Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No. 422 eBook

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THE HAPPY JACKS.

’On Saturday, then, at two—humble hours, humble fare; but plenty, and good of its kind; with a talk over old fellows and old times.’

Such was the pith of an invitation to dinner, to accept which I started on a pleasant summer Saturday on the top of a Kentish-town omnibus. My host was Happy Jack. Everybody called him ‘Happy Jack:’ he called himself ‘Happy Jack.’ He believed he was an intensely ‘Happy’ Jack. Yet his friends shook their heads, and the grandest shook theirs the longest, as they added the ominous addendum of ‘Poor Devil’ to ‘Happy Jack.’

‘Seen that unhappy wretch, Happy Jack, lately?’

’Seen him! of course, yesterday: he came to borrow a half-sovereign, as two of his children had the measles. He was in the highest spirits, for the pawnbroker lent him more on his watch than he had expected, and so Jack considered the extra shilling or two pure gain. I don’t know how the wretch lives, but he seems happier than ever.’

On another occasion, the dialogue would be quite different.

’Who do you think I saw last night in the first tier at the Opera?—who but Happy Jack, and Mrs Happy Jack, and the two eldest Happy Jack girls! Jack himself resplendent in diamond studs, and tremendously laced shirt-front; and as for the women—actually queens of Sheba. A really respectable carriage, too, at the door; for I followed them out in amazement: and off they went like so many lords and ladies. Oh, the sun has been shining somehow on the Happy Jacks!’

In due time I stood before the Terrace honoured by the residence of the Happy Jacks—-one of those white, stuccoed rows of houses, with bright green doors and bright brass-plates thereon, which suburban builders so greatly affect. As I entered the square patch of front-garden, I perceived straw lying about, as though there had been recent packing; and looking at the drawing-room window, I missed the muslin curtain and the canary’s brass cage swathed all over in gauze. The door opened before I knocked, and Happy Jack was the opener. He was clad in an old shooting-coat and slippers, had a long clay-pipe in his mouth, and was in a state of intense general *deshabille*. Looking beyond him, I saw that the house was in *deshabille* as well as the master. There were stairs certainly, but where was the stair-carpet? Happy Jack, however, was clearly as happy as usual. He had a round, red face; and, I will add, a red nose. But the usual sprightly smile stirred the red round face, the usual big guffaw came leaping from the largely opening mouth, the usual gleam of mingled sharpness and *bonhomie* shone from the large blue eyes. Happy Jack closed the door, and, taking my arm, walked me backwards and forwards on the gravel.

‘My boy,’ he said, ’we’ve had a little domestic affair inside; but you being, like myself, a man of the world, we were not of course going to give up our dinner for that. The fact is,’ said Jack, attempting to assume a heroic and sentimental tone and attitude, ’that, for the present at least, my household gods are shattered!’

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’You mean that’——

‘As I said, my household gods are shattered, even in the shrine!’

It was obvious that the twang of this fine phrase gave Jack uncommon pleasure. He repeated it again and again under his breath, flourishing his pipe, so as, allegorically and metaphorically, to set forth the extent of his desolation.

‘In other words,’ I went on, ’there has been an—an execution’——

’And the brokers have not left a stick. But what of that? These, are accidents which will occur in the best’——

’And Mrs’——

’Oh! She, you know, is apt to be a little downhearted at times; and empty rooms somehow act on her idiosyncrasy. A good woman, but weak. So she’s gone for the present to her sisters; and as for the girls, why, Emily is with her mother, and Jane is at the Joneses. Very decent people the Joneses. I put Jones up to a thing which would have made his fortune the week before last; but he wouldn’t have it. Jones is slow, and —well—— And Clara is with the Hopkinses: I believe so, at least; and Maria is—— Confound me if I know where Maria is; but I suppose she’s somewhere. Her mother managed it all: I didn’t interfere. And so now, as you know the best and the worst, let’s come to dinner.’

An empty house is a dismal thing—almost as dismal as a dead body. The echo, as you walk, is dismal; the blank, stripped walls, shewing the places where the pictures and the mirrors have been, are dismal; the bits of straw and the odds and ends of cord are dismal; the coldness, the stillness, the blankness, are dismal. It is no longer a habitation, but a shell.

In the dining-room stood a small deal-table, covered with a scanty cloth, like an enlarged towel; and a baked joint, with the potatoes under it, smoked before us. The foaming pewter-can stood beside it, with a couple of plates, and knives and steel forks. Two Windsor chairs, of evident public-house mould, completed the festive preparations and the furniture of the room. The whole thing looked very dreary; and as I gazed, I felt my appetite fade under the sense of desolation. Not so Happy Jack. ’Come, sit down, sit down. I don’t admire baked meat as a rule, but you know, as somebody says—

> “When spits and jacks are gone and spent,
> Then ovens are most excellent,”
> And also most con-ven-i-ent.

The people at the Chequers managed it all. Excellent people they are. I owe them some money, which I shall have great pleasure in paying as soon as possible. No man can pay it sooner.'

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The dinner, however, went off with the greatest success. Happy Jack was happier than ever, and consequently irresistible. Every two or three minutes he lugged in something about his household gods and the desolation of his hearth, evidently enjoying the sentiment highly. Then he talked of his plans of taking a new and more expensive house, in a fashionable locality, and furnishing it on a far handsomer scale than the old one. In fact, he seemed rather obliged to the brokers than otherwise for taking the quondam furniture off his hands. It was quite behind the present taste—much of it positively ugly. He had been ashamed to see his wife sitting in that atrocious old easy-chair, but he hoped that he had taken a step which would change all for the better. Warming with his dinner and the liquor, Happy Jack got more and more eloquent and sentimental. He declaimed upon the virtues of Mrs J., and the beauties of the girls. He proposed all their healths *seriatim*. He regretted the little incident which had prevented their appearance at the festive board; but though absent in person, he was sure that they were present in spirit; and with this impression, he would beg permission to favour them with a song—a song of the social affections—a song of hearth and home—a song which had cheered, and warmed, and softened many a kindly and honest heart: and with this Happy Jack sang—and exceedingly well too, but with a sort of dreadfully ludicrous sentiment—the highly appropriate ditty of *My Ain Fireside*.

Happy Jack was of no particular profession: he was a bit of a *litterateur*, a bit of a journalist, a bit of a man of business, a bit of an agent, a bit of a projector, a bit of a City man, and a bit of a West-end man. His business, he said, was of a general nature. He was usually to be heard of in connection with apocryphal companies and misty speculations. He was always great as an agitator. As soon as a League was formed, Happy Jack flew to its head-quarters as a vulture to a battle-field. Was it a league for the promotion of vegetarianism?—or a league for the lowering of the price of meat?—a league for reforming the national costume?—or a league for repealing the laws still existing upon the Statute-book against witches?—Happy Jack was ever in the thickest of the fray, lecturing, expounding, arguing, getting up extempore meetings of the frequenters of public-houses, of which he sent reports to the morning papers, announcing the ‘numerous, highly respectable, and influential’ nature of the assembly, and modestly hinting, that Mr Happy Jack, ’who was received with enthusiastic applause, moved, in a long and argumentative address, a series of resolutions pledging the meeting to,’ &c. Jack, in fact, fully believed that he had done rather more for free-trade than Cobden. Not, he said, that he was jealous of the Manchester champion; circumstances had made the latter better known—that he admitted; still he could not but know—and knowing, feel—in his own heart of hearts, his own merits, and his own exertions.

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The railway mania was, as may be judged, a grand time for Happy Jack. The number of lines of which he was a provisional director, the number of schemes which came out—and often at good premiums too—under his auspices; the number of railway journals which he founded, and the number of academies which he established for the instruction of youthful engineers—are they not written in the annals of the period? Jack himself started as an engineer without any previous educational ceremony whatever. His manner of laying out a 'direct line' was happy and expeditious. He took a map and a ruler, and drew upon the one, by the help of the other, a straight stroke in red ink—-which looked professional—from terminus to terminus. Afterwards, he stated distinctly in writing, so that there could be no mistake about the matter, that there were no engineering difficulties—that the landed proprietors along the line were quite enthusiastic in their promotion of the scheme—and that the probable profits, as deduced from carefully drawn-up traffic-tables, would be about 35 per cent. At this time, Happy Jack was quite a minor Hudson. He lived in an atmosphere of shares, scrip, and prospectuses. Money poured in from every quarter. A scrap of paper with an application for shares was worth the bright tissue of the Bank—and Jack lost no time in changing the one for the other. Amid the mass of railway newspapers, he started *The Railway Sleeper Awakened*, *The Railway Whistle*, *The Railway Turntable*, and *The Railway Timetable*; and it was in the first number of the last famous organ—it lived for three weeks—in which appeared a letter signed 'A Constant Reader.' After the bursting of the bubble, Happy Jack appeared to have burst too; for his whereabouts for a long time was unknown, and there were no traditions of his being seen. Then he began to be heard of from distant and constantly varying quarters of the town. Now you had a note from Shepherd's Bush, and next day from Bermondsey. On Tuesday, Jack dated Little King Street, Clapham Road; on Thursday, the communication reached you from Little Queen Street, Victoria Villas, Hackney; and next week perhaps you were favoured with a note from some of the minor little Inns of Court, where the writer would be found getting up a company on the fourth floor in a grimy room, furnished with a high deal-desk, two three-legged stools, and illimitable foolscap, pens, and ink.

Where Mrs Happy Jack and the young-lady Happy Jacks went to at these times, the boldest speculator has failed to discover: they vanished, as it were, into thin air, and were seen no more till the sunshine came, when they returned with the swallows. The lady herself was a meek, mild creature, skilful in the art of living on nothing, and making up dresses without material. She adored her husband, and believed him the greatest man in the world. On the occurrence of such little household incidents as an execution, or Jack making a rapid act of cabmanship

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from his own hearth to the cheerful residence of Mr Levi in Cursitor Street, the poor little woman, after having indulged herself in the small luxury of a ‘good cry,’ would go to work to pack up shirts and socks manfully, and with great foresight, would always bring Jack’s daily food in a basket, seeing that Mr Levi’s bills are constructed upon a scale of uncommon dimensions; after which, she would eat the dinner with him in the coffee-room, drink to better days, play cribbage, and at last get very nearly as joyous in that greasy, grimy, sorrow-laden room, with bars on the outside of the windows, as if it were the happy home she possessed a few weeks ago, and which she always hoped to possess again. As for the girls, they were trained by too good a master and mistress not to become apt scholars. They knew what a bill of sale was from their tenderest years; the broker’s was no unfamiliar face; and they quite understood how to treat a man in possession. Their management of duns was consummate. Happy Jack used to listen to the comedy of excuses and coaxings; and when the importunate had departed, grumblingly and unpaid, he used solemnly to kiss his daughters on the forehead, and invoke all sorts of blessings upon his preservers, his good angels, his little girls, who were so clever, and so faithful, and so true.

And in many respects they were good girls. The style in which they turned frocks, put a new appearance upon hoods, and cloaks, and bonnets, and came forth in what seemed the very lustre of novelty—the whole got up by a skilful mutual adaptation of garments and parts of garments—was wonderful to all lady beholders. In cookery, they beat the famous *chef* who sent up five courses and a dessert, made out of a greasy pair of jack-boots and the grass from the ramparts of the besieged town. Their wonderful little made-dishes were mere scraps and fragments, which in any other house would have been flung away, but which were so artistically and scientifically handled by the young ladies, and so tossed up, and titivated, and eked out with gravies, and sauces, and strange devices of nondescript pasty, that Happy Jack, feasting upon these wonderful creations of ingenuity, used to vow that he never dined so well as when there was nothing in the house for dinner. To their wandering, predatory life the whole family were perfectly accustomed. A sudden turn out of quarters they cared no more for than hardened old dragoons. They never lost pluck. One speculation down, another came on. Sometimes the little household was united. A bit of luck in the City or the West had been achieved, and Happy Jack issued cards for ‘At Homes,’ and behaved, and looked, and spoke like an alderman, or the member of a house of fifty years’ standing. When strangers saw his white waistcoat, and blue coat with brass buttons, and heard him talk of a glut of gold, and money being a mere drug, they speculated as to whether he was the governor or the vice-governor of the Bank of England,

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or only the man who signs the five-pound notes. That day six weeks, Jack had probably 'come through the court;' a process which he always used somehow to achieve with flying colours, behaving in such a plausible and fascinating way to the commissioner, that that functionary regularly made a speech, in which he congratulated Happy Jack on his candour, and evident desire to deal fairly with his creditors, and told him he left that court without the shadow of a stain upon his character. In the Bench, in dreary suburban lodgings, or in the comfortable houses which they sometimes occupied, the Happy Jacks were always the Happy Jacks. Their constitution triumphed over everything. If anything could ruffle their serenity, it was the refusal of a tradesman to give credit. But *uno avulso non deficit alter*, as Jack was accustomed, on such occasions, classically to say to his wife—presently deviating into the corresponding vernacular of—'Well, my dear, if one cock fights shy, try another.'

