

# THE TIMOROUS REPORTER

By

AMBROSE BIERCE

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## THE PASSING OF SATIRE

“YOUNG man,” said the Melancholy Author, “I do not commonly permit myself to be ‘interviewed’; what paper do you represent?”

The Timorous Reporter spoke the name of the great journal that was connected with him.

“I never have heard of it,” said the Melancholy Author. “I trust that it is devoted to the interests of Literature.”

Assurance was given that it had a Poets’ Corner and that among its regular contributors it numbered both Aurora Angelina Aylmer and Plantagenet Binks, the satirist.

“Indeed,” said the great man, “you surprise me! I had supposed that satire, once so large and wholesome an element in English letters, was long dead and d— pardon me—buried. You must bear with me if I do not concede the existence of Mr. Binks. Satire cannot co-exist with so foolish sentiments as ‘the brotherhood of man,’ ‘the trusteeship of wealth,’ moral irresponsibility, tolerance, Socialism and the rest of it. Who can ‘lash the rascals naked through the world’ in an age that holds crime to be a disease, and converts the prison into a sanitarium?”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to ask if he considered crime a symptom of mental health. By way of fortifying himself for a reply, the melancholy one visited the sideboard and topped a merciless quantity of something imperfectly known to his visitor from the arid South.

“Crime, sir,” said he, partly recovering, “is merely a high degree of selfishness directed by a low degree of intelligence. If selfishness is a disease none of us is altogether well. We are all selfish, or we should not be living, but most of us have the discernment to see that our permanent advantage does not lie in gratification of our malevolence by murder, nor in augmenting our possessions by theft. Those of us who think otherwise should be assisted to a saner view by punishment. It is sad, so sad, to reflect that many of us escape it.”

“But it is agreed,” said the journalist, “by all our illustrious sociologists—Brand Whitlock, Clarence Darrow, Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman—that punishment is useless, that it does not deter; and they prove it by the number of convictions recorded against individual criminals. Will you kindly say if they are right?”

“They know that punishment deters—not perfectly, for nothing is perfect, but it deters. If every human institution that lamentably fails to accomplish its full purpose is to be abolished none will remain.”

The Timorous Reporter begged to be considered worthy to know what, apart from its great wisdom and interest, all this had to do with satire.

“Satire,” said the Melancholy Author, “is punishment. As such it has fallen into public disfavor through disbelief in its justice and efficacy. So the rascals go unlashd. Instead of ridicule we have solemn reprobation; for wit we have ‘humor’—with a slang word in the first line, two in the second and three in the third. Why, sir, the American reading public hardly knows that there ever was a distinctive kind of writing known, technically, as satire—that it was once not only a glory to literature but, incidentally, a terror to all manner of civic and personal unworth. If we had to-day an Aristophanes, a Jonathan Swift or an Alexander Pope, he would indubitably be put into a comfortable prison with all sanitary advantages, fed upon yellow legged pullets and ensainted by the Little Brothers of the Bad. For they would think him a thief. In the same error, the churches would pray for him and the women compete for his hand in marriage.”

The thought of so great a perversion of justice overcame the creator of the vision and he sank into a chair already occupied by the cat—a contested seat.

## SOME DISADVANTAGES OF GENIUS

“MY CHILD,” said the Melancholy Author, “the sharpest affliction besetting a man of genius is genius.”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to explain that he had been taught otherwise.

“In the first place,” continued the Melancholy Author, inattentive to dissent, “the man of genius cannot hope to be understood by his contemporaries. The more they concede his genius, the less will they comprehend any particular manifestation of it. Carlyle has said that the first impression of a work of genius is disagreeable. There are magazines and publishing houses that say they receive as many as twenty-five thousand manuscripts a year. Of course, as Dr. Holmes pointed out, one does not have to eat an entire cheese to know if he likes it—it is needless to read all manuscripts through to the bitter end. But how if in those that are really great the apparently bitter end is the beginning? If the first impression is disagreeable—to one who is *not* a genius, just an editor—what chance of acceptance has the work?”

Not daring to affirm his steadfast conviction that all editors are men of genius, the interviewer suffered in (and from) silence, and the great man went on:

“Furthermore, the work of a man of genius is necessarily different from that of all others; by that difference, indeed, it is credentialed—to posterity—as a work of genius. But the editor, or the publisher’s reader—will he feel sure of his ground when dealing with that to which he is unaccustomed?—of whose acceptability to the public he is without the *criteria* to judge? With an abiding though secret sense of his own fallibility, will he not think it expedient to take the safe side and reject the work? That will at least entail no possible ‘difference of opinion’ with his employer. Dead manuscripts tell no tales. Sir, in the noble profession of letters it is the rule, attested by a thousand familiar instances, that the man of genius is starved by those whose successors in the seats of authority pay enormous prices for any scrap of his work that may survive him. Consider the case of Poe, of Lafcadio Hearn—who confessed that in the last dozen years of his life his average annual earnings by his pen did not exceed five hundred dollars. And I am no millionaire myself.”

As the Melancholy Author paused to celebrate his poverty at the sideboard his auditor cautiously advanced the view that several living writers of indubitable genius were pretty prosperous.

“Despite their genius,” said the great man, drying his lips with his coat-sleeve, “and because of something else. One of them may have the good fortune to take the attention of some distinguished person having the world’s ear at his tongue’s end, and the habit of loquacity—a person like Colonel Roosevelt, or the late Mr. Gladstone. Did not the latter, by a few words of commendation, provide for life for Mrs. Humphry Ward and for eternity for Marie Bashkirtseff? True, the one is impenitently dull and the other was a shrilling lunatic; but by accident he might have praised an author of consummate ability. Another really great writer may be prosperous—that is to say, popular—because of some engaging mannerism or artifice; as Mr. Kipling bends from his Olympian omniscience to flatter his readers with colloquial familiarity. Another, like Dickens, may have the good luck to be an amusing vulgarian, or, like Mr. Riley, be willing to write lyrics of the pumpkin-field in the ‘dialect’ of those who eat pumpkins. It may happen, too, although in point of fact it never does happen, that a man of genius is at the little end of a long, brass trumpet—I mean, is editor of Our Leading Magazine. Even conceding your entire claim for these fortunate persons (which I do not) it is clear that their genius has had nothing to do with their success. You are a hebetudinous futitarian!”

The Timorous Reporter “shrank to his second cause and was no more.” On reviving, he humbly submitted that he had affirmed nothing of the authors named, nor even mentioned them.

“Genius has been a thousand times defined,” resumed the oracle, regardless; “nevertheless we know fairly well what, partly, it is. *Inter alia*, it is the faculty of knowing things without having to learn them. When Hugo wrote his immortal narrative of Waterloo he had never seen a battle; nor was Dickens ever in solitary confinement in the Pennsylvania penitentiary. But will the possessor of this miraculous faculty profit by it, or even be able rightly to use it in the service of another’s gain? No; in his dealings with his fellow men, editors and publishers included, he will find them unaware, and unable to perceive, that he knows any more than they do. He will encounter, indeed, the most insuperable distrust, even from those who concede his genius; for genius is almost universally held to be a particular kind of brilliant disability. The story of Homer instructing the sandal-maker how to make footgear is, of course, apocryphal, but no more credence is given to the authentic instance of Lord Brougham showing the brewer how to make beer. Even those who assent to the best definition of genius ever made—‘great general ability directed into a particular channel’—will unconsciously assume that it is confined to that channel, and will assist in keeping it there. Its most distinguishing feature—versatility—the power to do many kinds of work equally well—will get no contemporary recognition. Having a reputation for writing great stories (for example) you will write equally great essays, satires and what not, all in vain. It is only to mediocrity that ‘great general ability’ is conceded. That is why the late William Sharp, turning to another kind of work than that in which he had distinguished himself, took a feminine name, and, secure from disparaging comparison with himself, was accessible to commendation. As the work of William Sharp, that of ‘Fiona McLeod’ would have evoked a chorus of deprecation as evidence of failing power. In literature, a single specialty is all that contemporary criticism is willing to allow to genius. Posterity tells a juster tale, albeit disposed to go to the other extreme, seeing something of the fire divine in even the paste jewels wherewith the great lapidary pelted the wolf from his door.”

“Then you would advise the writer of distinction to stick to his—latest?”

“That will not save him. The criticism that will not concede versatility will deny stability. After a few years, the man of genius, however he may confine himself to the kind of work in which, despite its excellence, he has been successful, must face the inevitable and solemn judgment that he has ‘exhausted the vein,’ ‘fallen down,’ ‘gone stale.’ It matters not if practice and years have ripened his imagination, broadened his knowledge and refined his taste—for great minds do not decay with age; his contemporaries will have it that he is ‘written out,’ for he is no longer a new thing under the sun.”

The Melancholy Author himself looks hardly more than seventy-five.

“‘Written out, written out’—England said so of Dickens and Tennyson; America said so of Bret Harte; both have for five years been saying so of Kipling. The great writer is likely, by the way, to share that view himself, as Thackeray, reading over some of his early work, exclaimed: ‘What a giant I was in those days!’

