig, had suffered. He spent the evening with me, totally unconscious of the fact that his hair presented the singular spectacle of having been parted diagonally from the right temple to the left ear. When ladies called, my wife preferred to receive them. They were generally hysterical, and often in tears. I remember, one Sunday, to have been startled by what appeared to be the balloon from Hayes Valley drifting rapidly past my conservatory, closely followed by the Newfoundland dog. I rushed to the front door, but was anticipated by my wife. A strange lady appeared at lunch, but the phenomenon remained otherwise unaccounted for. Egress from my residence is much more easy. My guests seldom "stand upon the order of their going, but go at once"; the Newfoundland dog playfully harassing their rear. I was standing one day, with my hand on the open hall door, in serious conversation with the minister of the parish, when the back door was cautiously opened. The watchful breeze seized the opportunity, and charged through the defenceless passage. The front door closed violently in the middle of a sentence, precipitating the reverend gentleman into the garden. The Newfoundland dog, with that sagacity for which his race is so distinguished, at once concluded that a personal collision had taken place between myself and visitor, and flew to my defence. The reverend gentleman never called again.

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The Newfoundland dog above alluded to was part of a system of protection which my suburban home once required. Robberies were frequent in the neighborhood, and my only fowl fell a victim to the spoiler's art. One night I awoke, and found a man in my room. With singular delicacy and respect for the feelings of others, he had been careful not to awaken any of the sleepers, and retired upon my rising, without waiting for any suggestion. Touched by his delicacy, I forbore giving the alarm until after he had made good his retreat. I then wanted to go after a policeman, but my wife remonstrated, as this would leave the house exposed. Remembering the gentlemanly conduct of the burglar, I suggested the plan of following him and requesting him to give the alarm as he went in town. But this proposition was received with equal disfavor. The next day I procured a dog and a revolver. The former went off, but the latter wouldn't. I then got a new dog and chained him, and a duelling pistol, with a hair-trigger. The result was so far satisfactory that neither could be approached with safety, and for some time I left them out, indifferently, during the night. But the chain one day gave way, and the dog, evidently having no other attachment to the house, took the opportunity to leave. His place was soon filled by the Newfoundland, whose fidelity and sagacity I have just recorded.

Space is one of the desirable features of my suburban residence. I do not know the number of acres the grounds contain except from the inordinate quantity of hose required for irrigating. I perform daily, like some gentle shepherd, upon a quarter-inch pipe without any visible result, and have had serious thoughts of contracting with some disbanded fire company for their hose and equipments. It is quite a walk to the wood-house. Every day some new feature of the grounds is discovered. My youngest boy was one day missing for several hours. His head—a peculiarly venerable and striking object—was at last discovered just above the grass at some distance from the house. On examination he was found comfortably seated in a disused drain, in company with a silver spoon and a dead rat. On being removed from this locality he howled dismally and refused to be comforted.

The view from my suburban residence is fine. Lone Mountain, with its white obelisks, is a suggestive if not cheering termination of the vista in one direction, while the old receiving vault of Yerba Buena Cemetery limits the view in another. Most of the funerals which take place pass my house. My children, with the charming imitateness that belongs to youth, have caught the spirit of these passing corteges, and reproduce in the back yard, with creditable skill, the salient features of the lugubrious procession. A doll, from whose features all traces of vitality and expression have been removed, represents the deceased. Yet unfortunately I have been obliged to promise them more active participation in this ceremony at some



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future time, and I fear that they look anxiously forward with the glowing impatience of youth to the speedy removal of some one of my circle of friends. I am told that the eldest, with the unsophisticated frankness that belongs to his age, made a personal request to that effect to one of my acquaintances. One singular result of the frequency of these funerals is the development of a critical and fastidious taste in such matters on the part of myself and family. If I may so express myself, without irreverence, we seldom turn out for anything less than six carriages. Any number over this is usually breathlessly announced by Bridget as, "Here's another, mum,—and a good long one."

With these slight drawbacks my suburban residence is charming. To the serious poet, and writer of elegiac verses, the aspect of Nature, viewed from my veranda, is suggestive. I myself have experienced moments when the "sad mechanic exercise" of verse would have been of infinite relief. The following stanzas, by a young friend who has been stopping with me for the benefit of his health, addressed to a duck that frequented a small pond in the vicinity of my mansion, may be worthy of perusal. I think I have met the idea conveyed in the first verse in some of Hood's prose, but as my friend assures me that Hood was too conscientious to appropriate anything not his own, I conclude I am mistaken.