A list of Jack's speculations would be instructive. He once took a theatre without a penny to carry it on; and having announced *Hamlet* without anybody to play, boldly studied and performed the part himself, to the unextinguishable delight of the audience. Soon after this, he formed a company for supplying the metropolis with Punches of a better class, and enacting a more moral drama than the old legitimate one—making Punch, in fact, a virtuous and domestic character; and he drew the attention of government to the moral benefits likely to be derived to society from this dramatic reform. Soon after, he departed for Spain in the gallant Legion; but not finding the speculation profitable, turned newspaper correspondent, and was thrice in imminent danger of being shot as a spy. Flung back somehow to England, he suddenly turned up as a lecturer on chemistry, and then established a dancing institution and Terpsichorean Athenaeum. Of late, Jack has found a good friend in animal magnetism, and his *seances* have been reasonably successful. When performing in the country districts, Jack varied the entertainments by a lecture on the properties of guano, which he threw in for nothing, and which was highly appreciated by the agricultural interest. Jack's books were principally works of travel. His *Journey to the Fountains of the Niger* is generally esteemed highly amusing, if not instructive: it was knocked off at Highbury; and his *Wanderings in the Mountains of the Moon*, written in Little Chelsea, has been favourably reviewed by many well-informed and discriminating organs of literary intelligence, as the work of a man evidently well acquainted with the regions he professes to describe.

Where the Happy Jacks are at this moment no one can tell. They have become invisible since the last clean out. A deprecatory legend has indeed been in circulation, which professed that Jack was dead, and that this was the manner in which, on his deathbed, he provided for his family:—

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‘Mrs Happy Jack,’ said the departing man, ’I’m not afraid of you. You have got on some way or other for nearly forty years, and I don’t see why you shouldn’t get on some way or other for forty more. Therefore, so far as you are concerned, my mind is easy. But, then, you girls—you poor little inexperienced poppets, who know nothing of the world. There’s Jane; but then she’s pretty—really beautiful. Why, her face is a fortune: she will of course captivate a rich man; and what more can a father wish? As for Emily—I fear Emily, my dear, you’re rather plain than otherwise; but what, I would ask, is beauty? —fleeting, transitory, skin-deep. The happiest marriages are those of mutual affection —not one-sided admiration: so, on the whole, I should say that my mind is easier about Emily than Jane. As for Maria, she’s so clever, she can’t but get on. As a musician, an artist, an authoress, what bright careers are open for her! While as for you, stupid little Clara, who never could be taught anything—I very much doubt whether the dunces of this world are not the very happiest people in it—Yes, Clara; leave to others the vain and empty distinctions of literary renown, which is but a bubble, and be happy in the homely path of obscure but virtuous duty!’

Happy Jack ceased. There was a pause. ‘And now,’ he said, ’having provided for my family, I will go to sleep, with a clear conscience and a tranquil mind.’

I said that I always distrusted this legend. I am happy to say, that even as I write I have proof positive that it is purely a fiction. I have just had a card put into my hand requesting my presence at a private exhibition of the celebrated Bloomer Family, while an accompanying private note from Jack himself informs me that the ’celebrated and charming Bloomer group—universally allowed to be the most perfect and interesting representatives of the new *regime* in costume’—are no other than the Happy Jacks *redivivi*—Mrs J. and the girls donning the transatlantic attire, and Happy Jack himself delivering a lecture upon the vagaries of fashion and the inconsistencies of dress, in a new garment invented by himself, and combining the Roman toga with the Highland kilt.

THE DESERT HOME.[1]

Robinson Crusoe is the parent of a line of fictions, all more or less entertaining; but those of our own day, as might be expected, share largely in the practical spirit of the time, making amusement in some degree the mere menstruum of information. Following the Swiss Family Robinson, we have here an English Family Robinson, which might as well be called an American Family Robinson; and although ostensibly meant for the holiday recreation of youth, it proves to be a production equally well suited for children of six feet and upwards. The author is personally familiar with the scenes he describes, and is thus able to give them a verisimilitude which in other circumstances can be attained only by the rarest genius; and notwithstanding the associations, of his last book, the *Scalp-hunters*, there is only one bloody conflict in the present one fought by animals of the genus Homo.

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The local habitation of the lost family is a nook in the Great American Desert—a nook in a desert twenty-five times the size of England! But this wilderness of about a million square miles is not all sand or all barren earth: it contains numerous other features of interest besides mountains and oases; it includes the country of New Mexico, with its towns and cities; the country round the Great Salt and Utah Lakes, where the germ of a Mormon nation is expanding on all sides; and it is traversed in its whole breadth by the Rocky Mountains. An English family, after being ruined in St Louis, and reduced to their last hundred pounds, are persuaded by a Scottish miner to accompany him across this desert to New Mexico. 'They are a wonderful people,' says the story-teller, 'these same Scotch. They are but a small nation, yet their influence is felt everywhere upon the globe. Go where you will, you will find them in positions of trust and importance—-always prospering, yet, in the midst of prosperity, still remembering, with strong feelings of attachment, the land of their birth. They manage the marts of London, the commerce of India, the fur-trade of America, and the mines of Mexico. Over all the American wilderness you will meet them, side by side with the backwoods-pioneer himself, and even pushing him from his own ground. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Sea, they have impressed with their Gaelic names rock, river, and mountain; and many an Indian tribe owns a Scotchman for its chief.'

The adventurers join a caravan, which is attacked by Indians, and the family of the destined Robinson find themselves alone in the wilderness, 800 miles from the American frontier on the east, 1000 miles from any civilised settlement on either the north or south, and 200 miles from the farthest advanced lines of New Mexico in the desert. They are, in short, lost; but in due time they are found again by other explorers. These strangers are standing on the edge of a cliff several hundred feet sheer down. 'Away below—far below where we were—lay a lovely valley, smiling in all the luxuriance of bright vegetation. It was of nearly an oval shape, bounded upon all sides by a frowning precipice, that rose around it like a wall. Its length could not have been less than ten miles, and its greatest breadth about half of its length. We were at its upper end, and of course viewed it lengthwise. Along the face of the precipice there were trees hanging out horizontally, and some of them even growing with their tops downward. These trees were cedars and pines; and we could perceive also the knotted limbs of huge cacti protruding from the crevices of the rocks. We could see the wild mezcal, or maguey-plant, growing against the cliff—its scarlet leaves contrasting finely with the dark foliage of the cedars and cacti. Some of these plants stood out on the very brow of the overhanging precipice, and their long curving blades gave a singular character to the

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landscape. Along the face of the dark cliffs all was rough, and gloomy, and picturesque. How different was the scene below! Here everything looked soft, and smiling, and beautiful. There were broad stretches of woodland, where the thick foliage of the trees met and clustered together, so that it looked like the surface of the earth itself; but we knew it was only the green leaves, for here and there were spots of brighter green, that we saw were glades covered with grassy turf. The leaves of the trees were of different colours, for it was now late in the autumn. Some were yellow, and some of a deep claret colour: some were bright-red, and some of a beautiful maroon; and there were green, and brighter green, and others of a silvery-whitish hue. All these colours were mingled together, and blended into each other, like the flowers upon a rich carpet. Near the centre of the valley was a large shining object, which we knew to be water. It was evidently a lake of crystal purity, and smooth as a mirror. The sun was now up to meridian height, and his yellow beams falling upon its surface caused it to gleam like a sheet of gold. We could not trace the outlines of the water, for the trees partially hid it from our view, but we saw that the smoke that had at first attracted us rose up somewhere from the western shore of the lake.' In this strange oasis they found what appeared to be a snug farm-house, with stables and outhouses, garden and fields, horses and cattle. Here they were hospitably entertained by the proprietor, his wife, and two sons, and served by a faithful negro; and of course it is the history of the settlers, and their struggles, expedients, and contrivances which form the staple of the work.

In this history we have the process of building a log-house, and the usual modes of assembling round the squatter such of the comforts of life as may be obtained in the desert; but our family Robinson appears to have been the most ingenious as well as the most fortunate of adventurers, for there are very few, even of the luxuries of civilised society, which are beyond his reach. The natural history of the book, however, is its main feature; and the adventures of the lost family with the unreasoning denizens of the desert remind us not unfrequently of the pictures of Audubon. This is among the earliest:—'There were high cliffs fronting us, and along the face of these five large reddish objects were moving, so fast that I at first thought they were birds upon the wing. After watching them a moment, however, I saw that they were quadrupeds; but so nimbly did they go, leaping from ledge to ledge, that it was impossible to see their limbs. They appeared to be animals of the deer species, somewhat larger than sheep or goats; but we could see that, in place of antlers, each of them had a pair of huge curving horns. As they leaped downward, from one platform of the cliffs to another, we fancied that they whirled about in the air, as though they were "turning somersaults,"

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and seemed at times to come down heads foremost! There was a spur of the cliff that sloped down to within less than a hundred yards of the place where we sat. It ended in an abrupt precipice, of some sixty or seventy feet in height above the plain. The animals, on reaching the level of this spur, ran along it until they had arrived at its end. Seeing the precipice, they suddenly stopped, as if to reconnoitre it; and we had now a full view of them, as they stood outlined against the sky, with their graceful limbs and great curved horns, almost as large as their bodies. We thought, of course, they could get no farther for the precipice, and I was calculating whether my rifle, which I had laid hold of, would reach them at that distance. All at once, to our astonishment, the foremost sprang out from the cliff, and whirling through the air, lit upon his head on the hard plain below! We could see that he came down upon his horns, and rebounding up again to the height of several feet, he turned a second somersault, and then dropped upon his legs, and stood still! Nothing daunted, the rest followed, one after the other, in quick succession, like so many street-tumblers; and, like them, after the feat had been performed, the animals stood for a moment, as if waiting for applause!' These were the *argali*, or wild sheep, popularly termed bighorns, and resembling an immense yellow goat or deer furnished with a pair of ram's horns.

Such are the anecdotes which the reader will find thickly scattered throughout this volume; but perhaps the most interesting are a series of conflicts witnessed by the father and one of the sons, and in the course of which they are themselves exposed to some danger. They had gone out to gather from the live oaks a kind of moss, which they found to be quite equal to curled hair for stuffing mattresses; and while perched upon one of the trees, the drama opened by the violent scolding of a pair of orioles, or Baltimore birds—so called from their colour, a mixture of black and orange, being the same as that in the coat-of-arms of Lord Baltimore. The cause of the disturbance appeared to be a nondescript animal close to the edge of the thicket, with a variety of little legs, tails, heads, ears, and eyes stuck over its body. 'All at once the numerous heads seemed to separate from the main body, becoming little bodies of themselves, with long tails upon them, and looking just like a squad of white rats! The large body to which they had all been attached we now saw was an old female opossum, and evidently the mother of the whole troop. She was about the size of a cat, and covered with woolly hair of a light gray colour.... The little 'possums were exact pictures of their mother—all having the same sharp snouts and long naked tails. We counted no less than thirteen of them, playing and tumbling about among the leaves.' The old 'possum looked wistfully up at the nest of the orioles, hanging like a distended stocking from

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the topmost twigs of the tree. After a little consideration she uttered a sharp note, which brought the little ones about her in a twinkling. 'Several of them ran into the pouch which she had caused to open for them; two of them took a turn of their little tails around the root of hers, and climbed up on her rump, almost burying themselves in her long wool; while two or three others fastened themselves about her neck and shoulders. It was a most singular sight to see the little creatures holding on with "tails, teeth, and toe-nails," while some peeped comically out of the great breast-pocket.' Burdened in this way, she climbed the tree, and then taking hold of the young 'possums, one by one, with her mouth, she made them twist their tails round a branch, and hang with their heads downwards. 'Five or six of the "kittens" were still upon the ground. For these she returned, and taking them up as before, again climbed the tree. She disposed of the second load precisely as she had done the others, until the thirteen little possums hung head downwards along the branch like a string of candles!'