“Another lion in the path of genius is its own success—the low kind of success that is called popularity, for which some sons of the gods, with their bellies sticking to their backs, really do strive. Let one of them achieve a result of this kind and he will find it all the harder to achieve another. Read Stockton’s story of ‘My Wife’s Deceased Sister.’ The narrator tells how, having published a popular tale with that title, he was ever thereafter what is called in the slang to which your detestable profession is addicted, ‘a dead one.’ Editors would take nothing that he offered, but always begged for something like ‘My Wife’s Deceased Sister.’ Sir, I know how it feels to go up against that invincible competitor, oneself. After publication of my famous story, ‘The Maiden Pirate,’ my greater (and even longer) work, ‘A Treatise on the Chaldean Dative Case,’ was rejected by twenty editors! Let the man of genius beware of popularity; one slip of that kind and a brilliant future is behind him. But it does not greatly matter, for even without incurring the mischance of a

‘hit,’ the great writer is, as I said, foredoomed to the charge of degeneracy.”

The Timorous Reporter humbly murmured the names of Hall Caine, Henry James, the late F. Marion Crawford, Mrs. Mary Wilkins Freeman, Miss Mary Murfree, Miss Mary Edward Bok, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Ella Wheeler Sylvester Vierick, and the venerable Hildegard Hawthorne—then edged himself softly toward an open door. With unforeseen resourcefulness, the sad-eyed deprecator of dissent seized a convenient missile, but it happened to be a decanter of Medford rum, and the situation was saved. With fortified solemnity the father of the maiden pirate again took up his parable:

“Certain literary domains are posted with warnings to the trespasser, and against men of genius the inhibition is fiercely enforced. Irruptions of mediocrity entail no penalty because unobserved by the constabulary. The supposed proprietors of these guarded estates are long dead, leaving no heirs; the ‘notices’ are put up without authority, for the land is really a common. One of these closed areas is that of Jonathan Swift, who dispossessed some of the successors of Lucian. Whom Lucian dispossessed we do not know, all evidences of an earlier occupancy than his having been effaced by the burning of the great library at Alexandria. All, doubtless, incurred ‘the penalty of the law,’ each in his turn, from the dunces of his day. The ‘penalty’ is execration as an imitator. Long before Swift, and probably long before Lucian, an accepted method of satire was comparison of actual with imaginary civilizations, through tales of fictitious travelers in unreal regions. But since Swift, woe to the writer having the hardihood to adopt the method, however candidly avowed, and however different the manner! It is as if guardians of Homer’s fame had chased Dante and Camoëns out of the field of the epic, and had put up the bars against Milton. Nay, it is as if an engineer platting a survey were accused of imitating Euclid. True, Virgil, who did imitate Homer most shamelessly, escapes censure. I fancy the Proponents-Militant of Originality have not heard of him.

“In our own day Bret Harte wrote charming sketches of life and character in Californian mining camps. Many others had done so before him, but for many years after his first work in that field none could enter it without incurring austere denunciation as imitator and plagiarist; and even to-day one having the experience to observe or the genius to imagine the life of a Californian mining camp, or any interesting feature of it, delivers his tidings, like the heralds of old, at his peril.

“Another of these posted preserves is that of satire in iambic pentameter verse. This mode of expression is supposed to belong by right divine to Alexander Pope, who made the most constant and cleverest use of it. With its concomitants of epigram and antithesis, it was old before Pope was young. He was himself a ‘trespasser’; he was roundly reviled for imitating Dryden. The form was used by other Queen Anne’s men, acceptably by Johnson and by many a later; but of this the patrolmen and gatekeepers of the Pope reservation in our day have not been apprised by ‘report divine’—the only way that they can be made to know anything, for read, the devil a bit do they. In the literary landscape they see only the highest peaks of the Delectable Mountains. They know only the large, familiar figures, and these only by their most characteristic work. To their indurated understandings each individual of this bright band stands for a particular field of composition. His title to exclusive possession is *res adjudicata*. If anybody set foot across the sacred boundary—little fellows excepted—he will find himself the fundamental element in a cone of pummeling custodians. Young man, in your report of this interview you will be good enough to quote me as deprecating that situation.”

The interviewer pledged his life, his sacred fortune and his honor to the performance of that duty, and the great man resumed:

“Of all these inhibiting *censores literarum*, the most austere and implacable are those guarding the sovereignty of Poe. They have made his area of activity a veritable *mare clausum*—as if he were

the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.”

The Timorous Reporter signified his sense of the speaker’s fertility of metaphor: there had been an inundation (of words) and the “estate” had become a “sea.” He whistled softly “A Life on the Ocean Wave.”

“It was not an unknown sea; it was criss-crossed by the wakes of a thousand ships and charted to the last reef. Tales of the tragic and the supernatural are the earliest utterances in every literature. When the savage begins to talk he begins to tell wonder tales of death and mystery—of terror and the occult. Tapping, as they do, two of the three great mother-lodes of human interest, these tales are a constant phenomenon—the most permanent, because the most fascinating, element in letters. Great Scott! has the patrol never heard of *The Thousand and One Nights*, of *The Three Spaniards*, of Horace Walpole, of ‘Monk’ Lewis, of De Quincey, of Maturin, Ingemann, Blicher, Balzac, Hoffmann, Fitz James O’Brien?”

The reporter summoned the boldness to say that the charge of imitation had not been made against De Maupassant, who certainly was not an unobserved “little fellow,” and was contemporary with the offending critics. “Why, sir,” said the Melancholy Author, “you forget—he wrote in French. Translations? Dear me, have there been translations? How sad!

“As to ‘originality,’ that is merely a matter of manner. The ancients exhausted the possibilities of method. In respect of that, one cannot hope to do much that is both new and worth doing, but there are as many styles—that is, ways of doing—as writers. One can no more help having some individuality in manner than one can help looking somewhat different from anybody else, although hopeless of being much of a giant, or unique as to number and distribution of arms, legs and head. But, sir, this demand for ‘originality’ is a call for third-rate men, who alone supply such a semblance of it as is still possible. The writer of sane understanding and wholesome ambition is content to meet his great predecessors on their own ground. He enters the public stadium, and although perversely handicapped because of his no record and mocked by the *claque*; and although the spectators are sure to declare him beaten, that ultimate umpire, Posterity, will figure the matter out, and may announce a different result.”

The reporter has reason to think that much more was said, but he had the misfortune to fall asleep; and when wakened by the sound of a closing door he was alone. “My!” he said; “I have Had a narrow escape; if the man that once proclaimed me a genius had not happened to be a fool I know not what evils might have befallen me.”

1909.

## OUR SACROSANCT ORTHOGRAPHY

“NO,” said the Melancholy Author, “I do not understand British criticism of American attempts at spelling reform. The claim of our insular cousins to a special ownership and particular custody of our language is impudent. English is not a benefaction that we owe to living Englishmen, nor a loan to be enjoyed, under conditions prescribed by the creditors. When our ancestors ‘came over’ they did not sign away any rights of revision of their own speech; and if a man come not honestly by his mother-tongue I know not what he may be said legitimately to own. I am not addicted to intemperate words, and harsh retaliation does not engage my assent, but when I see an Englishman reaching ‘hands across the sea’ to punish what he chooses to call an infraction of the

laws of *his* language, I am tempted to slap his wrist.” In the presence of this portentous incarnation of justice the Timorous Reporter trembled appropriately and was silent in all the dialects of his native land and Kansas.

“What would they have,” continued the great, sad man—“these ‘conservatives’? A language immune to change? That would be a dead language and we should have to evolve a successor. Ours has never been a changeless tongue; nothing is more mutable, even in its orthography. As it existed a few centuries ago it is now unintelligible except to a few specialists, yet every change has encountered as fierce hostility as any that is now proposed. Compare a page of ‘Beowulf’ with a page of the London *Times* or *The Spectator* and see what incalculable quantities of ‘crow’ the luckless ‘guardians of our noble tongue’ have had to swallow. Do you wonder, young man, that they are a dyspeptic folk? And did not Dr. Samuel Johnson formulate a great truth in the dictum that ‘every sick man is a scoundrel’?”

“Surely,” ventured the Timorous Reporter, “you would not apply so harsh a word to the great English reviewers, nor to our own beloved Professor Harry Thurston Peck!”

“To be consistent these gentlemen should not demand that the spelling remain as it is, for its present condition is the result of innumerable defeats of themselves and their predecessors by hardy ‘corrupters.’ It is pusillanimous of them not only to accept a situation that has been forced upon them but to proclaim it sacred and fight for its eternal maintenance. They should be making heroic efforts to restore at least the spelling of Hakluyt and Sir John Mandeville. It is not so very long since a few timid innovators began (as secretly as the nature of the rebellious act would permit) to leave off the ‘k’ in such words as ‘musick’ ‘publick’ and so forth. Instantly

The wonted roar was up amid the woods,  
And filled the air with barbarous dissonance—

the self-appointed ‘guardians of our noble tongue’ rose as one old lady and swore that rather than submit they would run away! That sacred ‘k’ is no more, but they are with us yet, untaught by failure and unstilled by shame. It is the nature of a fool to hate a thing when it is new, adore it when it is current, and despise it when it is obsolete.”