### LINES TO A WATER-FOWL.

(Intra Muros.)

#### I.

Fowl, that sing'st in yonder pool, Where the summer winds blow cool, Are there hydropathic cures For the ills that man endures? Know'st thou Priessnitz? What? alack Hast no other word but "Quack?"

#### II.

Cleopatra's barge might pale To the splendors of thy tail, Or the stately caravel Of some "high-pooped admiral." Never yet left such a wake E'en the navigator Drake!

#### III.

Dux thou art, and leader, too, Heeding not what's "falling due," Knowing not of debt or dun,—Thou dost heed no bill but one; And, though scarce conceivable, That's a bill Receivable, Made—that thou thy stars mightst thank—Payable at the next bank.



## ON A VULGAR LITTLE BOY

The subject of this article is at present leaning against a tree directly opposite to my window. He wears his cap with the wrong side before, apparently for no other object than that which seems the most obvious,—of showing more than the average quantity of very dirty face. His clothes, which are worn with a certain buttonless ease and freedom, display, in the different quality of their fruit-stains, a pleasing indication of the progress of the seasons. The nose of this vulgar little boy turns up at the end. I have noticed this in several other vulgar

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little boys, although it is by no means improbable that youthful vulgarity may be present without this facial peculiarity. Indeed, I am inclined to the belief that it is rather the result of early inquisitiveness—of furtive pressures against window-panes, and of looking over fences, or of the habit of biting large apples hastily—than an indication of scorn or juvenile superciliousness. The vulgar little boy is more remarkable for his obtrusive familiarity. It is my experience of his predisposition to this quality which has induced me to write this article.

My acquaintance with him began in a moment of weakness. I have an unfortunate predilection to cultivate originality in people, even when accompanied by objectionable character. But, as I lack the firmness and skilfulness which usually accompany this taste in others, and enable them to drop acquaintances when troublesome, I have surrounded myself with divers unprofitable friends, among whom I count the vulgar little boy. The manner in which he first attracted my attention was purely accidental. He was playing in the street, and the driver of a passing vehicle cut at him, sportively, with his whip. The vulgar little boy rose to his feet and hurled after his tormentor a single sentence of invective. I refrain from repeating it, for I feel that I could not do justice to it here. If I remember rightly, it conveyed, in a very few words, a reflection on the legitimacy of the driver's birth; it hinted a suspicion of his father's integrity, and impugned the fair fame of his mother; it suggested incompetency in his present position, personal uncleanliness, and evinced a sceptical doubt of his future salvation. As his youthful lips closed over the last syllable, the eyes of the vulgar little boy met mine. Something in my look emboldened him to wink. I did not repel the action nor the complicity it implied. From that moment I fell into the power of the vulgar little boy, and he has never left me since.

He haunts me in the streets and by-ways. He accosts me, when in the company of friends, with repulsive freedom. He lingers about the gate of my dwelling to waylay me as I issue forth to business. Distance he overcomes by main strength of lungs, and he hails me from the next street. He met me at the theatre the other evening, and demanded my check with the air of a young foot-pad. I foolishly gave it to him, but re-entering some time after, and comfortably seating myself in the parquet, I was electrified by hearing my name called from the gallery with the addition of a playful adjective. It was the vulgar little boy. During the performance he projected spirally-twisted playbills in my direction, and indulged in a running commentary on the supernumeraries as they entered.