The mother now climbed higher up; but the nest, with its tempting eggs, hung beyond her reach; and although she suspended herself by the tail—at last almost by its very tip—and swung like a pendulum, clutching as she swung, it was all in vain. At length, with a bitter snarl, she gave up the adventure as hopeless, detached the young ones from their hold, flung them testily to the ground, and descending, took them all into her pouch and upon her back, and trudged away. 'Frank and I now deemed it proper to interfere, and cut off the retreat of the old 'possum: so, dropping from our perch, we soon overtook and captured the whole family. The old one, on first seeing us approach, rolled herself into a round clump, so that neither her head nor legs could be seen, and in this attitude feigned to be quite dead. Several of the youngsters who were *outside*, immediately detached themselves, and imitated the example of their mother—so that the family now presented the appearance of a large ball of whitish wool, with several smaller "clews" lying around it!' The family Crusoes, however, were not to be cheated: they took the whole prisoners, intending to carry them home; and making the mother fast to one of the saplings, returned to their tree.

Soon the persecuted orioles began to scream and scold as before. Their enemy this time was a huge moccason, one of the most venomous of serpents. 'It was one of the largest of its species; and its great flat head, protruding sockets, and sparkling eyes, added to the hideousness of its appearance. Every now and then, as it advanced, it threw out its forked tongue, which, moist with poisonous saliva, flashed under the sunbeam like jets of fire. It was crawling directly for the tree on which hung the nest.' The birds seemed to think he meant to climb to their nest, and descended in rage and terror to the lower

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branches. 'The snake, seeing them approach almost within range of his hideous maw, gathered himself into a coil, and prepared to strike. His eyes scintillated like sparks of fire, and seemed to fascinate the birds; for instead of retiring, they each moment drew nearer and nearer, now alighting on the ground, then flapping back to the branches, and anon darting to the ground again—as though they were under some spell from those fiery eyes, and were unable to take themselves away. Their motions appeared to grow less energetic, their chirping became almost inaudible, and their wings seemed hardly to expand as they flew, or rather fluttered, around the head of the serpent. One of them at length dropped down upon the ground within reach of the snake, and stood with open bill, as if exhausted, and unable to move farther. We were expecting to see the snake suddenly launch forth upon his feathered victim; when all at once his coils flew out, his body was thrown at full length, and he commenced retreating from the tree!' The object that caused this diversion was soon visible. 'It was an animal about the size of a wolf, and of a dark-gray or blackish colour. Its body was compact, round-shaped, and covered, not with hair, but with shaggy bristles, that along the ridge of its back were nearly six inches in length, and gave it the appearance of having a mane. It had very short ears, no tail whatever, or only a knob; and we could see that its feet were hoofed, not clawed as in beasts of prey. But whether beast of prey or not, its long mouth, with two white tusks protruding over the jaws, gave it a very formidable appearance. Its head and nose resembled those of the hog more than any other animal; and in fact it was nothing else than the peccary—the wild hog of Mexico.'

The moccason did not wait to parley with his enemy, but skulked away through the long grass, every now and then raising his head to glare behind him. But the peccary tracked him by the smell, and on coming up to him, uttered a shrill grunt. 'The snake, finding that he was overtaken, threw himself into a coil, and prepared to give battle; while his antagonist, now looking more like a great porcupine than a pig, drew back, as if to take the advantage of a run; and then halted. Both for a moment eyed each other—the peccary evidently calculating its distance—while the great snake seemed cowed and quivering with affright. Its appearance was entirely different from the bright semblance it had exhibited but a moment before when engaged with the birds. Its eyes were less fiery, and its whole body seemed more ashy and wrinkled. We had not many moments to observe it, for the peccary was now seen to rush forward, spring high into the air, and pounce down with all her feet held together upon the coils of the serpent! She immediately bounded back again; and, quick as thought, once more rose above her victim. The snake was now uncoiled, and writhing over the ground. Another rush from

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the peccary, another spring, and the sharp hoofs of the animal came down upon the neck of the serpent, crushing it upon the hard turf. The body of the reptile, distended to its full length, quivered for a moment, and then lay motionless along the grass. The victor uttered another sharp cry, that seemed intended as a call to her young ones, who, emerging from the weeds where they had concealed themselves, ran nimbly forward to the spot.'

While the father and son are watching the peccary peeling the serpent as adroitly as a fishmonger would skin an eel, another actor enters upon the scene. This was the dreaded cougar, an animal of the size of a calf, and with the head and general appearance of a cat. Creeping stealthily round his victim, who is busy feasting on the quarry, he at length attains the proper vantage-ground, and gathering himself up like a cat, springs with a terrific scream upon the back of the peccary, burying his claws in her neck, and clasping her all over in his fatal embrace. 'The frightened animal uttered a shrill cry, and struggled to free itself. Both rolled over the ground—the peccary all the while gnashing its jaws, and continuing to send forth its strange sharp cries, until the woods echoed again. Even the young ones ran around, mixing in the combat—now flung sprawling upon the earth, now springing up again, snapping their little jaws, and imitating the cry of their mother. The cougar alone fought in silence. Since the first wild scream not a sound had escaped him; but from that moment his claws never relaxed their hold, and we could see that with his teeth he was silently tearing the throat of his victim.'

The Robinsons of the desert were now in an awkward predicament; for although they had been safe from the peccary, the cougar could climb a tree like a squirrel. A noise, however, disturbs him from his meal, and swinging the dead animal on his back, he begins to skulk away. But he is interrupted before he can reach cover; and as the new-comers prove to be twenty or thirty peccaries, summoned to the field by the dying screams of their comrade, he has more to do than to think of his dinner. To fling down his burden, to leap upon the foremost of his enemies, is but the work of an instant; but the avengers crowd round him with their gnashing jaws and piercing cries, and the brute darts up the tree like a flash of red fire, and crouches not twenty feet above the heads of the horrified spectators! The father, however, after some agonising moments of deliberation, brings him down with his rifle; and the cougar, falling among the eager crowd below, is torn to pieces in a moment. But this does not get rid of the peccaries, who set up their fiendish screams anew as they discover two other victims in the tree. The father fires again and again, dropping his peccary each time, till five lie dead upon the ground; but the rage of the rest only becomes more and more furious—and the marksman is at his last bullet. Here we shall leave him; and such of our readers as may be interested in his fate—who form, we suspect, a very handsome percentage on the whole—may make inquiries for themselves at his Desert Home.

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] Or the Adventures of a Lost Family in the Wilderness. By Captain Mayne Reid. London: Bogue. 1852.

THE VATTEVILLE RUBY.

The clock of the church of Besancon had struck nine, when a woman about fifty years of age, wrapped in a cotton shawl and carrying a small basket on her arm, knocked at the door of a house in the Rue St Vincent, which, however, at the period we refer to, bore the name of Rue de la Liberte. The door opened. 'It is you, Dame Margaret,' said the porter, with a very cross look. 'It is high time for you. All my lodgers have come home long since; you are always the last, and'——

'That is not my fault, I assure you, my dear M. Thiebaut,' said, the old woman in a deprecatory tone. 'My day's work is only just finished, and when work is to be done'——

'That's all very fine,' he muttered. 'It might do well enough if I could even reckon on a Christmas-box at the end of the year; but as it is, I may count myself well off, if I do but get paid for taking up their letters.'

The old woman did not hear the last words, for with quick and firm step she had been making her way up the six flights of stairs, steep enough to make her head reel had she been ascending them for the first time. 'Nine o'clock!—nine o'clock! How uneasy she must be!' and as she spoke, she opened with her latch-key the door of a wretched garret, in which dimly burned a rushlight, whose flickering flame scarcely seemed to render visible the scanty furniture the room contained.

'Is that you, my good Margaret?' said a feeble and broken voice from the farther end of the little apartment.

'Yes, my dear lady; yes, it is I; and very sorry I am to have made you uneasy. But Madame Lebriton, my worthy employer, is so active herself, that she always finds the workwoman's day too short—though it is good twelve hours—and just as I was going to fold up my work, she brought me a job in a great hurry. I could not refuse her; but this time, I must own, I got well paid for being obliging, for after I had done, she said in her most good-natured way: "Here, you shall take home with you some of this nice pie, and this bottle of good wine, and have a comfortable supper with your sister." So she always calls you, madame,' added Margaret, while complacently glancing at the basket, the contents of which she now laid out upon the table. 'As I believe it is safest for you, I

do not undeceive her, though it is easily known she cannot have looked very close at us, or she might have seen that I could only be the servant of so noble-looking a lady'——

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The feeble voice interrupted her: ’My servant!—you my servant! when, instead of rewarding your services, I allow you to toil for my support, and to lavish upon me the most tender, the most devoted affection! My poor Margaret! you who have undertaken for me at your age, and with your infirmities, daily and arduous toil, are you not indeed a sister of whom I may well be proud? Your nobility has a higher origin than mine. Reduced by political changes, which have left me homeless and penniless, I owe everything to you; and so tenderly do you minister to me, that even in this garret I could still almost fancy myself the noble Abbess of Vatteville!’

As she spoke, the aged lady raised herself in her old arm-chair, and throwing back a black veil, disclosed features still beautiful, and a forehead still free from every wrinkle, and eyes now sparkling with something of their former brilliancy. She extended her hand to Margaret, who affectionately kissed it; and then, apprehensive that further excitement could not but be injurious to her mistress, the faithful creature endeavoured to divert her thoughts into another channel, by inviting her to partake of the little feast provided by the kindness of her employer. Margaret being in the habit of taking her meals in the house where she worked, the noble Lady Marie Anne Adelaide de Vatteville was thus usually left alone and unattended, to eat the scanty fare prescribed by the extreme narrowness of her resources; so that she now felt quite cheered by the novel comfort, not merely of the better-spread table, but of the company of her faithful servant; and it was in an almost mirthful tone she said, when the repast was ended: ’Margaret, I have a secret to confide to you. I will not—I ought not to keep it any longer to myself.’

‘A secret, my dear mistress! a secret from me!’ exclaimed the faithful creature in a slightly reproachful tone.

’Yes, dear Margaret, a secret from you; but to be so no longer. No more henceforth of the toils you have undergone for me; they must be given up: I cannot do without you. At my age, to be left alone is intolerable. When you are not near me, I get so lonely, and sometimes feel quite afraid, I cannot tell of what, but I suppose it is natural to the old to fear; and often—will you believe it?—I catch myself weeping like a very child. Ah! when age comes on us, we lose all strength, all fortitude. But you will not leave me any more? Promise me, dear Margaret.’

‘But in that case what is to become of us?’ said Margaret.

’This is the very thing I have to tell. And now listen to me. Take this key, and in the right-hand drawer of the press you will find the green casket, where, among my letters and family papers, you will see a small case, which bring to me.’

Margaret, not a little surprised, did as she was desired. The abbess gazed on the case for some moments in silence, and Margaret thought she saw a tear glisten in her eye as she pressed the box to her lips, and kissed it tenderly and reverentially.