Pleased with his epigram, the Melancholy Author so accentuated the sadness of his countenance as to invite a sincere compassion.

“We hear much from the scholar-folk about the importance of preserving the derivation of words, not only as a guide to their meaning, but because from the genealogy and biography of words we get instructive sidelights on the history and customs of nations. That is all true: philology is a useful and fascinating study. Read *The Queen’s English* of the late Dean Alford if you think it is not. (Incidentally, I may mention my own humble volumes on *The Genesis and Evolution of ‘Puss’ as the Vocative Form of ‘Gat.’*) But derivation is really not a very sure guide to signification. For example, what do I learn of the meaning of ‘desultory’ by knowing that it is from the Latin ‘desultor,’ a circus performer that leaps from horse to horse? In many instances the origin of a word is misleading, as in ‘miscreant,’ which, etymologically, means nothing worse than “unbeliever.’ Of course it is interesting to hear in it a lingering echo of an ecclesiastic damning in a time when nothing worse than an unbeliever was thought to exist.

“But, as the late Prof. Schele de Vere pointed out, the roots of words are better disclosed in their sound than in their spelling. By phonetic spelling only can their pronunciation be made nearly uniform—if that is an advantage. If this is not obvious, human intelligence is a shut clam.”

The creator of this beautiful figure celebrated it at the sideboard and resumed his illuminating discourse.

“To those who deem it worth while to be happy, the study of derivations is, indeed, a perpetual banquet of delights, but it is important to remember that language is not merely, nor chiefly, a plaything for scholars, but a thing of utility in the conduct of life and affairs. To its service in that character all obstructive considerations should, and eventually do, give way. It may please, and to some extent profit, to know that ‘phthisis’ comes from the Greek ‘phthio’—to waste away—but if in order that one may see this, as well as hear it, I must so spell it as to deny to certain letters of the alphabet their customary and established powers I protest against the desecration. Our orthography has no greater sanctity than have the vested rights of the vowels and consonants by which we achieve it. Why do not ‘the whiskered pandours and the fierce hussars’ of conservatism stand forth as champions of that noble Roman, the English alphabet?”

“Yes, I concede the importance of being able to trace the origin of words, for words are thoughts, and their history is a record of intellectual progress, but in very few of them would a simplified, even a consistently phonetic, spelling tend to obscure the trail by which they came into the language. And as to these few, why not learn their origin from the dictionaries once for all and have done with it? The labor would be incomparably less than that of learning to spell as we do.”

Impressed but not silenced, the thirsty soul at the fountain of wisdom cautiously advanced the view that the reformed spelling is uncouth to the eye.

“It is most dispiriting,” said the oracle, in the low, sad tones that served to distinguish him from the bagpipes of Skibo castle, “to hear from the beardless lips of youth a folly so appropriate to age and experience. To the unobservant, any change in the familiar looks disagreeable. The newest fashion in silk hats looks ridiculous; a little later the old style looks worse. To me nothing is uncouth: the most refined and elevated sentiment loses nothing by its expression in as nearly phonetic spelling as our inadequate alphabet will permit. For my reading you may spell like Josh Billings if you will not write like him.”

“From all that you have been kind enough to say,” said the Timorous Reporter, with a sudden access of courage that alarmed him, “I infer that in your forthcoming great work, *The Tyrant Proposition*, you will employ the Skibonese philanthropography.”

“Not I. Courage is an excellent thing in man: the soldier is useful; but each to his trade. Mine, sir,” he concluded, with a note of pride underrunning the grave, sweet monotony of his discourse, “is writing.”

## THE AUTHOR AS AN OPPORTUNITY

“TO the literary man,” said the Melancholy Author, “life is not all ‘beer and skittles’ by much. He is in a peculiar sense the custodian of ‘troubles of his own.’ Of these, one of the most insupportable grows out of the fact that almost every man, woman or child thinks himself, herself or itself an expert in literature, and the literary; man a Heaven-sent Opportunity. No hawk ever watched a plump pullet detaching itself from the flock, with a more possessing delight than burns in the bosom of the average human being when a defenceless author ‘swims into his ken.’ Lord, Lord, with what alacrity he swoops down upon the incautious wight and holds him with his glittering eye to ‘talk books’ at him!

“He knows it all, the good assailant—knows all about books, particularly ‘the English classics’ and the newest novel. This knowledge—consisting, at the best, in whatever is current in popular criticism of the newspaper and magazine sort—he has quite persuaded himself is knowledge of Literature. It never occurs to the good creature that books are not literature; that he might have read every book in the world yet know no more of literature than a horned toad. Naturally, you do

not care to explain to him that literature is an art—the art of which books are merely a result. He sees the result, but of the art behind them he knows not even so much as its existence.

“He thinks that good writing is done as naturally, instinctively and with as little training as a bird sings in a tree, or a pig in a gate. He would be willing to admit that good painting cannot be done, good music executed, a good plea made in court, or good medical attendance given to the sick, without a deal of hard study of principles and methods. But writing—why, writing is merely setting down what you think; everybody writes.

“Even the literary critic—may hornets afflict him!—cannot be intelligently objectionable without a technical knowledge of his business. A great poet has said:

A man must serve his time at every trade,  
Save censure; critics all are ready made.

“And ‘censure’ here, you will have the goodness to observe, means not condemnation, as in our common speech, but the passing of judgment of any kind on the work of another.

“Suppose you were a famous electrician, and all other persons, eager to show you that they, too, know a thing or two and solemnly persuaded of the necessity of regaling you with scraps from your own table, should gravely define electricity as a ‘mysterious force,’ express to you the belief that it is destined to ‘revolutionize the world’ and declare their admiration of Benjamin Franklin’s gigantic achievement in drawing it from a cloud. Suppose you could turn away from one tormentor only to fall into the hands of another and another, all uttering the same infantile babble—the same shallow platitudes, the same false judgment. That would be no more than we authors have to endure, and smile in the endurance. Nay, not so much, for not only do we have to suffer all this talk of the ‘shop’—our shop—with all its irritating idiocy, but if we open our mouths to say something worth while, God help us!—we’ve a ‘fight’ on hand forthwith. For it is of the nature of ignorance to be disputatious, contentious, cantankerous. The more a man does not know, the more aggressive his manner of not knowing it. Venture to rack one of his ugly literary idols by so much as the breadth of a finger and—!”

Unable to suppress his emotion, the Melancholy Author rose and strode three paces toward an open door, then turned and, striding back again, dropped into his seat and tried to look unconcerned.

“The very persons who seek your society because they honestly admire your intellect will resent every manifestation of it. Whatever they do not understand, whatever is unfamiliar to them, is bad—false and immoral and insincere. Why, I remember a woman who came four hundred miles to see me—to sit at my feet, she was kind enough to say, and partake of my wisdom. In less than ten minutes she was angrily affirming the unworth of my opinions and attempting to inoculate me with her own. What did I do? My friend, what could I do, but wait until the storm had subsided and then express my admiration of the pink bow that she wore at her throat. Alas, I had sailed into a zone of storms, for it was cherry, and away went she!

“Now, I am willing to talk of literature—it is one of the delights of my life to do so. I am even willing to ‘talk books.’ But it must be with my equals, or with those who show some sense of the fact that a lifetime passed in the study of my art, and in its practice counts for something. Few things are more agreeable than imparting knowledge to those who in good faith and decent humility seek it; and such there are. I know some of them, and in their service find enough to do to keep me awake nearly all day. But the other sort: readers of brand-new books and reviews thereof; persons who think the ancients were barbarians; philosophers by birth and critics by inspiration who know it all without having learned any part of it—may Heaven,” concluded the

Melancholy Author, with a fine flourish of his right hand, “bestow them as friends upon my enemies.”

## ON POSTHUMOUS RENOWN

“NO,” said the Melancholy Author, “I do not expect my name to be shouted in brass on the frieze of Miss Helen Gould’s ‘Temple of Fame.’”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to inquire if that was because he had the misfortune to be alive.

“That is a disqualification that time will remove,” answered the Melancholy Author. “The ground of my hope is different: I shall cause to be inscribed upon my tombstone the lines following:

Good friends, for Jesus’ sake forbear  
To grieve the soul that’s gone to—where ?  
Blest be the man that spares my fame,  
And curst be he that flaunts my name!

“The lines are admirable and extremely; original,” said the Timorous Reporter. “May I ask if your reluctance to have your name emblazoned in the Temple is due to disesteem of the methods and results of selection, or to that innate modesty which serves to distinguish you from the violet?”

“To neither. It is due to my consciousness of the futility of all attempts to perpetuate an individual fame. When I die my fame will die with me. It is mine no longer than I live to bear it. When there is no nominative there can be no possessive.