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To-day has evidently been a dull one with him. I observe he whistles the popular airs of the period with less shrillness and intensity. Providence, however, looks not unkindly on him, and delivers into his hands as it were two nice little boys who have at this moment innocently strayed into our street. They are pink and white children, and are dressed alike, and exhibit a certain air of neatness and refinement which is alone sufficient to awaken the antagonism of the vulgar little boy. A sigh of satisfaction breaks from his breast. What does he do? Any other boy would content himself with simply knocking the hats off their respective heads, and so vent his superfluous vitality in a single act, besides precipitating the flight of the enemy. But there are aesthetic considerations not to be overlooked; insult is to be added to the injury inflicted, and in the struggles of the victim some justification is to be sought for extreme measures. The two nice little boys perceive their danger and draw closer to each other. The vulgar little boy begins by irony. He affects to be overpowered by the magnificence of their costume. He addresses me (across the street and through the closed window), and requests information if there haply be a circus in the vicinity. He makes affectionate inquiries after the health of their parents. He expresses a fear of maternal anxiety in regard to their welfare. He offers to conduct them home. One nice little boy feebly retorts; but alas! his correct pronunciation; his grammatical exactitude, and his moderate epithets only provoke a scream of derision from the vulgar little boy, who now rapidly changes his tactics. Staggering under the weight of his vituperation, they fall easy victims to what he would call his "dexter mawley." A wail of lamentation goes up from our street. But as the subject of this article seems to require a more vigorous handling than I had purposed to give it, I find it necessary to abandon my present dignified position, seize my hat, open the front door, and try a stronger method.

## WAITING FOR THE SHIP.

*A Fort point IDYL.*

About an hour's ride from the Plaza there is a high bluff with the ocean breaking uninterruptedly along its rocky beach. There are several cottages on the sands, which look as if they had recently been cast up by a heavy sea. The cultivated patch behind each tenement is fenced in by bamboos, broken spars, and driftwood. With its few green cabbages and turnip-tops, each garden looks something like an aquarium with the water turned off. In fact you would not be surprised to meet a merman digging among the potatoes, or a mermaid milking a sea cow hard by.

Near this place formerly arose a great semaphoric telegraph with its gaunt arms tossed up against the horizon. It has been replaced by an observatory, connected with an electric nerve to the heart of the great commercial city. From this point the incoming ships are signalled, and again checked off at the City Exchange. And while we are here looking for the expected steamer, let me tell you a story.



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Not long ago, a simple, hard-working mechanic had amassed sufficient by diligent labor in the mines to send home for his wife and two children. He arrived in San Francisco a month before the time the ship was due, for he was a western man, and had made the overland journey and knew little of ships or seas or gales. He procured work in the city, but as the time approached he would go to the shipping office regularly every day. The month passed, but the ship came not; then a month and a week, two weeks, three weeks, two months, and then a year.

The rough, patient face, with soft lines overlying its hard features, which had become a daily apparition at the shipping agent's, then disappeared. It turned up one afternoon at the observatory as the setting sun relieved the operator from his duties. There was something so childlike and simple in the few questions asked by this stranger, touching his business, that the operator spent some time to explain. When the mystery of signals and telegraphs was unfolded, the stranger had one more question to ask. "How long might a vessel be absent before they would give up expecting her?" The operator couldn't tell; it would depend on circumstances. Would it be a year? Yes, it might be a year, and vessels had been given up for lost after two years and had come home. The stranger put his rough hand on the operator's, and thanked him for his "trouvil," and went away.

Still the ship came not. Stately clippers swept into the Gate, and merchantmen went by with colors flying, and the welcoming gun of the steamer often reverberated among the hills. Then the patient face, with the old resigned expression, but a brighter, wistful look in the eye, was regularly met on the crowded decks of the steamer as she disembarked her living freight. He may have had a dimly defined hope that the missing ones might yet come this way, as only another road over that strange unknown expanse. But he talked with ship captains and sailors, and even this last hope seemed to fail. When the careworn face and bright eyes were presented again at the observatory, the operator, busily engaged, could not spare time to answer foolish interrogatories, so he went away. But as night fell, he was seen sitting on the rocks with his face turned seaward, and was seated there all that night.

When he became hopelessly insane, for that was what the physicians said made his eyes so bright and wistful, he was cared for by a fellow-craftsman who had known his troubles. He was allowed to indulge his fancy of going out to watch for the ship, in which she "and the children" were, at night when no one else was watching. He had made up his mind that the ship would come in at night. This, and the idea that he would relieve the operator, who would be tired with watching all day, seemed to please him. So he went out and relieved the operator every night!



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For two years the ships came and went. He was there to see the outward-bound clipper, and greet her on her return. He was known only by a few who frequented the place. When he was missed at last from his accustomed spot, a day or two elapsed before any alarm was felt. One Sunday, a party of pleasure-seekers clambering over the rocks were attracted by the barking of a dog that had run on before them. When they came up they found a plainly dressed man lying there dead. There were a few papers in his pocket,—chiefly slips cut from different journals of old marine memoranda,—and his face was turned towards the distant sea.