

Literature, &c.

From the New Monthly.
A QUARREL WITH OLD PROVERBS.

By Laman Blanchard.

'FINE FEATHERS MAKE FINE BIRDS'
Nothing more universal than the
ith reposed in this false proverb, and
nothing more degrading and ruinous.
Since sermons were first preached on
themes associated with whited supulchres,
having foul odors and rottenness
within—since lectures on those robes and
furred gowns that hide lust and cruelty
—since pictures of immortal Bobadils
with swathing air and sneaking heart,
were first presented on the stage, the
fallacy of the maxim has been glaringly
apparent to every eye, while, as a practical
rule of life it remains as fully in
force as ever. Those who have the wisdom
to ridicule it as the guide of others,
have the folly oftentimes, and continually
in some affairs, to follow it themselves.

It is an absurd taste, or rather an irrational prejudice, that objects to fine feathers, except as aids to deception, and as substitutes for what they should adorn. It is good to laugh at that worst of vulgarities, which is always dreading to be thought forward, and fears to array itself in a graceful and becoming garb, lest its solid qualities should be mistaken for mere glitter. He is a shallow philosopher who is frightened at the thought of being taken for a cockcomb, and dresses meanly to denote the greatness of his mind. The foppery of the beau is to be preferred to the foppery of the sloven. All grand disdain of trifles is a symptom of littleness, and an affected contempt for fair ornament is the most pitiful of affectations.

The 'goodly outside' is excellent, when not falsely assumed; but the worst natural face that nature's journeyman ever left unfinished is better than the bravest mask that ever hid it. The sword sheath of exquisite workmanship—the gilt vellum and the rich leather in which the pages of poetry and philosophy are preserved—may be vanities, but they are never despised except by a vanity infinitely more preposterous. But because they are fair to see, and to be prized in themselves, shall we admit with our forefathers—as by implication we must if we take our text for the rule—that fine scabbards make finely tempered blades, and that splendid binding make a precious book!

I look at the crowds of gaudy overdressed people in the world, who seem to have taken such pains to display, not to hide, the hypocrisy which is their rule of action—who want to pass for fine people, and begin by showing that they do, which at once defeats the whole project. There are the fine feathers truly, but what are the birds? Look at the whole family of the Peacocks with their tails spread! Do their splendid dyes convince any body that they have melodious voices, or, when all that gorgeous plumage is plucked off, would a famished pauper dine upon the tenderest of the train while stewed boot-tops were to be had?

Look at the style of this author; how smooth and glossy it is—how pleasingly mottled and how gaily crested; it bristles up occasionally into a sort of bland fierceness, and carries the fine-feather principle as far as it will go. But has any critic out of the moon discovered him to be a fine writer because he affects the air of one? His sentences are nicely balanced, his periods seductively rounded; but what do they contain? Does any one suspect him of having been once troubled with a thought in his whole life? Was he ever, even in a dream, the possessor of a solitary idea? Look again at this actor; he may boast from his birth the fine feathers in which a name associated with excellence always decorates its inheritor; but who is it that therefore sees in him a Richard or an Othello? Look at this specimen of a fine gentleman; in outward form and bearing, in dress and manner, he has every requisite, except the power—in whatsoever he may say or do—not of being true and generous—but of hiding from common observers his utter heartlessness, duplicity, avarice, and self-love. He has every thing that belongs to the gentleman, except the spirit of one. A fine bird indeed his fine feathers make of him! Look again at this painter. Are his grotesque forms and brilliant colours tokens of high art—or of low artifice? Do not consider his plumage, but the mean, meagre, stupid, shapeless thing it clothes and covers. If birds were all feathers, he would be a fine animal.

The allusions here, are less to individuals than to classes; and in the same way, with the same result, the reference might be extended to every department of Pretension; in law, science, and divi-

nity;—we might almost venture to say, but it must be said with reverence, in oratory, and in statesmanship! In all these, the pomp of the feathers, often conceals, the poverty of the bird; only to be afterwards to be seen in ridiculous contrast with it. The successful quibble at the expense of truth, the false gallop in reason or on railroads at the expense of ambition, the humble air masking ambition, and the 'damned error' blessed with a saving text—the rush of words and the jumble of images intended for a sublime burst, and the expedient measure which makes nothing certain but the sacrifice of principle—are so many instances that people imagine they can wear fine feathers with admirable effect all through life, however they may laugh at others when similarly tricked out.

The finery intended to impose on the world retains the power of keeping the wearer wrapped up in notions of self-importance, long after it has lost the effect of deceiving the looker on. The mere glitter ceases to please: and the charm once gone, comes the sound conviction, that the tone of the fiddle would be improved if the varnish were scraped off. To prefer the spoiled tone for the sake of the gloss, would be to prefer, for the sake of his fine feathers, the taste of a macaw with the toughness of half a century upon his bones to the flavor of a partridge with nothing but his tender and delicate flesh to atone for his plainness.

SELF-CULTURE.

BY WILLIAM E. CHANNING.