“For illustration, you speak of Shakspeare’s fame. But there is no Shakspeare. The fame that you speak of is not ‘his’; it is ours—yours, mine and John Smith’s. To call it ‘his’—why, sir, that is as if one should concede the ownership of property to a vacuum. The dead are poor—they have nothing. Our mental confusion in this matter is no doubt largely due to our imperfect grammar: we have not enough cases in our declension; or, rather, there are not enough names for the cases that we have. In the phrase ‘a horse’s tail’ we say rightly that ‘horse’s’ is in the possessive case: the animal really possesses—owns—the tail. But in the phrase ‘a horse’s price’ there is no possessive, for the horse does not own the price: there should be another name for the case. When dead, the horse does not own even the tail. It is the same with ‘Shakspeare’s fame’: while he lived the phrase contained a possessive case; now it is something different—merely what the Latin calls a genitive. Our name for it misleads the unenlightened and makes them think of a dead man as owning things. One of my ambitions, I may add, is to bring English grammar into conformity with fact, promoting thereby every moral, intellectual and material interest of the race!”

The Timorous Reporter summoned the courage to rouse him from ecstatic contemplation of the glory of his great reform by directing his disobedient attention to the fact that the Latin grammar, also, is defective, in that its genitive case is not supplemented by a possessive; yet the Romans appear to have had a pretty definite conception of “mine” and “thine,” albeit the latter was less lucidly apprehended than the former, and held a humbler place in the national conscience. Deigning to ignore the argument, the Melancholy Author resumed his discourse:

“Posthumous fame being what it is—if nothing can be said to be something—the desire to attain it is comic. It seems the invention of a humorist, this ambition to attach to your name (and equally to that of every person bearing it, or to bear it hereafter) something that you will not know that you

have attached to it. You labor for a result which you are to be forever unaware that you have brought about—for a personal gratification which you know that you are eternally forbidden to enjoy: if the gods ever laugh, do they not laugh at that?”

To signify his sense of the humor of the situation, the Melancholy Author fashioned the visage of him to so poignant a degree of visible dejection as might have affected an open tomb with envy and despair.

“Some time,” he continued, “the earth, her spinning retarded by the sun’s tidal action, will turn on her axis only once a year, presenting always the same side to the sun, as Venus does now, and as the moon does to the earth. That side will be unthinkably hot; the other, dark and unthinkably cold. Of man and his works nothing will remain. Later, the sun’s light and fire exhausted, he and all his attendant planets and their satellites will whirl, as dead invisible bulks, through the black reaches of space to some inconceivable doom. Suppose that then a man who died to-day—or yesterday in Assyria—should be miraculously revived. He would think that he had waked from a sleep of an instant’s duration. What to him would seem to have been the advantage of what he once knew as ‘fame’—sometimes as ‘immortality’? Would he not smile to learn that his name had once evoked sentiments of admiration and respect—that it had been carved in stone or cast in metal to adorn a Temple of Fame? And when again, and finally, put to death for nothing, would not his last squeak and gurgle carry an aborted jest?”

“My boy,” continued the Melancholy Author, suffering a look of compassion to defile the dread solemnity of his aspect, “I perceive that I have put the matter too strongly for you. You are not at home in the fields of space; you are disconcerted by the dirge of the spheres. Let us get back to earth as we have the happiness to know it. I will read you the concluding lines of a poem by an obscure pessimist, on the brevity of time and the futility of memorial structures:

Then build your mausoleum if you must,  
And creep into it with a perfect trust;  
But in the twinkling of an eye the plow  
Shall pass without obstruction through your dust.

Another movement of the pendulum  
And, lo! the desert-haunting wolf shall come  
And, seated on the spot, howl all the night  
O’er rotting cities, desolate and dumb.”

Delighted with his ruse of binding an unresisting auditor by passing off his own poetry as that of another, the Melancholy Author fell into a sea-green stupor, and the Timorous Reporter, edging himself quietly through the door of opportunity, departed that life.

## THE CRIME OF INATTENTION

“WHEN the germ of egotism is discovered,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “it will be readily recognized. The cholera germ is sometimes called the ‘comma bacillus,’ from its resemblance to the printer’s comma; the bacillus of egotism does not look like a capital I, as you would naturally suppose, but like the note of admiration. In order to discover it you have only to shed the gore of the first man you meet (who is sure to be a bore and deserve it) and put a drop under the microscope. True, you may have defective eyesight from long contemplation of your dazzling self, and so miss it, but it is there as plain as the nose on an elephant’s face.”

The Timorous Reporter ventured to suggest that when the note of admiration was named, to admire meant, not to esteem, but to wonder—that Milton so uses it in relating the meeting of Satan and Death at the gates of Hell. There was no reason, he said, why the germ of egotism or self-esteem should have the shape of that point.

“Having discovered and isolated the germ of egotism,” continued the Curmudgeon Philosopher, apparently addressing some exalted intelligence behind the Timorous Reporter, “the physicians will naturally cast about for a serum that will be powerful enough to beat it.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher had the condescension to darken his environment with a smile.

“I should suppose that this might be made from the blood of a whale, a rhinoceros, a tiger and an anaconda, all, of course, duly inoculated with the germ till silly. If a few gallons of this mighty medicament were injected into the veins of a patient not more than two years of age it might so check his self-esteem that on growing up he would emblazon the violet on his coat of arms.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher manifested his sense of his own distinction as a wit by a gesture singularly and appropriately elephantine. He had the goodness to continue: “A few years ago, before a just appreciation of the dignity of my position as a philosopher had compelled my withdrawal from the clubs and taverns, I used to observe that of a half-dozen men sitting about a table and engaged in the characteristic industry of smoking and drinking, four were commonly talking of themselves, one, with an impediment in his enterprise, was endeavoring to ‘get the floor’ in order to talk about *himself*, and the other (I trust it is needless to name him) was vainly asking attention to matters of interest and importance.

“It was customary among these gentlemen to interrupt one another in the middle of a sentence by ordering drinks or entering into a colloquy with the waiter, or addressing a trivial question to another of the party. Habitually the person speaking had the mortification to see his interlocutor turn squarely away from him and himself begin a monologue, only to be disregarded in his turn. There is something singularly pathetic in the spectacle of a man with an unfinished discourse turning to the only one of the party that has the civility to hear him out. It is one of the minor tragedies of social life, demanding an infinite compassion. Sometimes the sufferer would signify a just resentment by abruptly rising and leaving the table, but the rebuke was never even observed.

“Not the monologist alone was ignored in this unmannerly way; the nimble epigrammatist fared no better. The brightest sallies of wit, the oddest ventures in paradox, the most delicious bits of humor and the finest turns of wisdom—all met the same fate, all alike fell upon the stony soil of inattention. Remember that I speak, not of ordinary dullards, but of the so-called choice spirits of clubland, ‘gentlemen of wit and pleasure about town.’”

With a sidewise movement toward the door the Timorous Reporter cautiously advanced the notion that possibly something in the quality of the Curmudgeon Philosopher’s wit may not have had the good fortune to commend itself to his auditors.

“Selected from Apuleius, from Rabelais, Pascal, Rochefoucauld, Pope, and boldly worked into the conversation, they always passed without recognition of either their source or their wit. The company was simply unaware that anything out of the common had been said. Egotism has a bale of cotton in each ear.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher paused to note the effect of his epigram. Seeing that safety meant either applause or absence the Timorous Reporter deemed it expedient to withdraw by way of an open window.

## FETISHISM

“WE are wiser in many ways than our savage ancestors; we are wiser than the savages of today,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, with the air of one making a great concession; “yet for every folly or vice of uncivilized man I can show you a corresponding one among ourselves. In the matter of religions, for example, and of religious rites and observances, we have, mixed in with our better faiths, vestiges of all the primitive superstitions that have marked the childhood of the race. Vestiges, did I say? Why, sir, in many instances we have the veritable thing itself in all the vigor of its perennial prime.” The Reporter ventured to express a conviction that a crude and primitive religion could have no devotees among so enlightened and cultivated a people as ours.

“Sir,” thundered the Adversary of Presumption, turning a delicate purple, “races are like individuals; along with the vices and virtues of maturity they have those of infancy. No people ever is sufficiently civilized and enlightened to have laid aside any of its early superstitions and absurdities. To these it adds better things. It overwrites its primitive ideas with ideas less crude and reasonless; but nothing has been effaced. The latest text of the palimpsest is most in evidence, but all is there and, to a keen enough observation, legible. Did you never see a whole concourse of moderns uncover to a flag?”

The Reporter confessed that those whom he had seen performing this religious rite were mostly moderns.

“They will say when detected,” continued the oracle, “that what they uncover to is not the flag, but the sentiment that it represents. If ingenious enough, the idolater would make the same defence. So would the shagpated chap that prostrates himself before the sacred moogoo tree.

“What’s that—a flag is a symbol? Why, yes, ‘symbol’ is the name we choose to give to objects which we know to have no real sanctity, yet, either from hereditary instinct or other unreasoning impulse, cannot forbear to revere. The word is also used to denote a mere ‘survival,’ an object that once had a useful purpose, but now exists only because of our habit of having it. Be pleased to look down into that burial place.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher’s dwelling had characteristically been chosen because of its contiguity to a cemetery.

