





THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 7, 1874

## The New Game of Authors.

How is it possible for judges at a baby show to give a satisfactory award? To say nothing of the satisfaction of parents and friends, there is no evidence of baby criticism in accordance with whose fixed rules and settled principles the umpires may proceed. So all goes by favor and individual fancy, and there have been a hundred sets of judges, each no doubt, who have reached a conclusion different from all others.

No more settled are the canons of literary criticism. Richard Grant White and other literary gentlemen who are preparing lists of "the hundred greatest writers that ever lived" will bear as great a buzz about their ears, as if a score of matrons with eyes of fire and cheeks of flame had come to uphold the honors of their babies. Mr. White, for instance, is able to find room for no American in his list, but, by expending it so as to embrace "all authors of eminent merit," he manages to squeeze in Emerson and Hawthorne.

But why complain? You may as well find fault with a man's preferences in the matter of cooking systems as in his literary tastes, so purely personal are they. Take for instance the one literary judgment which might seem to be universally accepted—the one which hardly a school teacher in the country would hesitate to lay down dogmatically to his pupils, namely, that Shakespeare is the first of poets—we find that no assumption has been made by the best judges. Dr. Johnson is notorious for his moderate estimate of "the first among the sons of song." Charles Lamb says with characteristic felicity of expression that the names of some other poets have a "sweeter relish to the ear" than Milton and Shakespeare. "The sweetest names," which carry a perfume in the mention, are Keats, Marlowe, Dryden, Drummond of Hawthornden and Cowley. Dickens too, had Shakespeare a bore and called Hamlet "that tiresome fellow." If first principles are disputed in this way, of course harmony of opinion on other points is not to be expected.

There is no mathematics in literature, and the different opinions of the multiplication table, concert of action will hardly be attained. There have been many persons well versed in Greek and therefore capable of judging, who preferred Pope's Homer to the original, the version being so free that Bentley told the author that it was "a pretty poem," but he must not call it Homer.

The obvious way to judge of an author's merit is to find out how generally he is read, and how many copies of his works are sold; but it is also the most unjust way. You cannot get at the worth of a writer, as you can get at a squab by his mere weight of matter. If this rule were to be adopted, the "Two Towers"—Martin Parguey and the "Land-would head the list in England and America, while Browning and Lowell would stand ignominiously at the very bottom. Dr. Miller's American Senator asserted with confidence that Watts was the greatest of English poets because his works were "better known and better loved throughout England and America than the whole lot of them." Wordsworth was little read in his own time and has gained but little in popular favor since his death, yet Mr. Parguey, in his "Golden Treasury," which contains perhaps the most pleasing selections from the poets ever made, quotes more from Wordsworth than from any other author.

That one man's merit is another man's poison is doubly true in literature. What a number of times we have been assured that the distinctively American poet had arrived. Walt Whitman was for a long time the foremost aspirant for that honor. Emerson himself gave him a king's nod and foreign admirers were numerous. And all the while the most persons of cultivated minds could see nothing but absolute lawlessness in "Leaves of Grass" and "Drum-Taps." It is only a few months ago that the *Literary World*, a very reputable journal, published an article by Low Wallace's story, "The Fair God," the American novel. We do not know that its opinion was adopted by any other reviewer, and the book is already well forgotten.

There have been numberless "best American poems," the latest being, according to the *Washington Review*, "The Bushman's Road." "The Closing Scene," which is certainly an exquisite production; but there are a score or two more poems in the field claiming the same rank.

The very mention of the name of Victor Hugo will throw some of his literary contemporaries into convulsions, their detestation of his politics undoubtedly affecting on their judgment, but by the greater part of the reading world he is held to be the leading author of the age. It is upon such accidental circumstances that decided opinions often depend. The poems of Ossian were greatly lauded and their writer made a peer of Homer, so long as their antiquity was undisputed, but their popularity declined as soon as their modern authorship was suspected. There was something, however, about their solemn roll and thunder that was always pleasing to the sublime soul of Napoleon.

Officialism, then, being so arbitrary and vacillating in its methods, we need not give that Mr. White and other explorers find few, if any, American poets that are worth their notice. There is some comfort in the knowledge that Emerson is a candidate for the position of Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, that Mark Twain's books are pirated in London and that Tom Hughes is already quoted Lowell's "Biglow Papers." These facts show that the great European mind, which has produced all the good books, is at least dimly conscious of its own greatness. There is still more comfort in the idea that it is quite competent for any person of extensive reading and mature judgment to make up a list of "greatest writers" in which the names of Cotton Mather, Tom Paine, Benji Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, J. Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Channing and all the later worthies of American literature shall appear conspicuous places. Nay, some Maine man might include in his roll of honor John Neal and David Barker and not blush for it. These names are quite as good as several which appear in Mr. White's list.