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‘I have sworn,’ she said, ’never to part with it; yet what can I do? It must be so: it is the will of God.’ And with a trembling hand, as if about to commit sacrilege, she opened the case, and drew from it a ruby of great brilliancy and beauty. ‘You see this jewel?’ she said. ’Margaret, it is the glory of my ancient house; it is the last gem in my coronet, and more precious in my eyes than anything in the world. My grand-uncle, the noblest of men, the Archbishop of Besancon, brought it from the East; and when, in guerdon for some-family service, Louis XIV. founded the Abbey of Vatteville, and made my grand-aunt the first abbess of the order, he himself adorned her cross with it. You now know the value of the jewel to me; and though I cannot tell its marketable value, still, notwithstanding the pressure of the times, I cannot but think it must bring sufficient to secure us, for some time at least, from want. “Were I to consider myself alone, I would starve sooner than touch the sacred deposit; but to allow you, Margaret, to suffer, and to suffer for me—to take advantage any longer of your disinterested affection and devoted fidelity—would be base selfishness. God has at last taught me that I was but sacrificing you to my pride, and I must hasten to make atonement. I will endeavour to raise money on this jewel. You know old M. Simon? Notwithstanding his mean appearance and humble mode of living, I am persuaded he is a rich man; and though parsimonious in the extreme, he is good-natured and obliging whenever he can be so without any risk of loss to himself.’

The next day, in pursuance of her project, the abbess, accompanied by Margaret, repaired to the house of M. Simon. ‘I know, sir,’ she said, ’from your kindness to some friends of mine, that you feel an interest in the class to which I belong, and that you are incapable of betraying a confidence reposed in you. I am the Abbess of Vatteville. Driven forth from the plundered and ruined abbey, I am living in the town under an assumed name. I have been stripped of everything; and but for the self-sacrificing attachment of a faithful servant, I must have died of want. However, I have still one resource, and only one. I know not if I am right in availing myself of it, but at my age the power to struggle fails. Besides, do not suffer alone; and this consideration decides me. Will you, then, have the goodness to give me a loan on this jewel?’

’I believe, madame, you have mistaken me for a pawnbroker. I am not in the habit of advancing money in this way. I am myself very poor, and money is now everywhere scarce. I should be very glad to be able to oblige you, but just at present it is quite out of the question.’

For a moment the poor abbess felt all hope extinct; but with a last effort to move his compassion, she said: ’Oh, sir, remember that secrecy is of such importance to me, I dare not apply to any one else. The privacy, the obscurity in which I live, alone has prevented me from paying with my blood the penalty attached to a noble name and lineage.’

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’But how am I to ascertain the value of the jewel? I am no jeweller; and I fear, in my ignorance, to wrong either you or myself.’

’I implore you, sir, not to refuse me. I have no alternative But to starve; for I am too old to work, and beg I cannot. Keep the jewel as a pledge, and give me some relief.’

Old Simon, though covetous, was not devoid of feeling. He was touched by the tears of the venerable lady; and besides, the more he looked at the jewel, the more persuaded he became of its being really valuable. After a few moments’ consideration, he said: ’All the money I am worth at this moment is 1500 francs; and though I have my suspicions that I am making a foolish bargain, I had rather run any risk than leave you in such distress. The next time I have business in Paris, I can ascertain the value of the jewel, and if I have given you too little, I will make it up to you.’ And with, a glad and grateful heart the abbess took home the 1500 francs, thankful at having obtained the means of subsistence for at least a year.

Some months later, old Simon went up to Paris, and hastening to one of the principal jewellers, shewed the ruby, and begged to know its value. The jeweller took the stone carelessly; but after a few moments’ examination of it, he cast a rapid glance at the threadbare coat and mean appearance of the possessor, and then abruptly exclaimed: ’This jewel does not belong to you, and you must not leave the house till you account for its being in your possession. Close the doors,’ he said to his foreman, ‘and send for the police.’ In vain did Simon protest his innocence; in vain did he offer every proof of it. The lapidary would listen to nothing; but at every look he gave the gem, he darted at him a fresh glance of angry contempt. ’You must be a fool as well as a knave,’ he said. ’Do you know, scoundrel, that this is the Vatteville—the prince of rubies; the most splendid, the rarest of gems. It might be deemed a mere creation of imagination, were it not enrolled and accurately described in the archives of our art. See here, in the *Guide des Lapidaires*, a print of it. Mark its antique fashioning, and that dark spot!—yes, it is indeed the precious ruby so long thought lost. Rest assured, fellow, you shall not quit the house until you satisfy me how you have contrived to get possession of it.’

’I should at once have told you, but from unwillingness to endanger the life of a poor woman who has confided in me. I got the jewel from the Abbess de Vatteville herself, and it is her last and only resource.’ And now M. Simon proved, by unquestionable documents, that notwithstanding his more than humble appearance, he was a man of wealth and respectability, and received the apologies which were tendered, together with assurances that Madame Vatteville’s secret was safe with one who, he begged to say,’knew how to respect misfortune, whenever and however presented to his notice.’

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‘But what is the jewel worth?’ asked M. Simon.

’Millions, sir! and neither I nor any one else in the trade here could purchase it, unless as a joint concern, and in case of a coronation or a marriage in one of the royal houses of Europe, for such an occasion alone could make it not a risk to buy it. But meanwhile I will, if you wish, mention it to some of the trade.’

‘I am in no hurry,’ said Simon, almost bewildered by the possession of such a treasure. ’I may as well wait for some such occasion, and in the meantime can make any necessary advances to the abbess. Perhaps I may call on you again.’

The first day of the year 1795 had just dawned, and there was a thick and chilling fog. The abbess and her faithful servant felt this day more than usually depressed, for fifteen months had now elapsed since the 1500 francs had been received for the ruby, and there now remained provision only for a few days longer. ’I have got no answer from M. Simon,’ said the abbess; and in giving utterance to her own thought, she was replying to what was at that moment passing through Margaret’s mind. ’I fear he has not been able to get more for the ruby than he thinks fair interest for the money he advanced to me.’

‘It is most likely,’ said Margaret; and both relapsed into their former desponding silence.

‘What a dreary New-Year’s Day!’ resumed Madame de Vatteville, in a melancholy tone.

‘Oh, why can I not help you, dear mistress?’ exclaimed Margaret, suddenly starting from her reverie. ’Cheerfully would I lay down my life for you!’

’And why can I not return in any way your devoted attachment, my poor Margaret?’

At this instant, two loud and hurried knocks at the door startled them both from their seats, and it was with a trembling hand Margaret opened it to admit the old porter, and a servant with a letter in his hand.

‘Thank you, thank you, M. Thiebaut: this letter is for my mistress.’ But the inquisitive old man either did not or would not understand Margaret’s hint to him to retire, and Madame de Vatteville was obliged to tell him to leave the room.

’Not a penny to bless herself with, though she has come to a better apartment!’ muttered he, enraged at the disappointment to his curiosity—’and yet as proud as an aristocrat!’

The abbess approached the casement, broke the seal with trembling hand, and read as follows:—

’I have at length been able to treat with a merchant for the article in question, and have, after much difficulty, obtained a sum of 25,000 francs—far beyond anything I could have

hoped. But the sum is to be paid in instalments, at long intervals. It may therefore be more convenient for you, under your peculiar circumstances, to accept the offer I now make of a pension of 1500 francs, to revert after your decease to the servant whom you mentioned as so devotedly attached to you. If you are willing to accept this offer, the bearer will hand you the necessary documents, by which you are to make over to me all further claim upon the property placed in my hands; and on your affixing your signature, he will pay you the first year in advance.

SIMON.’

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‘What a worthy, excellent man!’ joyfully exclaimed the abbess; for, in the noble integrity of her heart, she had no suspicion that he could take advantage of her circumstances.

However Simon settled the matter with his conscience, the abbess, trained in the school of adversity to be content with being preserved from absolute want, passed the remainder of her life quietly and happily with her good Margaret, both every day invoking blessings on the head of him whom they regarded as a generous benefactor. Madame de Vatteville lived to the age of one hundred, and her faithful Margaret survived only a few months the mistress to whom she had given such affecting proofs of attachment.

But Simon’s detestable fraud proved of no use to him. After keeping his treasure for several years, he thought the Emperor’s coronation presented a favourable opportunity for disposing of it. Unfortunately for him, his grasping avarice one morning suggested a thought which his ignorance prevented his rejecting: ’Since this ruby—old-fashioned and stained as it is—can be worth so much, what would be its value if freed from all defect, and in modern setting?’ And he soon found a lapidary, who, for a sum of 3000 francs, modernised it, and effaced the spot, and with it the impress, the stamp of its antiquity—all that gave it value, beauty, worth! This wanting, no jeweller could recognise it: it was no longer worth a thousand crowns.

It was thus that the most splendid ruby in Europe lost its value and its fame; and its name is now only to be found in *The Lapidaries’ Guide*, as that which had once been the most costly of gems. It seemed as if it could not survive the last of the illustrious house to which it owed its introduction into Europe, and its name.

HENRY TAYLOR.

> ’There is delight in singing, though none hear
> Beside the singer: and there is delight
> In praising, though the praiser sit alone,
> And see the praised far off him, far above.’
> —W.S. LANDOR.

It has been said, with more of truth than flattery, that literature of any kind which requires the reader himself to think, in order to enjoy, can never be popular. The writings of Mr Henry Taylor are to be classed in this category. The reader of his dramas must study in order to relish them; and their audience, therefore, must be of the fit, though few kind. Goethe somewhere remarks, that it is not what we take from a book so much as what we bring to it that actually profits us. But this is hard doctrine, caviare to the multitude. And so long as popular indolence and popular distaste for habits of reflection shall continue the order of the day, so long will it be difficult for writers of Mr Taylor’s type to popularise their meditations; to see themselves quoted in every

provincial newspaper and twelfth-rate magazine; to be gloriously pirated by eager hordes

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at Brussels and New York; or to create a furor in ‘the Row’ on the day of publication, and turn bibliopolic premises into ‘overflowing houses.’ The public asks for glaring effects, palpable hits, double-dyed colours, treble X inspirations, concentrated essence of sentiments, and emotions up to French-romance pitch. With such a public, what has our author in common? While *they* make literary demands after their own heart, and expect every candidate for their *not* evergreen laurels to conform to their rules, Mr Taylor calmly unfolds his theory, that it is from ‘deep self-possession, an intense repose’ that all genuine emanations of poetic genius proceed, and expresses his doubt whether any high endeavour of poetic art ever has been or ever will be promoted by the stimulation of popular applause.[2] He denies that youth is the poet’s prime. He contends that what constitutes a great poet is a rare and peculiar balance of all the faculties—the balance of reason with imagination, passion with self-possession, abundance with reserve, and inventive conception with executive ability. He insists that no man is worthy of the name of a poet who would not rather be read a hundred times by one reader than once by a hundred. He affirms that poetry, unless written simply to please and pamper, and not to elevate or instruct, will do little indeed towards procuring its writer a subsistence, and that it will probably not even yield him such a return as would suffice to support a labouring man for one month out of the twelve.[3] Tenets like these are not for the million. The propounder they regard as talking at them, not to them. His principles and practice, his canons of taste, and his literary achievements, are far above out of their sight—his merit they are content to take on trust, by the hearing of the ear, a mystery of faith alone.