“Note the number of ‘dummy’ urns surmounting the monuments. Centuries ago, when cremation was the rule, as it seems likely to be again, those would have been true urns, holding ashes of the dead. We have inherited the tendency to have them, but as they have now no utility we spare ourselves the trouble of accounting for them by saying they are symbolic—whereby the fashion is exalted to a high dignity.

“I assume your familiarity with the word ‘fetish.’ It is spelled two ways and pronounced four; I pronounce it as I was taught at my mother’s knee.”

By way of accentuating the fact that he had had a mother he affected a rudimentary tenderness of tone and expression which in a case of doubtful identity would have assisted in distinguishing him as a pirate of the Spanish Main.

The Reporter asked what fetish worship might have the hardihood to be.

“Fetish worship,” replied the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “is the most primitive of religions. It is the form that belief in the supernatural takes in our lowest stage of intellectual development—the adoration of material objects. A stone or a tree supposed to possess supernatural powers of good or evil, or to have some peculiar sanctity, is a fetish. Idolatry and the worship of living things are not uncommonly confounded with fetish worship, but in reality are another and higher form of religion, belonging to a more advanced culture.

“You have seen the proposal to transport Plymouth Rock about the country for a show? It is in

the morning papers, one of which I had the back luck to pick up while at breakfast. Hate the morning papers!”

The Timorous Reporter signified his regret.

“I hope it will not be done,” continued the Curmudgeon Philosopher, ignoring the apology. “In the first place, the Rock is devoid of authenticity. It is indubitably a rock, and it is at Plymouth, but its connection with the landing of the Pilgrims was supplied by imagination. That is all right; by imagination we demonstrate our superiority to the novelists. Historians and scientists are credentialed by imagination; through imagination the philosopher attains to a knowledge of the meaning and message of things. Without imagination we should be as the magazine poets that perish.”

With obvious satisfaction in his character of cynic the Curmudgeon Philosopher again mitigated the austerity of his countenance—this time by something that may have been honestly intended as a smile.

“We have seen bands of children taught to march about a cracked bell, throw flowers upon it, sing hymns to it. When it stopped in the several cities that it was carried through on a triumphal car the populace turned out to worship it. It was supplied with a ‘guard of honor.’ Bands played appropriate music before it, and mayors ‘delivered eulogies.’ No popular hero or august sovereign could be accorded a more obsequious homage than this lifeless piece of cracked metal—nay, its progress is more like that of a Grecian god. This was fetishism, pure and undefiled.

“If this new project is carried out the people that worshiped a bell will worship a stone. True, the stone weighs several tons.”

Proud of his generosity in making so great a concession, the Curmudgeon Philosopher looked over the top of his spectacles for the applause that came not to his hope.

“Sir,” he concluded, his great fist falling like a thunderbolt upon the table at which he stood, “we are Pottawattomies!”

## OUR AUDIBLE SISTERS

“NO,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “I am no believer in ‘the elevating influence of woman.’ We have had women a long time, now; the influence is obvious, but the elevation—we are still waiting for that. Perhaps it was different in the old days when they had no connection with public affairs and could devote their entire attention to the business of giving men ‘a leg up,’ but to-day they are so busy assisting us to conduct the world’s large activities that they overlook our dissatisfaction with the low moral plane that we occupy.

“I think, sir, that old Sir William Devereux was wrong when he said that the best way to keep the dear creatures from playing the devil was to encourage them in playing the fool. We have been for more than a generation encouraging them to play the fool in a thousand and fifty ways, and they play the devil as never before.

“These dreadful creatures—I mean these dear, delightful darlings—care for nothing but abstract ideas having no practical application to actual conditions in a faulty world. In the councils of Them Loud nobody cares for anything but principles and Principle. Every Mere Male who anywhere ventures to lift up his voice in behalf of an imperfect but practicable reform is outfitted by them with a set of motives that would disgrace a pirate. To the she colonels of uplift, nothing is so fascinating as Abstract Reform; they roll it as a sweet morsel under and over their tireless tongues. At every session of Congress you shall hear again the clank of the female saber in the corridors and committee rooms of the Capitol, intimidating the poltroon lawmaker. You shall hear the war

whoop of the Sexless Impracticables, acclaiming the Sufficient Abstraction and denouncing the coarse expedients of the Erring Male. May the devil shepherd them in a barren place!”

Overcome by his emotions, the Curmudgeon Philosopher cruelly kicked the house dog (which “answered not with a caress”) and snorted at vacancy.

“What good does it all do, anyhow—this irruption of women into the domain of public affairs? The advantages that Lively Woman promised even herself in becoming New and Audible are illusory; those that she renounced were real. For one thing, we no longer love her. Why, sir, I remember the time when I myself would have taken trouble to serve and honor women. I may say that I felt for them a special esteem. How is it to-day? They pass me by as the idle wind, unobserved, and—most significant of all—unobserving.

“Love, sir, ‘romantic love,’ as Tolstoi calls it, is a purely artificial thing. Many nations know it not. The ancient Greeks knew it not; the Japanese of yesterday did not at all comprehend it. There have been no other really civilized nations. We love those who are helpless and dependent on us. That is why we love our children and our pets.

“In demanding equal rights before the law woman renounces her claim to exceptional tenderness; in granting the demand, man accepts the renunciation in good faith. If the rest of you are going to look out for my wife, sir, I am left free to look out for myself. Have I really a wife? God forbid—I’m supposing one.

“When in the history of our civilization was romantic love at high noon? Why, sir, ‘when knighthood was in flower’; when woman was a chattel; when a gentleman could divorce himself with a word. It was then that woman was set upon a pedestal and adored. Men consecrated their lives to the service of the sex—fought for woman, sang of her with a sincerity that is sadly lacking in the imitation troubadours of our time. Why, sir, even I, in my youth, composed some verses.”

The Curmudgeon Philosopher educed a manuscript from his breast-pocket and the Timorous Reporter began to withdraw from the Presence.

“O, very well—I’ll not force them on you; but permit me to remark, sir, that the decay of courtesy toward women is not unattended with a certain growing coarseness of manners in general. Those who have caught the base infection are not gentlemen, and you may go to the devil!”

## THE NEW PENOLOGY

“TRUE science,” said the Curmudgeon Philosopher, “began with publication, in 1620, of Lord St. Albans’ *Novum Organum*. Why not Lord Bacon’s? Because, my benighted friend, there was no ‘Lord Bacon.’ He was Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, and, later, Viscount St. Albans. When you hear a man speak of ‘Lord Bacon’ fly from that man.

“The *Novum Organum*, or new method, has overthrown the *Organum* of Aristotle and released men’s minds from thralldom to the belief that truth could be got by mere reasoning, unaided by observation and experiment. This faith in the all-sufficiency of Logic had persisted for more than two thousand years, an intellectual paralysis invulnerable to treatment; and all the while the world thought itself enjoying robust mental health.

“Belief in the sufficiency of Deduction was not the only delusion that dominated and shackled the human mind, and some of the others are with us to-day, to comfort and inspire! We think that if we did not have them we should be sick.”

Pleased with his wit, the Curmudgeon Philosopher executed the great convulsion of nature which he knew as a smile.

“One of the most mischievous of these false and futile faiths is known as the Reformation of

Criminals. With no result, we have been embracing it with a devout fervor since the dawning of time. Our mistake is not so much that we have neglected to get the consent of the criminals as that we think ourselves able to reform them without it.

“Each habitual criminal is the hither end of an interminable line of criminal ancestors. He can reform no more than he can fly: his character is as immutable as the shape of his head or the texture of the muscle that he calls his heart. Our efforts in his behalf recall the story of the physician who, after examining a patient afflicted with a disorder of the skin, said: ‘This is hereditary; we must begin at the beginning. Go home and tell your father to take a sulphur bath.’ Our criminals are in worse case than that patient; he had an accessible father for the treatment.

“What have I to propose? What is the ‘New Method’ that I favor? What would I substitute for ‘reformation’ of the unworthy? Their destruction—I would kill them.”

With obvious pride in this humane suggestion, he stroked his ragged beard with both hands and adored his reflection in the mirror opposite his pedestal.

“It sounds harsh, I dare say, to one unfamiliar with the thought, and I might have said ‘remove’ if that would seem less alarming; but ‘kill’ is an honest word, and I’ll stand to it.

“Think of it! The New Method would give us in two generations a nation without habitual criminals! What other will do that? Think of the lessened misery, the security of life and property, the lighter burden of taxation to maintain the machinery of justice, the no police—all that the besotted proponents of ‘Reformation’ hope and hope again and hope in vain to accomplish brought about in the lifetime of one man!