Judge BLODGETT of Chicago has recently ordered a decision maintaining the right of women to compensation as agents for their husbands. Jonathan Hay, of Freeport, Illinois, became a bankrupt, and certain sewing machines and some other articles of personal property were taken by his creditors under a writ of seizure. His wife and daughter claimed the articles as their private property. It appeared in evidence that Mrs. Hay had been separate and apart from the business of her husband for several years, and that the business depended for success upon her individual skill and energy. She supported her husband, and he showed no ability in any direction except in the way of contracting debts. In 1859 the property acquired by her own skill and labor was sold to satisfy the claims of her husband's creditors. In that same year the law was passed giving to married women their earnings absolutely, and Mrs. Hay again went to work. She furnished her husband money to open a music store in 1871, and acted as his agent in the sale of musical instruments. The express understanding was that she should receive a specified commission on every sale. The court remarked that this understanding was unnecessary, as the law gave her earnings with or without her husband's consent, and that the transaction could not be regarded as made by him with a third party. In 1873 she purchased ten sewing machines (being the sewing machines in question) of him, paying therefor \$500 cash, having borrowed the money for the purpose. The court decided that the purchase was fair and open, and that therefore the property must be returned to Mrs. Hay by the assignee.

We have the best authority for stating that a London gentleman representing a banking house in that city, has been in this city, Montreal and other points on the line of the Portland and Ogdensburg railroad making inquiry into its future prospects and the character of its management, and the negotiation of the company's bonds. This has been brought about by the influence of Sir Hugh Allan, who is personally interested in the completion of the line. United States railroad securities do not have a flattering reputation in the English market, but the amount of essential oil in onions is so great that a man should eat one and then eat the brain would exude the odor of the esculent. San Francisco does most of her first-class murdering on Sunday. As a rule, Chinamen in San Francisco do not kill Sunday.

The Lincoln monument at Springfield, Ill., will be dedicated next October. President Grant will be asked to deliver the oration. The Boston Journal says the Massachusetts Legislature has hardly entered upon its work.

Edith O. Gorman is telling Boston young ladies how she happened to become a nun. They thought every lady had heard that story except very young ones.

The use of tobacco seems to be falling off in England. The declared value of the imports for the first quarter of the year was only \$232,902 against \$243,875 for the same period of last year.

A great revival is in progress in Petersburg, Va., among the colored people. Over five hundred were recently baptized by immersion in the Appomattox river, an immense multitude witnessing the ceremony.

James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald writes of \$500 Tuesday's ten-mile walk-jump from his residence on Fifth Avenue to Jerome Park, a distance of ten miles. He accomplished this in one hour and forty minutes and fifty seconds, beating his competitor by five minutes.

Independent political movements are springing up at the West. Oregon has one already in the field with a State ticket. Nevada is organizing one, and Kansas is one advanced to the point of calling a State Convention to meet at Ottawa on May 11.

A very cowardly, cruel deed is ascribed to the Sub-Master of the Charlestown Mass. high school. A little dog entered the school-room on Monday when it is alleged the Sub-Master grasped the unoffending little creature and threw him out of the window to the pavement, a distance of about forty feet. The dog was killed, and died its misery, by a humane passer-by.

R. E. Whitehouse who ran away from his wife and four children at Lynn, with a young woman named Wither, about a year ago, committed suicide at Wither, Mich., a few days since, having been crazy for some time through fear that his wife would discover his whereabouts. Both he and the girl were persons of considerable culture, the latter belonging to a family in good circumstances. She remains at Wither, almost frantic with grief and terror.

## STATE NEWS.

The Lewiston Journal says Thomas Conlan, who escaped from jail Saturday afternoon, was recaptured between three and four o'clock Tuesday morning. Conlan was arrested and taken to the jail. Upon being arrested he remarked: "Just my luck."

The Journal says the City Council of Lewiston on Monday evening again considered the question of a new bridge. The Common Council voted in favor of its construction. The Aldermen expressed their opposition, but members desired more time to investigate the details and investigations by which it is proposed to erect the bridge.

The Journal says Monday afternoon Geo. D. Field, an operative in the book and shoe business, was killed by a falling piece of machinery at the factory of C. L. of Auburn, had the ends of the two middle fingers of the left hand cut off in a snipping machine.

An order to build a new school house on the Spring Street lot was refused a passage of a year and a vote; three to two in favor of the same. The school house on the lot of Aldermen and eight to four in Common Council of the city of Auburn.

In the Supreme Judicial Court at Auburn on Monday E. D. Winslow vs. the Commonwealth. The case was argued by the Commonwealth and the defendant. The case was decided in favor of the Commonwealth. The case was decided in favor of the Commonwealth.

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Two men belonging to Edgecomb, Joseph Nickerson and Jason Huff, were drowned in Wisconsin harbor about 7 o'clock Tuesday evening. They were in a boat loaded with sand and the boats sank.

Melvin Preble, M. D., who was City Physician of Bangor in 1873, has recovered a sum of \$1700 against the city for services rendered to patients during the winter of 1873.

James P. V. Reed on Saturday night, was arrested Monday night about seven miles this side of Houlton, and, with the stolen steel conveyed back to Bangor.

James P. Davis, who committed the shocking homicide at Stetson last Saturday, was discharged on his own recognizance. He was released on his own recognizance.

The town of Bangor, Me., week to see if the town would vote five per cent of its valuation in further aid of the Somerset Railroad, was held on the 2nd inst. The vote was 100 to 100.

Hon. Nehemiah Abbott of Belfast on Saturday night had a second attack of paralysis, on account of which he is unable to perform his duties. He is now in a precarious condition.

James B. March, Esq., of the same city, had a second attack of the same disease on Saturday night, which has deprived him of the use of his limbs.

Mr. John Holland, of Holland Mills, Me., bought some fish of a fish peddler Tuesday on account of which he is unable to perform his duties. He is now in a precarious condition.

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