Perhaps men shrewder than good Sir Roger de Coverley might aver that much is to be said on both sides—that there may be something of fallacy on the part of poet as well as people in this controversy. It is possible to set the standard too high as well as too low—to plant it on an elevation so distant that its symbol can no longer be deciphered, as well as to fix it so low that its folds draggle in mire and dust. If genius systematically appeal only to the initiated few, it must learn to do without the homage of the outer multitude. For its slender income of fame, it has mainly itself to thank. These remarks apply with primary force to that class of contemporary poets who delight in the mystic and enigmatical, and whose ideas are so apt to vanish, like Homer’s heroes, in a cloud—among whom Robert Browning and Philip J. Bailey are conspicuous names; and in a secondary degree to that other class, lucid indeed in thought, and classically definite in expression, but otherwise too scholastic and abstract for popular sympathies—among whom we may cite Walter Savage Landor and Henry Taylor. Coleridge[4]

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tells us that, to enjoy poetry, we must combine a more than ordinary sympathy with the objects, emotions, or incidents contemplated by the poet, consequent on rare sensibility, with a more than ordinary activity of the mind in respect of the fancy and imagination. This more than ordinary mental activity is especially demanded from the readers—say rather the students—of *Philip van Artevelde* and its kindred dramas. Those who are thus equipped will commonly be found to agree in admiring the writings of this author; among them he is unquestionably 'popular,' if it be any test of popularity to send forth a second edition three months after the first. Scholarship can appreciate, pure intellect can find nutriment in, his reflective and carefully-wrought pages. His heroes and heroines, cold and unimpassioned to the man of society, are classic and genial to the man of thought. A Quarterly Reviewer observes, that the blended dignity of thought, and a sedate moral habit, invests his poetry with a stateliness in which the drama is generally deficient, and makes his writings illustrate, in some degree, a new form of the art. In all that he writes he stands revealed the true English gentleman, 'that grand old name,' as Tennyson calls it,

> Defamed by every charlatan,
> And soiled with all ignoble use.'

Isaac Comnenus—in which a recent critic discovers much of that Byronian vein upon which Mr Taylor is severe in his own criticisms—being little remarkable in itself, as well as the least remarkable of his dramatic performances, need not detain us. The career of *Philip van Artevelde* belongs to an era when, as Sir James Stephen remarks, the whole of Europe, under the influence of some strange sympathy, was agitated by the simultaneous discontents of all her great civic populations—when the insurgent spirit, commencing in the Italian republics, had spread from the south to the north of the Alps, everywhere marking its advance by tumult, spoil, and bloodshed. 'Wat Tyler and his bands had menaced London; and the communes of Flanders, under the command of Philip van Artevelde, had broken out into open war with the counts, their seigneurs, and with their suzerain lord, the Duke of Burgundy. On the issue of that attempt the fate of the royal and baronial power seemed to hang in France, not less than in Flanders.'[5] The drama composed by Mr Taylor to represent the fortunes of the 'Chief Captain of the White Hoods and of Ghent,' consists of two plays and an interlude—*The Lay of Elena* —and being, as he says in his preface, equal in length to about six such plays as are adapted to the stage, was not, of course, intended to solicit the most sweet voices of pit and gallery, although it has since been subjected to that ordeal at the instance of Mr Macready. Historic truth is said to be preserved in it, as far as the material events are concerned—with the usual exception of such occasional dilatations and compressions of

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time as are required in dramatic composition. And notwithstanding the limited imagination and the too artificial passion which characterise it, *Philip van Artevelde* is in very many respects a noble work, as it certainly is its author's chef-d'oeuvre. It has been pronounced by no mean authority the superior of every dramatic composition of modern times, including the *Sardanapalus* of Lord Byron, the *Remorse* of Coleridge, and the *Cenci* of Shelley. The portraiture of Philip is one of those elaborate and highly-finished studies which repay as well as require minute investigation. He is at once profoundly meditative and surpassingly active. His energy of brain is only rivalled by his readiness of hand. In him the active mood and the passive—the practical and the ideal—the objective and the subjective—are not as parallel lines that never meet, but are sections of one line, describing the circle of his all-embracing mind. His youth has been, that of a dreamy recluse, the scorn of men of the world. 'Oh, fear him not, my lord,' says one of them to the Earl of Flanders:

> —'His father's name
> Is all that from his father[6] he derives.
> He is a man of singular address
> In catching river fish. His life hath been
> Till now, more like a peasant's or a monk's,
> Than like the issue of so great a man.'

Similarly the earl himself describes him as 'a man that as much knowledge has of war as I of brewing mead—a bookish nursling of the monks—a meacock.' But when the last scene of all has closed his strange eventful history, the testimony of a nobler, wiser foe, [7] ascribes to him great gifts of courage, discretion, wit, an equal temper, an ample soul, rock-bound and fortified against assaults of transitory passion, but founded on a surging subterranean fire that stirs him to lofty enterprise—a man prompt, capable, and calm, wanting nothing in soldiership except good-fortune. Ever tempted to reverie, he yet refuses, even for one little hour, to yield up the weal of Flanders to idle thought or vacant retrospect. Having once put his hand to the plough of action, with clear foresight, not blindfold bravery, his language is—'Though I indulge no more the dream of living, as I hoped I might have lived, a life of temperate and thoughtful joy, yet I repine not, and from this time forth will cast no look behind.' The first part of the drama leaves him an exultant victor, an honourable prosperous, and happy man. The second part—-which alike in interest and treatment is very inferior to the first—finds him falling, and leaves him 'fallen, fallen, fallen, from his high estate.' His sun, no longer trailing clouds of glory, sets in a wintry and misty gloom. And yet in the act of dying he emits flashes of the ancient brightness, and we feel that so dies a hero. The other *dramatis personae* pale their ineffectual fires before his central light.

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After a silence of nearly ten years—characteristic of Mr Taylor's deliberative and disciplined mind—he produced (1842) *Edwin the Fair*, of whose story the little that was known, he observes, was romantic enough to have impressed itself on the popular memory—the tale of *Edwy and Elgiva* having been current in the nursery long before it came to be studied as a historical question. In illustrating this tale he borrows from the bordering reigns 'incidents which were characteristic of the times,' though some are of opinion, that his deviation from historical truth has rather impaired than aided the poetical effect of the drama. With artistic skill, and often with sustained energy, he develops the career of the 'All-Fair' prince, and his relation to the monkish struggle of the tenth century; the hostile intrigues and stormy violence of Dunstan; the loyal tenacity and Saxon frank-heartedness of Earl Leolf and his allies; the celebrated coronation-scene, and 'most admired disorder' of the banquet; the discovery and denunciation of Edwin's secret nuptials; his imprisonment in the Tower of London; the confusion and dispersion of his adherents; the ecclesiastical finesse and conjuror-tricks of Dunstan; the king's rescue and temporary success; the murder of Elgiva, and Edwin's own death in the essay to avenge her. It is around Dunstan, the representative of spiritual despotism, that the interest centres. The character of this 'Saint,' like that of Hildebrand and a Becket, has been made one of the problems of history. Mr Taylor's reading of the part is masterly, and we think correct. His Dunstan is not wholly sane; he believes himself inspired to read the alphabet of Heaven's stars, and to behold visions beyond the bounds of human foresight; one of the few to whom, 'and not in mercy, is it given to read the mixed celestial cypher: not in mercy, save as a penance merciful in issue.' His mischievous influence over the popular mind is sealed by the partial and latent degree of his insanity, for 'madness that doth least declare itself endangers most, and ever most infects the unsound many.' His great natural powers are tainted by the one black spot; his youth has been devoted to books, to the study of chemistry and mechanics; his manhood to observing 'the ways of men and policies of state' in the court of Edred; 'and were he not pushed sometimes past the confines of his reason, he would o'ertop the world.' Next to him in interest comes Earl Leolf, from whose lips proceed some of the finest poetry in the play, especially that exquisite soliloquy[8] on the sea-shore at Hastings. Athulf, the brother of Elgiva, is another happy portrait—a man bright and jocund as the morn, who can and will detect the springs of fruitfulness and joy in earth's waste places, and whose bluff dislike of Dunstan is aptly illustrated in the scene where he brings the king's commands, and is kept waiting by the monks during Dunstan's matutinal flagellation:—

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'Athulf. But, sirs, it is in haste—in haste extreme—
Matters of state, and hot with haste.

Second Monk. My lord,
We will so say, but truly at this present
He is about to scourge himself.

Athulf. I'll wait.
For a king's ransom would I not cut short
So good a work! I pray you, for how long?

Second Monk. For twice the *De Profundis*, sung in slow time.

Athulf. Please him to make it ten times, I will wait.
And could I be of use, this knotted trifle,
This dog-whip here has oft been worse employed.'

In his recent play, *The Virgin Widow* (1850), Mr Taylor declines from the promise of his earlier efforts. The preface suggests great things; but they are not forthcoming. There is much careful finish, much sententious rhetoric, much elegant description; but there is little of racy humour (the play is a 'romantic comedy'), little of poetical freshness, little of lively flesh and blood portraiture, and more of melodramatic expedience than dramatic construction. Neither comedy nor melodrama is our author's *forte*.

In 1836 Mr Taylor published *The Statesman*, a book which contained the 'views and maxims respecting the transaction of public business,' which had been suggested to its author by twelve years' experience of official life. He has since then allowed that it was wanting in that general interest which might possibly have been felt in the results of a more extensive and varied conversancy with public life.[9] In 1848 he produced *Notes from Life*, professedly a kind of supplemental volume to the former, embodying the conclusions of an attentive observation of life at large. The first essay investigates in detail the right measure and manner to be adopted in getting, saving, spending, giving, taking, lending, borrowing, and bequeathing 'money;' and a weighty, valuable essay it is, with no lack of golden grains and eke of diamond-dust in its composition. The thoughts are not given in the bullion lump, but are well refined, and having passed through the engraver's hands, they shine with the true polish, ring with the true sound. In terse, pregnant, and somewhat oracular diction, we are here instructed how to avoid the evils contingent upon bold commercial enterprise—how to guard against excesses of the accumulative instinct—how to exercise a thoroughly conscientious mode of regulating expenditure, eschewing prodigality, that vice of a weak nature, as avarice is of a strong one—how to be generous in giving; 'for the essence of generosity is in self-sacrifice, waste, on the contrary, comes always by self-indulgence'—how to withstand solicitations for loans, when the loans are to accommodate weak men in sacrificing the

future to the present. The essay on *Humility and Independence* is equally good, and pleasantly demonstrates

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the proposition, that Humility is the true mother of Independence; and that Pride, which is so often supposed to stand to her in that relation, is in reality the step-mother by whom is wrought the very destruction and ruin of Independence. False humilities are ordered into court, and summarily convicted by this single-eyed judge, whose cross-examination of these 'sham respectabilities' elicits many a suggestive practical truth. There is more of philosophy and prudence than of romance in the excursus on *Choice in Marriage*; but the philosophy is shrewd and instructive, uttering many a homely hint of value in its way: as where we are reminded that if marrying *for* money is to be justified only in the case of those unhappy persons who are fit for nothing better, it does not follow that marrying *without* money is to be justified in others; and again, that the negotiations and transactions connected with marriage-settlements are eminently useful, as searching character and testing affection, before an irrevocable step be taken; and again, that when two very young persons are joined together in matrimony, it is as if one sweet-pea should be put as a prop to another. The essay on *Wisdom* is elevated and thoughtful, like most of the essayist's papers, but somewhat too heavy for miscellaneous readers. With his wonted clearness he distinguishes Wisdom from understanding, talents, capacity, ability, sagacity, sense, &c. and defines it as that exercise of the reason into which the heart enters—a structure of the understanding rising out of the moral and spiritual nature. Then follows a section on *Children*, which explodes not a few educational fallacies, and propounds certain articles of faith and practice wholesome for these times, though it will probably wear a prim and quakerish aspect to the admirers of Jean Paul's famous tractate[10] on the same theme. The concluding paper in this series, entitled *The Life Poetic*, is the liveliest, if not the most valuable of the six: it has, however, been charged, with considerable show of justice, with a tendency to strip genius of all that is individual and spontaneous, or to accredit it only 'when it moves abroad sedately, clad in the uniform of a peculiar college.' Mr Taylor's 'solicitous and premeditated formalism' of poetical doctrine is, it must be confessed, a little too strait-laced. The true poet is born, not made. Still, in their place, our author's dogmas have their use, and might, if duly marked and inwardly digested, annually deter many aspirants who are *not* poets from proving so incontestably to the careless public that negative fact.