“And by means that are merciful to the criminals themselves. Can there be a doubt that if in him the love of life were not the mere brute instinct of a perverted soul the habitual criminal would prefer death? What does life hold that is worth anything to such as he, devoid of self-respect and the respect of others, victim alike of justice and injustice, denied the delights that come of refined sensibilities, hunted from pillar to post and ever cowering in fear of the law? Nothing is more cruel than to let him live. And at last he dies anyhow.

“But suppose that the painless putting to death of all criminals were as deep a misfortune as it would be to—to philosophers, for example? Yet in the long run it would vastly lessen the total of human unhappiness, even of public executions. The earth was not made yesterday: for thousands, probably hundreds of thousands of years, men have been putting other men to death for crime.

“Even under the mild laws of to-day in civilized countries the number executed will in the course of the ages enormously exceed to-day’s total criminal population. Moreover, it would not be necessary to kill them all: most of them, if confronted by a law for their killing, would take themselves out of the country, quarter themselves upon foolish nations still willing to stand their nonsense—nations still enamored of that ancient delusion, Reformation of Criminals.

“That would serve your purpose as well as anything, but as a citizen of the world, owing my first allegiance to Mankind,” concluded the Curmudgeon Philosopher, with a gesture appropriate to some noble ancestral sentiment, “I should deem it my duty to endeavor to prevent their escape by writs of *ne exeat regno*.”

## THE NATURE OF WAR

THE Bald Campaigner was looking over the tops of his spectacle lenses, silent, obviously wise, a thing of beauty.

“Do you approve the punishment of General Jacob Smith, who was dismissed from the army; for barbarism?” asked the Timorous Reporter. “Doubtless you remember the incident.”

“My approval,” said the great soldier, “is needless and of no significance. I have long been on the retired list myself, and am not the reviewing officer in this case. I think General Smith’s punishment just, if that’s what you want to know. He committed a serious indiscretion. As a commander of troops in the island of Samar he gave to a subordinate the following oral instructions:

“I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn the better you will please me.’ He said, further, that he wanted all persons killed who were capable of bearing arms and were in actual hostilities against the United States—I am quoting the Secretary of War—and, in reply to a question by his subordinate, asking for an age limit, designated it as ten years.

“All this was highly improper and unmilitary. It is customary in matters of so great importance for the commander to give his instructions in the form of written orders—a good commander is without a tongue.

“I am no great literary genius, but in the matter of military orders I know a hawk from a handsaw by the handsaw’s teeth. Suppose General Smith’s orders (written orders) had read like this:

“It is thought that it will be to the advantage of the expedition in point of celerity of movement, and will simplify the problem of supply, if the column be not encumbered with prisoners. The commander of the expedition will not be unmindful of the military advantages that flow from the infliction of as many casualties upon the enemy as is practicable with the small force that he commands and the evasive character of the enemy; nor will he overlook the need of removing by fire such structures and supplies as are incompatible with the interests of the United States, or inconsistent with professions of amity on the part of the island’s inhabitants, or conducive to the prosperity of those in rebellion. No person engaged in hostilities against the United States will, of course, be suffered to plead sex or age in mitigation of such mischances as the fortunes of war may entail, provided, however, that no non-combatants of either sex under the age of ten years shall under any circumstances be put to death without authority from these headquarters; the traditional benevolence of the American army must not be impaired.’

“Sir, if General Smith had issued an order like that he would to-day be a popular hero and an ornament to the active list of the army.”

Waving his remaining arm with a gesture singularly cogent and convincing, the Bald Campaigner ceased and marched against a hostile bottle near by. After study of the suppositious “order” in his stenographic notes, the reporter ventured the opinion that the difference between it and the oral instructions actually given was mainly one of expression. The Bald Campaigner said in reply:

“Expression is everything. An army officer should be a master of expression, as a baseball pitcher should be a master of delivery. The straight throw and the curved throw carry the ball to the same spot, but consider the different effect upon the fortunes of the pitcher. What General Smith lacked was not heart, but style. He was not cruel, but clumsy. His words were destitute of charm. His blundering tongue had succeeded only in signifying his fitness to be thrown to the civilian lions.”

The reporter hazarded a belief that the General’s instruction to make Samar “a howling wilderness” was brutal exceedingly.

“Certainly it was,” assented the Bald Campaigner, “an officer of refinement and taste would have said: ‘It will be found expedient to operate against the enemy’s material resources.’ There is never a military necessity for coarse speech.

“As to devastation—did you mention devastation?—that is the purpose of war. War is made, not against the bodies of adult males, but against the means of subsistence of a people. The fighting is

incident to the devastation: we kill the soldiers because they protect their material resources—get between us and the fields that feed them, the factories that clothe them, the arsenals that arm them. We cannot hope to kill a great proportion of them at best; the humane thing is to overcome them by means of hunger and nakedness. The earlier we can do so, the less effusion of blood. Leave the enemy his resources and he will fight forever. He will beget soldiers faster than you can destroy them.

“Do you cherish the delusion that in our great civil war, for example, the South was subdued by killing her able-bodied males who could bear arms? Look at the statistics and learn, to your astonishment, how small a proportion of them we really did kill, even before I lost my arm.

“The killing was an incident. I speak of the latter part of the conflict, when we had learned how to conduct military operations. As long as our main purpose was bloodshed we made little progress. Our armies actually guarded the homes and property of the men they were sent to conquer—the very men that were fighting them, and who, therefore, assured of the comfort and safety of their families, continued fighting with cheerful alacrity. If we had continued that rose-water policy they might have fought us to this day.”

The reporter involuntarily glanced at a calendar on the wall, and the war oracle continued :

“Wisdom came of experience: we adopted the more effective and more humane policy of devastation. With Sherman desolating the country from Atlanta to Goldsborough and Sheridan so wasting the Shenandoah Valley that he boasted the impossibility of a crow passing over it without carrying rations, the hopes of Confederate success went up in smoke.

“And,” concluded the hairless veteran, rising and opening the door as a delicate intimation that there was nothing more to say, “I beg leave to think that the essential character of the *Ultima Ratio* is not permanently obscurable by the sentimental vagaries of blithering civilians such as you have the lack of distinction to be.”

The Timorous Reporter retired to his base of operations and the war-drum throbbed no longer in his ear.

## HOW TO GROW GREAT

“I DO not overlook the disadvantages of defeat in a war with some foreign power,” said the Bald Campaigner; “I only say that in the resulting humiliation would be a balance of advantage. It does a nation good to ‘eat the leek.’ The great Napoleon thrust that tonic vegetable into the mouths of Prussia and the other German states. They took a bellyful each, and the result of that penitential feast is the splendid German empire of to-day. Before their racial health was entirely restored the Germans passed the unwelcome comestible to the ailing dominion of Napoleon the Stuffed, and France has so thriven on the diet that she no longer fears the hand that wrote the menu. Alone among modern states, Great Britain has grown powerful without having had to cry for mercy. In the voice of supplication is heard the prophecy of power.”

The Timorous Reporter cautiously named our own country as one that has risen to greatness without suffering defeat and humiliation.

“Sir, you are in error,” said the Bald Campaigner loftily. “We were defeated in the War of 1812. Wherever our raw volunteers met the trained veterans of Great Britain (except at New Orleans, when the war was over) we were beaten off the field. Our attempts to invade Canada were all repelled, our capital was taken and sacked, and when we sued for peace it was granted in a treaty in which the grievance for which we had taken up arms was contemptuously ignored.

“Remember that for this conflict we enlisted and equipped more than a half-million men, while

Great Britain had at no time more than sixteen thousand opposing us.

“As historians of the conflict we have done heroic work, as have Southern historians of our civil war and French historians of the struggle with the Germans—as all beaten peoples naturally do. Sir, do you know that the great body of the Spanish people believe, and will always believe, that Spain brought us to our knees in 1898? The Russian who does not think that the armies of the Czar wrung the most humiliating terms from the Japanese is an exceptionally intelligent Russian—he knows enough to disbelieve the ‘popular histories’ in the Russian tongue and the official falsehoods of his government.”

The Timorous Reporter inquired how a second beating would profit us, seeing that we got no good out of the other.

“The other was not bad enough,” the great man explained. “Having Napoleon on her hands, Great Britain did not, until he had been got rid of, make an aggressive war. When she began to cried for mercy. What we need is a beating that neither our vanity can deny nor our ingenuity excuse—one which, in the slang of your pestilent trade, ‘will not come off.’”

“And then?”

“Then, sir, we shall give ourselves an army strong enough to repel invasion from the north, or, if something should happen to our navy, from the east or west. Then, sir, we shall get our soldiers by conscription, and the man who is drawn will serve. The words ‘volunteer,’ ‘recruiting,’ ‘bounty,’ ‘substitute’ will disappear from our military vocabulary, with all the inefficiency, waste, and shame that they connote. In brief, we shall recognize the truth, obvious to reason, that a citizen owes his country military service in the same way that he owes it pecuniary support. (If taxpaying had always been optional what an expostulation would meet the proposal to make it compulsory!) We shall then not need to concern ourselves with ‘the problem of desertion,’ ‘the effect on the army of high wage-rates in civil employment,’ and the rest of it. There will be no problem of desertion: the discernment that recognizes a citizen’s military obligation will find an effective method preventing him from running away from it. All this will come after we have been sorely defeated by some power, or combination of powers, that has not only a navy but an army.”