SELF-CULTURE is practical, or it proposes as one of its chief ends to fit us for action, to make us efficient in whatever we undertake, to train us to firmness of purpose and fruitfulness of resource in common life, and especially in emergencies, in times of difficulty, danger and trial. But passing over this and other topics for which I have no time, I shall confine myself to two branches of self-culture which have been almost wholly overlooked in the education of the people, and which ought not to be so slighted.

In looking at our nature, we discover, among its admiral endowments, the sense or perception of beauty. We see the germ of this in every human being, and there is no power which admits greater cultivation; and why should it not be cherished in all? It deserves remark, that the provision for this principle is infinite in the universe. There is but a very minute portion of the creation which we can turn into food and clothes, or gratification for the body; but the whole creation may be made to minister to the sense of beauty. Beauty is an all pervading presence. It unfolds in the numberless flowers of the spring. It waves in the branches of tress and the green blades of grass. It haunts the depths of the earth and sea, and gleams out in the hues of the shell and the precious stone. And not only these minute objects but the ocean, the mountains, the clouds, the heavens, the stars, the rising and setting sun, all overflow with beauty. The universe is its temple; and those men who are alive to it cannot lift their eyes without feeling themselves encompassed with it on every side. Now this beauty is so precious, the enjoyments it gives are so refined and pure, so congenial with our tenderest and noble feelings, and so akin to worship, that it is painful to think of the multitude of men as living in the midst of it, and living almost as blind to it, as if, instead of this fair earth and glorious sky, they were tenants of a dungeon. An infinite joy is lost to the world by the want of culture of this spiritual endowment. Suppose that I were to visit a cottage, and to see its walls lined with the choicest pictures of Raphael, and every nook filled with statues of the most exquisite workmanship, and that I were to learn, that neither man woman or child ever cast an eye at these miracles of art, how should I feel their privation; how should I want to open their eyes, and to help them to comprehend and feel the loveliness and grandeur which in vain courted their notice. But every husbandman is living in sight of the works of a diviner artist; and how much would his existence be elevated, could he see the glory which shines forth in their forms, hues, proportions and moral expression. I have spoken only of the beauty of nature, but how much of this mysterious charm is found in the elegant arts, and especially in literature? The best books have most beauty. The greatest truths are wronged if not linked with beauty, and they win their way most surely and deeply into the soul when arrayed in this their natural and fit attire. Now no man receives the true culture of a man, in whom the sensibility to the beautiful is not cherished, and I know of no condition of life from which it should be excluded. Of all luxuries this is the cheapest and most at

hand, and it seems to me to be the most important to those conditions, where coarse labour tends to give a grossness to the mind. From the diffusion of the sense of beauty in ancient Greece, and of the taste for music in modern Germany, we learn that the people at large may partake of refined gratifications which have hitherto been thought to be necessarily restricted to a few.

What beauty is, is a question which the most penetrating minds have not satisfactorily answered; nor, were I able, is this the place for discussing it. But one thing I would say; the beauty of the outward creation is intimately related to the lovely, grand, interesting attributes of the soul. It is the emblem or expression of these. Matter becomes beautiful to us, when it seems to lose its material aspect, its inertness, infiniteness and grossness, and by the ethereal lightness of its forms and motions seems to approach spirit; when it images to us pure and gentle affections; when it spreads out into a vastness which is a shadow of the Infinite; or when in more awful shapes and movements of the Omnipotent. Thus outward beauty is akin to something deeper and unseen, is the reflection of spiritual attributes; and of consequence the way to see and feel it more and more keenly is to cultivate those moral, religious, intellectual and social principles of which I have already spoken, and which are the glory of the spiritual nature; and I name this, that you may see, what I am anxious to show, the harmony which subsists among all branches of human culture, or how each forwards and is aided by all.

There is another power, which each man should cultivate according to his ability, but which is very much neglected in the mass of the people, and that is the power of Utterance. A man was not made to shut up his mind in itself; but to give it voice and to exchange it for other minds. Speech is one of our grand distinctions from the brute. Our power over others lies not so much in the amount of thought within us, as in the power of bringing it out. A man of more than ordinary intellectual vigor, may, for want of expression, be a cypher, without significance, in society. And not only does a man influence others, but he greatly aids his own intellect, by giving distinct and forcible utterance to his thoughts. We understand ourselves better, our conceptions grow clearer, by the very effort to make them clear to another. Our social rank too depends a good deal on our power of utterance. The principal distinction between what are called gentlemen and the vulgar lies in this, that the latter are awkward in manners, and are essentially wanting in propriety, clearness, grace, and force of utterance. A man who cannot open his lips without breaking a rule of grammar, without showing in his dialect or brogue or uncouth tones his want of cultivation, or without darkening his meaning by a confused, unskillful mode of communication, cannot take the place to which perhaps his native good sense entitles him. To have intercourse with respectable people, we must speak their language. On this occasion, I am glad that grammar and a correct pronunciation are taught in the common schools of this city. These are not trifles; nor are they superfluous to any class of people. They give a man access to social advantages, on which his improvement very much depends. The power of utterance should be inculcated in all their plans of self-culture.