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Notes from Books followed within a few months, but met with a less cordial reception. Of the four essays comprised in this volume, three are reprinted contributions to the *Quarterly Review*, being criticisms on the poetry of Wordsworth and Aubrey de Vere; and worthily do they illustrate—those on Wordsworth at least—Mr Taylor's composite faculty of depth and delicacy in poetical exposition. Of Wordsworth's many and gifted commentators—among them Wilson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Lamb, Moir, Sterling—few have shewn a happier insight into the idiosyncrasy, or done more justice to the beauties of the patriarch of the Lakes. With Wordsworth for a subject, and the *Quarterly Review* for a 'door of utterance,' Mr Taylor is quite in his element. The fourth essay, on the *Ways of the Rich and Great*, is enriched with wise saws and modern instances. Its *materiel* is composed of ripe observation and reflective good sense; but the manner is objected to as marred by conceits of style—a sin not very safely to be committed by so stern a censor of it in others. His authoritative air in laying down the law is also occasionally unpleasing to some readers; and great as his tact in essay-writing is, he wants that easy grace and pervading *bonhomie* which imparts such a charm to the works of one with whom he has been erroneously identified—the anonymous author of *Friends in Council*. But, after all, he is one of those writers to whom our current literature is really indebted, and whose sage, sententious, and well-hammered thoughts may be profitably, as well as safely, commended to every thinking soul among us.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[2] *Notes from Life.*

[3] Ibid.

[4] *Literary Remains.*

[5] *Lectures on the History of France.*

[6] Namely, Jacques van Artevelde, 'the noblest and the wisest man that ever ruled in Ghent,' and whom the factious citizens slew at his own door.

[7] Duke of Burgundy, in the last scene of Part II.

[8] Beginning:—

> 'Rocks that beheld my boyhood! Perilous shelf
> That nursed my infant courage! Once again
> I, stand before you—not as in other days

In your gray faces smiling; but like you
The worse for weather.'...

How sweet the lines:—

The sun shall soon
Dip westerly; but oh! how little like
Are life's two twilights! Would the last were first,
And the first last! that so we might he soothed
Upon the thoroughfares of busy life
Beneath the noon-day sun, with hope of joy
Fresh as the morn,' &c.
—*Act II. scene ii.*

[9] Preface to *Notes from Life.*

[10] *Levana*, of which an able translation was published by Messrs Longman in 1848.

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RAILWAY JUBILEE IN AMERICA.

The opening in September last of the grand railway which unites Massachusetts with British North America is one of the most noticeable events of our times. Before this, the commercial path of transit from Europe lay from the Atlantic up the St Lawrence, the navigation of which—at all times difficult and dangerous—is closed by ice during five months of the year, and thus all intercourse through the States, except by sleighs, stopped. Now, goods may be brought direct to Boston and shipped to Europe, or unshipped at Boston for the Canadas without interruption. But in a moral and social point of view, the subject is still more important. Rivalry and bad feeling vanish before intercourse, and the locomotive mows down prejudices faster than corn falls before the Yankee reaping-machine.

When I heard that there was to be a *procession*, the word vulgarised the whole affair. It conjured up before my mind's eye our doings of the sort in England, with the Lord Mayor's Show at the head of them; and I concluded that the Yankee attempt would be still more trashy. Let us see how it turned out. I send you a newspaper for the details; but *here* you must be a spectator, with the whole picture dashing, mass by mass, upon your sensorium.

As the first requisite for enjoyment, it was a glorious day even for this climate. Nothing shews off a pageant like fine weather. I left home shortly after daybreak, and went to the Common, as it is called—a Park about as large as St James's, handsomely laid out, with long alleys, some parallel, others crossing at various angles, and all shaded by fine trees. The scene presented by this Park reminded me of Camacho's wedding in *Don Quixote*, on a large scale. There stood the tent for the banquet, constructed to dine 3000 persons, and decorated with the flags of America and England streaming from the top, with the flags of other nations below. Close by, were large tents for the preparation of viands, surrounded with all the paraphernalia of a feast. In various places, booths had been erected by the city, for the gratuitous supply of all comers with pure iced water, and these were thronged throughout the day, especially with children. The pedestrian portion of the procession assembled in the Park, while the vehicles crowded all the adjacent streets. And now might be observed the various societies, with their bands of music; volunteer companies marching here and there, getting into step, arranging their order and practising their tunes. I was chatting with a raw Vermonter, who was as much a stranger as myself. 'In the name of creation,' he suddenly exclaimed, 'what tarnal screeching is that yonder?' 'That,' I said, 'is the bagpipes, the national music of Scotland.' 'That?' said he: 'it would clear a State of racoons in no time!' But the Scots had determined to shine, and they advanced:

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a tall Highlander first, in full costume, and blowing the pipes at his loudest; after him ten others, in full Highland costume, with a banner—the Scottish Friends; and about 200 with silk sashes, and walking three abreast. The Catholic Irishmen followed, with a banner displaying a portrait of the Pope and other Catholic emblems; and directly after came the Protestant Irishmen, with their banners and music. Why will they not associate thus in their own land? A very interesting portion of the assembling was a party of about a thousand fine-looking, hardy men, all remarkably clean, dressed in labourers' costume—blue blouses and white trousers—headed by a band of music playing Irish popular tunes, with a large banner of the stars and stripes, and the word 'Liberty,' with the inscription—'The Irish Labourers. Under this we find Protection for our Labour.'

The Park is an irregular square. On the north side, on the highest point of the city, stands the State-House, where the legislature meets. Near that is the house which was formerly inhabited by the governor, at the time the British flag waved where there now fly, glancing in the sun, the stars and stripes. As the president was expected at the State-House, and the procession was to start from thence, that was the point of attraction, where the spectators formed into a vast, dense, and steady mass. We English are in the habit of seeing the paraphernalia of courts, and are slow to disconnect the ideas of pomp and state from the persons of those who hold power and distinction; but the chief of this great nation, together with the secretary of state, had arrived in town by railway in an ordinary carriage, without the least parade, and the corporation had hired for the occasion an open carriage-and-four—such an equipage as would have passed quite unnoticed in an English provincial town. Let me here observe, that by an ordinary carriage I mean a carriage open to all; for in America there are no locomotive distinctions of 1st, 2d, and 3d classes. I never saw expectation more on tiptoe. A rattle round the corner was heard; then the noise of the wheels ceased, and then the president—a tall, gentlemanly-looking, elderly man—was ascending the steps of the State-House; and as soon as his gray locks were seen by the immense multitude, such a shout arose as only Anglo-Saxon lungs can raise and prolong. The president turned round on the landing of the steps, took off his hat, bowed, and entered the hall. I have seen many ceremonies, regal and imperial, which passed off very much like a scene at a theatre; but I felt the sublime simplicity of this. There is no road to distinction here but talent; and as the fine old man stood on the steps bowing, with Mr Webster, Secretary of State, by his side, they looked the very embodiment of intellect, and the manly, overpowering shout of the crowd the recognition of it. The multitudinous voices died away in the distance with a peculiar effect. No firing of guns. While

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on this part of the subject, I may mention my strong impression, that in no place is the government so much respected as in America. The public press may ridicule and joke upon certain acts of individuals; but whatever side is taken, there is nothing that can bring the laws, or those who administer them, into disrespect. This produces order to an extent unknown elsewhere. No one seems to question the law or the commands of its officers excepting Europeans, who bring their turbulent habits with them.

Leaving this imposing scene, I turned to the route of the procession, which had been advertised to pass through certain streets. In some degree to account for the masses of human beings that filled them, the three railways had kept pouring people in for three days, and the trains, immediately on arrival, turned back to fetch the thousands they had left waiting at the stations. It was said that there never was such a gathering in one place since the independence of the States. The arrangements of the pageant were made by the committee of the city; but the audience, or public, arranged themselves, and never was there anything better done. Along the whole line of streets, about three miles in length, the goods had been removed from the shop-windows, and their places filled with ladies. Every window that commanded a view was appropriated to females and children, who were likewise in many cases on the tops of the houses. Men occupied the pavement to the kerbstone. The roadway was kept by deputy-marshals, who rode up and down, in black dress suits, cocked, open hats, and white sashes; and in this vast assemblage their every request was immediately attended to. At the end of every street, carriages of all descriptions were placed, filled with people. As an instance of the courtesy of the spectators, my wife had handed our Little Red Ridinghood to some gentleman on the top of an omnibus, who very kindly held her up to see the show, and took charge of her while Mrs W—— found her way to the window where her place had been kept. If anything could mark the kindly disposition and good order of the crowd, it was the fact, that although I should think all the children in the city were there, not one was hurt, but everybody exerted himself to accommodate this interesting portion of the community. Across the streets, and at all available points, the stars and stripes waved proudly in the air, and altogether the scene was most beautiful and imposing. I walked the whole length of the route before the procession moved, and the *coup d'oeil* was perfect. The military portion looked remarkably well; but when the open carriage appeared in which rode Lord Elgin and his friends, the representative of Great Britain was greeted with such shouts and by such waving of handkerchiefs from the windows by crowds of elegantly dressed females, as I am sure his lordship can never forget. On his part, Lord Elgin continued bowing in acknowledgment, almost without intermission, for two hours and twenty minutes—the time occupied in passing.

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Nearly equal to this was the enthusiasm elicited by the appearance of an open carriage, drawn by four grays, and containing only two men, wellnigh ninety years of age, then the sole survivors, in the State of Massachusetts, of those who fought in the War of Independence. It is the custom to shew honour to the survivors of that event on all public occasions. On the 4th of July last, the last public gathering, there were four in the carriage: two are gone. Before the carriage, was carried the banner of Washington, used in the struggle. When these old men raised their withered hands to remove their hats, in reply to the welcome of the crowd, they appeared like spirits of the past. In all probability, they will not appear in public again; but the fruits of their courage will live for ever. The appropriateness and beauty of the arrangement of details were remarkable in the representation of the particular trades. The most imposing objects were the two new locomotives, shining brilliantly in their might of brass and steel, and richly painted; and as they loomed in sight, turning the bends of the streets, they were truly magnificent and appropriate objects. Each was raised upon a car, so that, on the whole, it was thirty feet high; it was drawn by eighteen iron-gray horses, all in line, decorated with blue ribbons, and handsomely caparisoned; each horse being led by a workman, in clean, new, working costume. The next was a procession on foot. Eight negroes, in Eastern costume, walked as guards round a platform, carried palanquin-fashion by four negroes, with 5000 ounces of manufactured silver-plate, built up in a pyramid, and forming a splendid object, fully equal in workmanship to anything of the kind I have seen. A very interesting part of the pageant was the children of the different schools, in four-wheeled cars, covered with drapery, and decorated with flowers and plants; and it was really pleasing to see the happy little creatures enjoying such a holiday as they would never forget. It is impossible to give a third of the details of this unique procession; but I cannot omit to notice the last feature—the labourers on their truck-horses. These were the carmen of the town. Their clean, healthy, happy faces, with their glossy horses, decorated with ribbons, made me regard them as the best and proudest cavalry a nation could have. These are all men who, a very short time since, landed from the Old World—fugitives from misery and starvation.

I had a ticket offered me for the banquet, but I preferred being outside among the people. I have had enough of dinner-speeches in my time, although this occasion was one of peculiar interest. The Park continued to be crowded to excess; and as the company arrived, they were greeted by the people and the bands of music stationed here and there. But what sound is that? They are drinking toasts within; and one is now given which stirs the vast multitude like an electrical shock. I cannot hear at first, the roar is so

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deafening: but presently I am able to analyse the sounds that have caused the commotion; and I confess it is with a beating heart, and a sort of choking sensation in the throat, I hear every lip repeat—'The Queen of England!' and every band in the Park take up from the music in the tent our own national strain, till the whole atmosphere vibrates with *God save the Queen!* The effect was magical, and I felt gratified beyond measure—not alone at the compliment to our country, but as evidence that the Anglo-Saxons are still one great community, and that the proceedings of that day would rivet between the two countries the bond of common blood. The day closed as happily as it had begun, and the streets were crowded up to a late hour. I was in all the thickest of the press, and I know that there was not a single accident, nor did I see or hear of any instance of drunkenness or disorder. All was harmony and good-humour.