The Timorous Reporter hesitatingly advanced the view that a large standing army might seriously imperil the subordination of the military to the civil power.

“Young man,” said the hairless veteran, austerely, “you talk like a Founder of this Republic!”

## A WAR IN THE ORIENT

“CONSIDERING your pro-Russian sympathies,” said the Timorous Reporter, “the results of some of the fighting in the Japanese and Russian war must have been deeply disagreeable to you—that of the great naval engagement in the Sea of Japan, for example.”

“Yes,” replied the Bald Campaigner, “the escape of two or three Russian ships affected me most unpleasantly.”

The reporter professed himself unable to understand.

“I had confidently expected Togo to destroy them all. He is disappointing—Togo.”

“Please pardon me,” said the man of letters; “I thought that you had favored the Russian cause.”

“So I did, sir, so I did, and do. But something is due to the art and science of war. As a soldier I stand for them, deprecating any laxity in the application of the eternal principles of strategy and tactics by land or sea. Admiral Togo should have been dismissed for permitting those ships to escape.”

The reporter suggested the possibility that in the uproar and obscurity of battle the ships that got away were overlooked.

“Nothing should be overlooked,” said the Bald Campaigner. “The commander in battle should know everything that is going on—or going away. With the light that we have, I am unable to explain the Japanese admiral’s lamentable failure; I can only deplore it.”

“Had he, then, so overwhelming an advantage?” the reporter asked. “It is thought the fleets were pretty evenly matched.”

“Sir,” said the Bald Campaigner, loftily, “it was a fight between an inland people and an insular. If Rojestvensky had had a hundred battleships he would have been overmatched and defeated. Ships and guns do not make a navy, and landsmen are not transmuted into sailors by sending them to sea. The Russians are not a sea-going people. Their country has no open ports—that is what they are always fighting to get. They have no foreign commerce; they have no fisheries. Why, sir, it reminds me of the reply made by a Scotch carter to an angry soldier who had challenged him to fight. ‘Fecht wi’ ye? Na, na, fechtin’s yer trade. But I’ll drive a cart wi’ ye.’ If command of the ocean were a matter of planting potatoes, Russia would be a great sea power.

“The born sailor is a being of an order different from ourselves—as different as a gull from a grouse, a seal from a cat. What, to a landsman, is a matter of study, memory and calculation, is to him a matter of intuition. An unstable plane is his natural, normal and helpful footing. As a gun-pointer he sights his piece not only consciously with his instruments and his eye, but unconsciously with that better instrument, the sense of direction—as one plays billiards. The rolling and pitching of the ships do not spoil his aim; he allows for them automatically—feels the auspicious instant with the sure instinct of an expert rifleman breaking bottles in the air. It is impossible to impart this subtle sense to a farmer’s boy, or to a salesman in a shop, no matter how young you catch him; he cannot be made to understand it—cannot even be made to understand that it can be. For that matter, nobody does understand it.

“I am not unaware, sir, of the ‘modern’ methods of sea-fighting—keeping at a safe distance from the enemy and pointing the guns by means of range-finders and other instruments and machines, but nothing that can be invented can eliminate the ‘personal equation’ in sea-fighting, any more than in land-fighting parapets, casemates, turrets and other defensive works can profitably replace the breasts of the soldiers, or arms of precision take the place of their natural aptitude for battle with both feet on the ground. I am not unmindful of the time when the Romans improvised a fleet (constructed on the model of a wrecked Carthaginian galley) and manning it with landsmen destroyed the sea-power of Carthage in a single engagement. That exception tests the rule (*probat regulam*) but the rule stands. Landsmen for soldiers, sailors for the sea and to the devil with military machinery!

“Before our civil war we had a merchant marine second only to that of Great Britain. American sails whitened every sea, the stars and stripes glowed in every port. We were a nation of sailors. Even so long ago as the war of 1812 we held our own with Great Britain on the ocean, though beaten everywhere on land by inferior numbers with superior training. To-day we could not hold our own against any maritime people, even if we fought with full coal-bunkers near our own shores. The American behind the gun is no longer a born sailor with the salt of the sea in every globule of the blood of him. Our fate in encountering a seagoing people, sailors and fishermen and the sons of sailors and fishermen, with sea legs, sea eyes and sea souls, would be that which has befallen inlanders against islanders, from Salamis to Tsu Shima. The sea would be strewn with a wreckage of American ‘magnificent fighting-machines.’”

The Timorous Reporter murmured the words “Manila Bay” and “Santiago de Cuba,” then diffidently lifted his eyes, with a question mark in each, to the face of his distinguished

interlocutor—which darkened with a smile.

“With regard to Manila,” he said, “I am told that Dewey’s famous command, ‘You may fire when you are ready, Gridley,’ was not accurately reported. According to my informant, the Spanish ships were ingeniously wound with ropes to keep them from falling apart. What Dewey actually said was this: ‘When you are ready, Gridley, you may fire at those ropes.’ Anybody can cut a rope with a cannon if not molested. At Santiago, the Spanish Admiral was ordered not to give battle, but to escape, and ships cannot run away and fight at the same time.

“Sir, two naval victories in which the victors lost one man killed do not supply a reasonable presumption of invincibility. Manila and Santiago were slaughters, not battles. They are without value.”

The reporter said he thought that they were not altogether worthless as “horrors of war,” and visibly shuddered. The superior intelligence flamed and thundered!

“That is all nonsense about ‘the horrors of war,’ in so far as the detestable phrase implies that they are worse than those of peace; they are more striking and impressive, that is all. As to the loss of life, I submit that civilians mostly die some time, and are mourned, too, quite as feelingly as soldiers; and the kind of death that is inflicted by war-weapons is distinctly less objectionable than that resulting from disease. Wars are expensive, doubtless, but somebody gets the money; it is not thrown into the sea. In point of fact, modern nations are never so prosperous as in the years immediately succeeding a great war. I favor anything that will quicken our minds, elevate our sentiments and stop our secreting selfishness, as, according to that eminent naturalist, the late William Shakspeare, toads get venom by sleeping under cold stones. A quarter-century of peace will make a nation of blockheads and scoundrels. Patriotism is a vice, but it is a larger vice, and a nobler, than the million petty ones which it promotes in peace to swallow up in war. In the thunder of guns it becomes respectable. I favor war, famine, pestilence—anything that will stop the people from cheating and confine that practice to contractors and statesmen.

“To return to Russia—”

“Which,” said the reporter, *sotto voce*, “many Russians abroad do not care to do.”

“You said, I think, that she does not seem to be much of a power on either sea or land. She was a power in the time of the first Napoleon. She held out a long time at Sevastopol against the English, the French, the Turks and the Sardinians. She defeated the Turks at Shipka Pass and Plevna, and the Turks are the best soldiers in Europe. True, in the war with Japan, she lost every battle. That was to be expected, for she was all unready and her armies were outnumbered two to one from the beginning. No one outside Russia, and few inside, has ever come within a quarter million of a correct estimate of the Japanese strength. There were not fewer than seven hundred thousand of these cantankerous little devils in front of Gunshu Pass.”

“Then they are—in a military sense—‘cantankerous,’” said the reporter. “That is about the same as saying that they are good soldiers, is it not?”

“Oh, they fight well enough. Why shouldn’t they? They have something to fight for; the pride of an honorable history; a government that does not rob them; a civilization that is to them new and fascinating, reared, as the superstructure of a glittering temple, upon an elder one, whose stones were hewn and laid and wrought into beauty by their forefathers, while ours were chasing one another through marshes with flint spears. Best of all, they had a sovereign whom they adore as a deity and love with a passionate personal attachment. What can you do against such a people as that?—a people in whom patriotism is a religion—a nation of poets, artists and philosophers, like the ancient Greeks; of statesmen and warriors, like those of early Rome?”

“If the Japanese are all that you think them,” said the reporter, “how do you justify your pro-Russian sympathies?”

“It is not the business of a student of military affairs to have sympathies,” replied the Bald Campaigner, coldly; “but it is precisely because they are that kind of people that their overthrow is, to America, a military necessity. They are dangerous neighbors to so feeble barbarians as we, with a government which all extol and none respects—a loose unity and no illusions—a slack allegiance and no consciousness of national life—a bickering aggregation of individuals, man against man and class against class—a motley crowd of lawless, turbulent and avaricious ungovernables!”

He paused from exhaustion and mopped his shining pow with his handkerchief.

“Maybe Americans are like that,” assented the reporter, “but it is said that we fight pretty well on occasion—in a civil war, for example.”

“Certainly, all Caucasians fight ‘pretty well’ compared with other Caucasians. The Japs are another breed.”

The Inquiring Mind was convinced, but not silenced. “Suppose,” said he, “that a collision ever occurs between an American and a Japanese fleet or army on equal terms, what, in your honest judgment as a military expert, will be the result?”