From the New Yorker.

FEMALE SOVEREIGNS.

UNDER this title Mrs. Jamieson has given her sex two volumes, which every woman ought to read. The most interesting facts are culled with judgement and given with fidelity. Still, even at this late day, we must raise our feeble voice against Mrs. J.'s deduction, that females (because of their sex) have been unfortunate sovereigns. This is not historic truth. History is a collection of facts; we must take them as they stand. When we moralise on the effects certain causes might have produced, we have strayed from history, and, it is possible, are none the nearer to philosophy. It is true of the sex, that we are made to adorn the world, rather than to command it; but it is no less true, that we should look at historical facts in their just bearing, or it is useless to study them at all. Mrs. Jamieson's theory can be best examined by a candid review of the reigns she has given in support of her position. We will take them up in her own order:

Semiramis can hardly be termed an established historical identity. She is a dim, gigantic shadow, dressed in fabled colors Her era was before the birth of profane history. All that tradition re-

veals of her is, that in Asia—where woman, to the remotest times, has been a mere possession, a slave—a queen, great in design and magnificent in execution, held under her sway a vast empire; that she was obeyed by millions in her life, and after death, received from posterity divine honors. Queenlike indeed must have been the intellect that won and kept such power; and most beneficent her rule, since the recollection has been so grateful to succeeding ages. Her memory was revered through the East; and vague and uncertain as are the traces of the stupendous works attributed to her, she has left, at the distance of thirty-five centuries, the imprint of a splendid and useful character. Useful—for tradition ascribes to her that 'she made roads, and led rivets, and fertilized barren realms, where, before her reign, the wild beast only had trod.' She wished to play the conqueror too, like the lords of creation, but was less happy than in her system of internal improvements.

About two centuries after, lived Nicotris, another Assyrian queen, who resembles her in the splendor and extent of her public works. It is possible that both these names were impersonations of dynasties, and that the works of a race of kings have concentrated their lustre on a single name. But the general belief sustains the individual existence of these illustrious queens of Assyria.

Cleopatra—the last Cleopatra—brings us to the Christian era, when the world plunged in the deepest abyss of crime, was awaiting the light of purer day. But the Redeemer had not yet appeared when the Egyptian queen lived and died, the type and victim of her age. Egypt, a fragment of the usurped empire of Alexander, was the portion of spoils allotted to Ptolemy Lagus. Planted in a kingdom won by force and sustained by crime, the history of the dynasty of the Ptolemies is a series of such monstrous atrocities that human nature sickens at the recital. Cleopatra, last of the infamous line, came to the throne on a joint possession with her brother. Unable to cope with the artful and treacherous ministers of the young Ptolemy, who wished to remove her from the sovereignty, fled to Syria. She was then scarcely sixteen; yet, with wonderful perseverance and address, she formed a strong party, levied an army, and returned to Egypt to decide by arms the contest with her brother. They were laid down at the command of Cæsar, who constituted himself umpire in the dispute. On the decision of that all powerful umpire let the shame rest, if the decision was unjust. Cleopatra gave herself to infamy. But Cæsar betrayed the honor of the Roman name, in allowing partiality, not good faith, to decide on the welfare of a nation. The weakness and vices of the young queen are beyond extenuation, but we must not forget that she was educated a votary of the dark Isis, and cannot be fairly judged by those who have been formed in a purer faith. Our business at present is with the political effects of her career. As sovereign, she ruled Egypt for twelve years after the decision of Cæsar, with ability and success. She was respected at home and abroad; and under her liberal and pacific policy, her realm was more rich, prosperous and happy, than it has been at any time in the nineteen centuries that have since rolled away. It was not the mismanagement of Cleopatra that swept Egypt from the list of nations. It was the restless, insatiable tide of Roman ambition. A second time she delayed the catastrophe by conciliating Pompey, at the expense of another stain of infamy. A third time she was implicated in the civil dissensions that convulsed Rome. It was impossible to avoid it, for she was a Roman vassal. Antony in the tone of a dictator, commanded her to appear before him in Cilicia. She obeyed, and the rough but magnificent warrior felt the power of charms that had subdued a Cæsar and a Pompey; he knelt, a suppliant lover, where he had intended to command as master. From that forward bound to the faction of Marc Antony, Cleopatra brought to his aid the rich resources of her kingdom, and faithfully adhered to his fortunes until the fatal battle, or rather flight, of Actium. Even that was dictated by cowardice rather than treachery, and at any rate the same results were inevitable. Antony was no match, in war or policy, for the victorious Cæsar. If he had evaded an Actium, he would have found a Pharsalia; and Egypt, compelled at first to the alliance, was included, by the enchantment of circumstances, in his fall. In considering the primary causes, it must be remembered that it was not the queen Cleopatra who first bent her country to a foreign yoke; that was the act of the king her father. After the diadem of