I would mention, as a strong proof of the growing interest felt for the old country here, in New England especially, that almost every family is desirous of being known to be connected with it. They have all English names; and a numerous society have employed a gentleman of skill in such matters for the last ten years in England in tracing out the English branches of the different families, in the State, so as to have the genealogy complete. This has become a passion; and I have found every person I met who could trace his descent from the mother-country proud of it. I fell in, the other day, with a highly intelligent American, who told me with quite a feeling of pride, that his grandfather and grandmother were English, and his wife's father a Scot.

THINGS TALKED OF IN LONDON.

January 1852.

Notwithstanding our busy and acquisitive propensities, we of the metropolis have found time to wish one another a happy new-year, and to send friendly greetings to our country cousins also. We don't like to take the step from one year into another without a *coup d'amitie*. Besides all which, we are in the habit of considering ourselves at the present season more than ever entitled to partake of the recreations offered us, whether theatrical, musical, pictorial, saltatorial, philosophical, or scientific. And so, while simple-minded people are looking into the new almanacs to test the accuracy of the predictions, I must try to fill a page or two with such matters of talk as will bear reproduction in print.

First of all, among the discussions and communications at the Astronomical Society, it is stated that the term 'meteoric astronomy' is one which we shall shortly be able to use with almost absolute certainty, as M. Petit of Toulouse has succeeded in determining the orbits of meteors relatively to the sun as well as to the earth. His conclusions are

considered valuable, especially with respect to the meteor of August 19, 1847, which, it appears,

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came ’from the regions of space beyond our system;’ having, as is estimated, occupied more than 373,000 years in passing from its point of departure to its fall in the North Sea, near the shores of Belgium! This is another addition to our knowledge of meteoric phenomena which affords promise of further results. Certain members of the same society are still at work on what has been a tedious task—the restoration of the standard yard, rendered necessary, as you will remember, by the destruction of the original in the Parliament-House conflagration, more than ten years ago. The work proceeds slowly but surely, as the extremest pains are taken to insure accuracy, the measurements, bisections, and graduations being read off with a microscope. When finished, it will be centuplicated or more, if necessary, and, as is said, a copy deposited in every corporate town in the kingdom. This restoration of the standard is not so easy a task as would be commonly supposed, for apart from the determination of the yard with mathematical accuracy, alternations of heat and cold have to be taken into account; for, as is well known, a strip of metal which measures thirty-six inches long in a temperature of 70 degrees, will not measure the same in 50 degrees. Connected with this subject, it was stated at one of the meetings of the society, that the ancient Saxon yard was nearly identical with the modern French *metre*; whence a suggestion of ’the possibility of the Saxon yard being actually derived from a former measure of the earth, made at a period beyond the range of history, the results of which have been preserved during many centuries of barbarism.’ Be this as it may, we are now given to understand that the Egyptian Pyramids, whether originally erected for purposes of sepulture or not, are, at the same time, definite portions of a degree of the earth’s surface in the meridian of Egypt; and it has been proposed, as these mighty structures are far more durable even now than anything which we could build in England, that when our standard shall be re-established, the length shall be cut on the side of one of the pyramids, together with such explanatory particulars as may he necessary, so as to preserve the record for all coming time. Modern science thus availing itself of the labours of the past, would be a remarkable incident in the history of philosophy.

The appearance of extraordinary spots on the sun has attracted a more than ordinary degree of attention to that luminary, and to Mr J. Nasmyth’s ‘views respecting the source of light,’ which, though published a few months since, are now again talked about. Mr Nasmyth, after several years’ observation, comes to the conclusion, ’that whatever be the source of light, its production appears to result from an action induced on the *exterior surface* of the solar sphere;’ and he believes it reasonable to ’consider the true source of the latent element of light to reside, *not in the solar orb*, but in space itself; and that the grand

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function and duty of the sun is to act as an agent for the bringing forth into vivid existence its due portion of the illuminating or luciferous element; which element he supposes to be diffused throughout the boundless regions of space, and which in that case must be perfectly exhaustless. Further, assuming this luciferous element to be not equally diffused through space, we find a reason why in some ages of the earth's history the heat should have been greater than at others, why stars have been seen to vary in brightness, and why there was that puzzle to geologists—a glacial period. During that period, according to Mr Nasmyth, with whose words I finish this part of my communication, 'an arctic climate spread from the poles towards the equator, and left the record of such a condition in glacial handwriting on the mountain walls of our elder mountain ravines, of which there is such abundant and unquestionable evidence.'

Our Microscopical Society have made a discovery in an all but invisible subject: they now state the *Volvox globator* to be a vegetable, and not, as has long been supposed, an animal, as its cells, presumed to be ova, are produced in the same way as in certain kinds of *algae*. In the discussion excited by this announcement, it came out that several other minute forms, classed by Ehrenberg among living animalcules, are in reality vegetable; which, if true, shews that a good deal of microscopical work will have to be done over again. The Syro-Egyptian Society, too, have heard something relating to the same subject—a paper on Ehrenberg's examination by the microscope of the anciently deposited alluvium of the Nile, from which it appears that 'microscopic animals' in countless numbers were the cause of the remarkable fertility of the soil, and not vegetable or unctuous matters. Talking of deposits reminds me of a little fact which I must not forget to mention—the finding of a fossil reptile in the 'Old Red' of your county of Moray is, barring the alarm, as much a cause of astonishment to our geologists, as was the mark of the foot on the sand to Robinson Crusoe.

Now for a few gatherings from the continent. M. Chalambel has laid before the Academie at Paris a 'Note on a Modification to be introduced in the Preparation of Butter, which improves its Quality and prolongs its Preservation.' 'If butter,' he observes, 'contained only the fat parts of milk, it would undergo only very slow alterations when in contact with the air; but it retains a certain quantity of *caseum*, found in the cream, which caseum, by its fermentation, produces butyric-acid, and to which is owing the disagreeable flavour of rancid butter. The usual washing of butter rids it but very imperfectly of this cause of alteration, for the water does not wet the butter, and cannot dissolve the caseum, which has become insoluble under the influence of the acids that develop themselves in the cream. A more complete separation would be obtained if these acids were saturated; the caseum would again be soluble, and consequently the quantity retained in the butter would be almost entirely carried away by the washing-water.'

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The remedy proposed is: ’When the cream is in the churn, pour in—a little at a time, and keep stirring—enough of lime-wash to destroy the acidity entirely. The cream is then to be churned until the butter separates; but before it forms into lumps, the buttermilk is to be poured off, and replaced by cold water, in which the churning is to be continued until the butter is complete, when it is to be taken from the churn and treated as usual. I have,’ says M. Chalambel, ’by following this method, obtained butter always better, and which kept longer, than when made in the ordinary way. The buttermilk, deprived of its sharp taste, was drunk with pleasure by men and animals, and had lost its laxative properties.’ By means of lime-wash or lime-water, he has restored butter so ‘far gone’ that it could only have been recovered by melting; but any alkaline lixivium will answer the same purpose.

I have more than once kept you informed of the inquiry concerning the effects of iodine on the human system, which has so long engaged the attention of several eminent chemists on the continent; and now have to report something further by M. Fourcault, whose communication thereupon to the Academie is entitled, ’On the Absence of Iodine in Water and Alimentary Substances, considered as Cause of Goitre and Cretinism, and on the Means of Preventing the Development of these Affections.’ He has investigated the subject profoundly and analytically, and concludes that ’the absence or insufficiency of iodine in water and in alimentary substances, is to be considered as the primitive cause, special or *sui generis*, of goitre and Cretinism;’ that the existence of the diseases does not depend on the presence more or less of sulphate of lime or magnesia in the animal economy; that ’iodine acts in goitre as iron in chlorosis—by restoring to the system one of its essential principles;’ and that ’the most powerful secondary or auxiliary causes are: a coarse and uniform vegetable regimen; living at the bottom of deep, enclosed valleys; in low and damp houses, into which air and light penetrate with difficulty; the alliance of infected families among themselves; and the want of such employment as would yield a comfortable subsistence and proper development of the physical forces.’ In commenting on these statements, Baron Thenard observed that M. Chatain, in the course of his able researches on iodine, had analysed the waters of those Alpine valleys most subject to goitre, and found that mineral almost entirely wanting. And it has been proved that sea-salt, containing a minute quantity of ioduret of potassium, acted as a preservative from goitre on all the inhabitants of a district who made use of it. The air, too, has been examined as well as the water, and, so far as yet ascertained, the proportion of iodine in the atmosphere is variable, and much greater in amount in some regions than in others. The activity prevailing in this particular branch of inquiry is the more encouraging, as the maladies which it aims at removing are of so peculiarly distressing a nature; and the investigation is one likely to lead also to valuable incidental results.

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Next, M. Abeille, chief physician to the hospital at Ajaccio, has an interesting communication—On the employment of electricity to counteract the accidents arising from too long inhalation of ether or chloroform. He found that patients submitted to galvano-puncture could not be rendered insensible by the effects of ether—the galvanism invariably restored sensation—and taking this accidentally-discovered fact as the basis of further research, he set to work and made a series of experiments on living animals, and arrived at results which in a brief summary are: that electricity, made to operate by means of needles implanted in several parts of the body, especially in the direction of the cerebro-spinal axis, reawakes sensibility, and immediately puts the relaxed muscles into play. 'It constitutes,' he adds, 'according to my experiments, the most prompt and efficacious means—I may say the only efficacious—to restore to life any person whose inhalation of chloroform has been prolonged beyond the time prescribed by prudence. It is the first means to which recourse ought to be had; and trials made in other ways appeared to me to lead to nothing but loss of time, which in many cases would be fatal.'

M.H. Deschamps says, that there is a 'certain sign of death,' which, if attended to, will entirely prevent risk of that much-dreaded accident—premature interment. It is a certain green tinge which always makes its appearance on the abdomen, even before the cadaverous smell, and is a positive evidence that decomposition has begun. There are some people to whom the knowledge of this fact will be a satisfaction; but if, as is popularly supposed, bodies are not unfrequently buried alive, how is it that we never hear of a revival in a dissecting-room? Then, on another point of physiology, M. Payerne states, with regard to the distress experienced by many persons in the ascent of a high mountain, 'that the lassitude and breathlessness felt in elevated places appear to proceed, not from an insufficiency of oxygen, but rather from the rupture of the equilibrium between the tension of the fluids contained in our organs and that of the ambient air, whatever be the way in which the rupture is produced.' And, to close these physiological matters, M. Chuart begs the Academie to include among their premiums for rendering arts or trades less insalubrious, one for 'different inventions designed to diminish the frequency of accidents which take place in coal-mines from explosions of gas.' How much such inventions are needed, recent events in our own coal districts but too painfully demonstrate.

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Our Meteorological Society may perhaps take a hint from M. Liais's suggestion as to the 'possibility of applying photography to determine the height of clouds, and to the observation of shooting-stars;' and M.F. Cailliaud, director of the museum at Nantes, says something not uninteresting to naturalists—namely, that the statements commonly made, that all molluscous animals perforate stone by means of an acid, is not the fact with regard to *Pholades* and *Tarets*. He observes, that although a workman would be amazed on hearing a proposition to pierce calcareous stone with the shell of a *Pholas*, yet he himself has done it, and holds the success to be a proof that the animal can do the same. The idea of the acid might be accepted, while it was proved that the creatures were to be found only in limestone; but now that he has sent to the Academie specimens of gneiss and mica schist, containing pholades, on which the acid has no effect, he conceives that they must have entered by boring. They have also been found in porphyry—a fact of which Brongniart said, many years ago, that nature had concealed the explanation, and we must wait for a solution. Whether M. Cailliaud's solution be the true one or not, is a point that will soon be verified or disproved by geologists and naturalists, who are never better pleased than when an inquiry, which may lead to new views of nature, opens before them.