“Damn them!” shouted the man of no sympathies, “we’ll wipe them off the face of the earth!”

## A JUST DECISION

“AH, I have long hoped for this,” said the Sentimental Bachelor. “It is a good while now—I think it must be ever since Adam—that Tyrant Man has had to pay all too dearly for the favor—and favors—of the unfair sex. Of course, there is a difference in the value of the advantages enjoyed. For illustration, there is the good will of Celeste, of Babette, of Clarisse—best of all, of the incomparable Clorinda! I say good will, for I speak of that which I myself have had the supreme distinction to enjoy; and no gentleman, sir, will ever so far forget himself as to call a lady’s preference for him by a stronger name. Discretion, sir, discretion—that is what every man of sense and feeling goes in for.”

The Timorous Reporter signified such approval as was consistent with the public interest and the prosperity of the press.

“As I was saying, the good will of the admirable Nanette, the most excellent Lucia—excellent no longer, alas, for she is dead—of the superb Héloïse, and I might, perhaps, add to the list one or two others, is above price and beyond appraisal. Yet it was not to be had for nothing; the gods are not so kind. I have suffered, sir, I have paid, believe me.

“What am I coming to? Why, this, my lad, this. The supreme court of one of our States has decided that, in proving an intention of marriage on the part of a male defendant, what the lady plaintiff may have said to others about it is not competent evidence. ‘Hearsay evidence’? Why, yes; the honorable court was polite enough to call it so, but, doubtless, if, with all due respect for the ladies mentioned—Herminia, Adele, Demetria and the others—I may venture to say so, the real ground of exclusion of such evidence is its incredibility. I trust to your discretion not to report me as uttering that opinion; not for the world would I wound the sensibilities of the adorable Miranda, most veracious of her sex.”

The speaker paused, gazing pensively at vacancy as if communing with the day before yesterday. The reporter endeavored to reveal by his manner a policy of expectation.

“My dear boy,” resumed the Sentimental Bachelor, “if you aspire to the good will of a woman, and are marriageable, you should be prepared and willing to have it believed by all her friends that your intentions are honorable—yes, sir; you must submit to be placed in that false position: it is a part of the price. True, you may swear the lady to secrecy; and Congreve says that no one is so

good as a woman to keep a secret, for, although she is sure to tell it, yet nobody will believe her. Alas! he underestimated human credulity, which is the eighth wonder of the world. Beware of human credulity; it is always ready to believe the worst.

“What’s that? You have had sweethearts that did not say you wanted to marry them; women friends that did not say you were in love with them? Fortunate man! But consider how young you are. It is a just inference that they too are young. Youth is the season of veracity; wait. As these excellent young ladies (whom Heaven bless) grow older—as they miss more and more the attentions of men—as they dwell more and more upon joys of the irrevocable past, they will have a different story to tell, and right mercifully is it decreed, that they shall believe it themselves. Why, even the once charming Doretta finds, I am told, a consolation for the horrors of age and whist in the dream of repeated proposals from me—Meeee! Ah, well, it were inhuman to deny to one to whom I gave so much the happiness of stating the amount of the benefaction. Far be it from me to bring down her gray hairs in sorrow to the truth.

“But, suppose, my dear young friend, that I were wealthy enough to be sued for breach of promise of marriage—which Heaven forbid! You see how this righteous decision of that supreme court would remove from me the temptation and necessity of contradicting a lady. Oh, it is a great decision! It marks a notable advance in the apprehension of the underlying motives of human action. For they are human—except Iphigenia, who is divine. Not so beautiful as Perdita; not so intelligent as Lorena; not so devoted as Janette; so young as Marie; so faithful as Theodora—peerless Theodora! But Iphigenia—she has the cleverness to be so very new! It makes a difference.”

Remarking that Bulwer was a most admirable writer, the Timorous Reporter took his leave.

## THE LION’S DEN

“I CAN NOT accept the view,” said the Sentimental Bachelor, looking up from his piano stool, “that because one has a houseful of books and pictures one is necessarily a lover of literature and art. I have a few myself—not many; but you will observe that my book-cases have not glass doors; on the contrary (if you understand the significance of that phrase), they are beautiful examples of the cabinetmaker’s craft, harmonizing well with the architectural and color schemes of the rooms containing them. But the devil a book can you see in them without opening them.

“Why is that? Because, in the first place, books are not beautiful—at least none of those within the means of any but a millionaire. Even the most costly and sumptuous of them are angular, blocklike objects, displeasing to the eye. Unless bound with special reference to the room in which they are to turn their backs on you, most of them will be out of harmony with their environment and with one another.

“Yes, you see here scattered about, mostly on the floor, a few books” (the Sentimental Bachelor indicated them by a graceful gesture of his right hand) “that are as unlovely, as any. But these are volumes having for me a peculiar value from pleasant or tender association—just as any article might have—just, in fact, as that rug has, upon which the divine Janette has deigned to set her little feet. Ah, Janette the adorable!—Melissa being dead.

“You dare to think, no doubt, that with glass doors to my book-cases I should be better able to find readily any particular volume that I might want. Pardon me, but it is unworthy of you to impute to me so deep and dark an ignorance. I should be sorry if ever I failed to put my hand on any desired book in the darkest night. Believe me, my friend, it is not the book-lover who displays his books in a show-case.

“As to pictures, if I were so unfortunate as to own all the treasures of the Dresden galleries, you would see no more than one painting in a room. That is the Japanese way, and the Japanese are the only civilized people in our modern world; they are born artists all, though some neglect their mental heritage and go out as cooks. Think of it!—a people among whom the arranging of three cut flowers in a vase (they know not the dreadful ‘bouquet’) is an art having its principles and laws, its learned professors to expound them, its honorable place in the curriculum of public and private education!

“Trust the Japanese to be always right in a matter of art. His instinct is as infallible as that of the ancient Greek; and our European ‘schools’ of painting are already greatly indebted to him. It is a silly new picture in which the Japanese influence can not be traced. I’m ordering my dependent young brother from Paris to Tokio to study art—the little rascal!

“One painting in a room fixes attention; two divide it; more than two disperse it. Than a wall plastered with bad canvases I know of nothing more distracting and confusing except a wall plastered with good ones. It is like a swarm of pretty girls, or a table d’hôte dinner in a country hotel, where all you are to eat is brought in at once and arranged round your plate. It kills the appetite.

“Why does one do that sort of thing? To impress one’s visitors—to show off. No, no; it is not because one is fond of paintings and never tires of them. Be pleased to exercise your faculty of observation. I passed a few weeks recently at the country house of a friend. Before I had been half an hour in the place he had taken me through all the rooms and shown me a hundred of his ‘art treasures’—paintings by famous ‘masters.’ (Maybe I had my own opinion as to that.) For my pleasure? Why, no; he allowed me less than a half minute to each. Gadzooks! can a fellow digest a painting that he has bolted?. No, sir; ’twas for gratification of his vanity of possession. During the weeks that I remained in his house I never once caught him, nor any member of his family, standing before any one of all those pictures, silently ‘taking it in.’ The purpose of the pictures was to supply an opportunity for his visitors’ envy and compel their tongues to the service of his ears.

“You observe on my walls here,” the veteran virtuoso continued, revolving slowly on his pivot, “one water-color and a lot of trifles—photographs, pen-and-ink drawings, and so forth—most of them rather bad. The painting itself is none too good; I should not like to have my taste in such things judged by it. But observe: it is the work of a young friend, and into every inch of it he has put something of his heart, for it was done in the hope of pleasing me. The carved oak frame, too, is one of his own creation, the mat (of copper)—all. Would the costliest and ugliest of old masters give me as much pleasure? You, yes; but, dear fellow, you are not considered.

“See that pen-and-ink head—there are better. But it is a first attempt, done by the uninstructed young girl whose photograph you see alongside. She is to be a great artist some day, but none of her work will have to me the interest and value of that.

“Ah, those faded and soiled little photographs—Mary, Hélène, Katy, the divine Josie and the rest—you need not look at them; they are merely little soft spots for my eyes to fall upon and rest. Why, sir, there’s not the most trifling object in this room but has a hundred tender recollections clinging to it like bats to a stalactite—swarming about it like bees about Hymettus. Should I replace them with ‘works of art’ bought in the shops and damnably authenticated?

“This room is for me. I live here, read here, write here, smoke here. Wherever my eye falls, it rests upon something that starts a train of thought and emotion infinitely more agreeable, and I believe more profitable, than any suggested by the work of a hand that I never grasped, guided by however sure an eye that never looked into mine. Don’t, I pray you, take the trouble to appear to be interested in these things, such as a country maiden might decorate her sleeping room withal. (Ah, happy country maiden, untaught in the black art of showing off!) Don’t, I beg, give anything

here a second glance: 'there was no thought of pleasing thee' when it was put here.

"Come," concluded the Sentimental Bachelor, taking his hat and stick, "let us go to the Park. I want to show you the fine Rembrandt that I presented to the Art Gallery. Celestine adored it."