That the age of great books is not past, is proved by an arrival from America—the United States' government having presented to several public and private institutions in this country, a large, handsome quarto, which contains, to quote the whole title, *Historical and Statistical Information respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States, collected and prepared under the Direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, per Act of Congress*. The preparation and arrangement of this work having been intrusted to Mr Schoolcraft is a sufficient guarantee for its value. It throws much light on the Indian tribes of North America, and rectifies many erroneous ideas and impressions concerning them and their origin. Perhaps you will allow me to give you, in a few words, the author's views on this part of the subject. He considers the ancient monuments, found in parts of the United States and in Mexico, to have originated within five hundred years of the dispersion from Babel; that the Indians are the Almogic branch of the Eber-ites; and that the ancient monuments do not denote so high a degree of civilisation as is generally supposed. It is only since the discovery of America by Europeans that anything like certainty attaches to the history of the natives. The Mohicans 'preserve the memory of the appearance and voyage of Hudson, up the river bearing his name, in 1609;' and among other tribes similar traditions are retained. In the wrong-headedness and persistence of idea, the Indians entirely resemble the Oriental branches of

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the great Semitic family; and the evidence shews that originally they crossed over from Asia at Behring's Strait, a voyage still performed in canoes to the present day. One of the titles of Montezuma was Lord of the Seven Caves; and the caves in which tradition says the traverse took place, are taken to be the caves or subterranean abodes still used by the Aleutian islanders. This was current among the Aztecs in 1519, and the voyage of the United States' Exploring Expedition has furnished a philological proof of connection, in the peculiar termination of nouns in *tl*, which is common to the inhabitants of Nootka Sound, as it was to the Aztecs. The more the Indians are studied, the more does everything about them appear to be Eastern—their language, religion, calendar, architecture, &c. Their worship of fire in the open air, avoiding the use of temples, is precisely that of Zoroaster, as is also their leading doctrine of two spirits—good and evil—ruling the world; and the allegory of the *egg of Ormuzd* has been found in an earthwork on the top of a hill in Adams's County, Ohio. 'It represents the coil of a serpent, 700 feet long, but it is thought would reach, if deprived of its curves, 1000 feet. The jaws of the serpent are represented as widely distended, as if in the act of swallowing. In the interstice is an oval or egg-shaped mound.' This repetition of a symbol is considered as further proof of Eastern derivation.

Do not suppose, however, that this is a sample of the whole volume, for ample details and information are given on all matters connected with the Indians—their arts, habits, pursuits, pictorial literature (so to speak), sports, and agriculture. Some idea of their capabilities in husbandry may be gathered from the fact, that in Michigan, ancient 'garden-beds' have been discovered, extending for 150 miles along the banks of rivers. Students will find a mine of information in this book, which, though but the first of a series, contains nearly 600 pages—a rare feast for ethnologists.

The Royal Irish Academy in Dublin have published a report of their proceedings, which comprise reports on rain-falls, meteors, ancient urns, and other Irish antiquities, besides Roman and Carthaginian; on hygrometry, chiefly with regard to the pressure of the dew-point; and on artificial islands. Of the latter, it appears that several exist in different parts of Ireland; but the one to which attention is particularly directed is near Strokestown, Roscommon. The lake Clonfinlough having been drained by the Board of Works, the structure of the islet, which had long occupied its centre, was laid bare. It proved to be about 130 feet in diameter, constructed on oak piles, forming a sort of 'triple stockade,' with stems laid flat towards the centre for a floor, over which earth, clay, and marl were heaped, with two flat irregular stone-floors covering the whole at different depths below the surface. Two canoes were also found,

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each hollowed out of a single tree, and a great collection of miscellaneous ornaments and domestic utensils—all of which being illustrative of different periods of Irish history, will receive due attention at the hands of Irish antiquaries. Visitors to the Society's Museum will be gratified to know that Mr Petrie is preparing a catalogue of that valuable and interesting assemblage of rarities. He is to begin with the Stone Period, and come down to the Bronze and Iron, according to their respective dates, with dissertations prefixed. This is following the good example set by your Scottish Society of Antiquaries.

It is a fact honourable to the society that they do not confine their honours exclusively to contributors to their own 'Transactions.' At their late anniversary, they gave their gold medal to the Rev. J.H. Jellett, for his labours in treating the noblest mathematical subjects in a way to make them intelligible to students. As the president said in his address: 'Descending from the more desirable position of an inventor to the humbler but more useful one of enabling others to place themselves on a level with himself, by compiling for their use an excellent elementary treatise, he has conferred on his species a benefit of the highest order,' in a work which otherwise was 'as little likely to be given to the world as it was desirable that it should be so.'

It is time to close; but I must first clear off a few miscellaneous items. The Admiralty Report concerning the Arctic expeditions is canvassed pretty freely, and with significant hints that justice has not been rendered in its conclusions. We can only hope that really efficient commanders will be sent out with the expedition that is to be despatched in April or May next; if not, it will be abortive, as the others have been, and we shall never know what has become of Franklin. It appears that the news of Collinson's ships being on their return is unfounded. It was communicated from the United States, and has been contradicted; and for all we know to the contrary, Collinson and his coadjutor Maclure may come home next summer by way of Baffin's Bay. There are now 226 telegraph stations connected with the central establishment in Lothbury, behind the Bank of England. Of these, 70 are principal stations, at which the attendance is day and night; and in the whole, a distance of 2500 miles is embraced, with 800 more over which the wires are now being stretched. The charges for transmission of messages have been lowered with a beneficial result, the business of the telegraph having greatly increased. There must be a still further reduction before the 'thought-flasher' becomes as generally available here as it is in America. It is now in real earnest going to Ireland. A ship has been despatched to fetch Cleopatra's so-called 'needle:' the Panopticon at length has found a local habitation, and is assuming a tangible form in the shape of bricks and mortar: ocean steamers are more than ever talked about; and

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every month a new one, better than all before, is launched: gold, too, is a favourite topic; and Australian and Californian mining-shares are plentiful in the market; so also are those of Irish Waste-Land Improvement Companies, who, in addition to the reclamation, propose to grow beet-root, flax, and chicory. At last we have got one or two penny news-rooms—not so good, however, as yours in Edinburgh; and a project is mooted to establish reading and waiting rooms combined, in different parts of the capital. There is talk, too, of central railway termini, of new bridges, new streets, and of converting Kennington Common into a park—how soon to be realised remains to be seen.

THE TURN OF LIFE.

From forty to sixty, a man who has properly regulated himself, may be considered as in the prime of life. His matured strength of constitution renders him almost impervious to the attacks of disease, and experience has given his judgment the soundness of almost infallibility. His mind is resolute, firm, and equal; all his functions are in the highest order; he assumes the mastery over business; builds up a competence on the foundation he has formed in early manhood, and passes through a period of life attended by many gratifications. Having gone a year or two past sixty, he arrives at a critical period in the road of existence; the river of death flows before him, and he remains at a stand-still. But athwart this river is a viaduct, called ‘The turn of Life,’ which, if crossed in safety, leads to the valley, ‘Old Age.’ The bridge is constructed of fragile materials, and it depends upon how it is trodden whether it bend or break. Gout, apoplexy, and other bad characters are also in the vicinity to waylay the traveller, and thrust him from the pass; but let him gird up his loins, and provide himself with a fitting staff, and he may trudge on in safety with perfect composure. To quit a metaphor, the ‘Turn of Life’ is a turn either into a prolonged walk or into the grave. The system and power having reached their utmost expansion, now begin either to close like flowers at sunset, or break down at once. One injudicious stimulant—a single fatal excitement, may force it beyond its strength—whilst a careful supply of props, and the withdrawal of all that tends to force a plant, will sustain it in beauty and in vigour until night has entirely set.—*The Science of Life, by a Physician*.

NERVE.

An Indian sword-player declared at a great public festival, that he could cleave, vertically, a small lime laid on a man’s palm without injury to the member; and the general (Sir Charles Napier) extended his right hand for the trial. The sword-player, awed by his rank, was reluctant, and cut the fruit horizontally. Being urged to fulfil his

boast, he examined the palm, said it was not one to be experimented on with safety, and refused to proceed. The general

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then extended his left hand, which was admitted to be suitable in form; yet the Indian still declined the trial; and when pressed, twice waved his thin, keen-edged blade, as if to strike, and twice withheld the blow, declaring he was uncertain of success. Finally, he was forced to make trial, and the lime fell open, cleanly divided: the edge of the sword had just marked its passage over the skin without drawing a drop of blood!—*Sir Charles Napier's Administration in Scinde*.

WIRE USED IN EMBROIDERY.

In the manufacture of embroidery fine threads of silver gilt are used. To produce these, a bar of silver, weighing 180 ounces, is gilt with an ounce of gold; this bar is then wire-drawn until it is reduced to a thread so fine that 3400 feet of it weigh less than an ounce. It is then flattened by being submitted to a severe pressure between rollers, in which process its length is increased to 4000 feet. Each foot of the flattened wire weighs, therefore, the 4000th part of an ounce. But as in the processes of wire-drawing and rolling the proportion of the two metals is maintained, the gold which covers the surface of the fine thread thus produced consists only of the 180th part of its whole weight. Therefore the gold which covers one foot is only the 720,000th part of an ounce, and consequently the gold which covers an inch will be the 8,640,000th part of an ounce. If this inch be again divided into 100 equal parts, each part will be distinctly visible without the aid of a microscope, and yet the gold which covers such visible part will be only the 864,000,000th part of an ounce. But we need not stop even here. This portion of the wire may be viewed through a microscope which magnifies 500 times; and by these means, therefore, its 500th part will become visible.—*Lardner's Handbook*.

CHEAP LIVING.

In the interior of Bulgaria and Upper Moesia, the low price of provision and cattle of every description is almost fabulous compared with the prices of Western Europe. A fat sheep or lamb usually costs from 1s. 6d. to 2s.; an ox, 40s.; cows, 30s.; and a horse, in the best possible travelling condition, from L.4 to L.5 sterling; wool, hides, tallow, wax, and honey, are equally low. In the towns and hans by the road-side everything is sold by weight: you can get a pound of meat for a halfpenny, a pound of bread for the same, and wine, which is also sold by weight, costs about the same money. In Servia, pigs everywhere form the staple commodity of the country. I have seen some that, would weigh from 150 lbs. to 200 lbs. or more offered for sale at 300 Turkish piastres the dozen; in the neighbourhood of the Danube they fetch a little more. The expense of keeping these animals in a country abounding with forests being so trifling, and the prospect of gain to the proprietor so certain, we cannot wonder that no landowner is

without them, and that they constitute the richest class in the principality. In fact, pig-jobbers are here men of the highest rank: the prince, his ministers, civil and military governors, are all engaged in this lucrative traffic.—*Spencer's Travels.*

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MOUNTAINS IN SNOW.

Cold—oh, deathly cold—and silent, lie the white hills ’neath
the sky,
Like a soul whom fate has covered with thy snows, Adversity!
Not a sough of wind comes moaning; the same outline, high and
bare,
As in pleasant days of summer, rises in the murky air.

Very quiet—very silent—whether shines the mocking sun
Through the wintry blue, or lowering drift the feathery
snow-clouds dun:
Always quiet, always silent, be it night or be it day,
With that pale shroud coldly lying where the heather-blossoms lay.

Can they be the very mountains that we looked at, you and I?
One long wavy line of purple painted on the sunset sky;
With the new moon’s edge just touching that dark rim, like
dancer’s foot,
Or young Dian’s, on the hill-side for Endymion waiting mute.

O how golden was that even!—O how balm the summer air!
How the bridegroom sky bent loving o’er its earth so virgin fair!
How the earth looked up to heaven like a bride with joy oppressed,
In her thankfulness half-weeping that she was thus overblest!

Ghostly mountains! ‘Silence—silence!’ now is aye your soundless
voice,
Lifted in an awful patience o’er the world’s uproarious noise;
O’er its jarrings and its greetings—o’er its loving and its
hate—
Silence! Bare thy brows all dumbly to the snows of heaven,
and—wait!’

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