

## Notches on The Stick

The idea has grown up in some minds that public interest in poetry throughout America is declining. How that originated it is impossible to say, unless it might have been in the barren tastes of the persons who first gave it publicity. If this gradgrind world could kill the faculties by which poetry is to be appreciated, or even dull them to any considerable extent the supposition might be correct. But every alleged fact must be brought to the testing; and in this case, one of the largest publishing firms in the country has instituted the test. This was done by sending out a circular letter addressed to representative lists of poets, authors, editors, publishers, librarians, and booksellers. An abstract of the result is to be found in tabulated form, as follows:

CLASS.	No.	Replies.	Yes.	No.
Poets and authors.....	48	27	3	24
Editors and publishers.....	100	88	11	77
Booksellers.....	160	85	9	74
Librarians.....	100	92	11	81

Current literature has had the privilege of examining this correspondence and prints extracts of interest. Mr. S. S. McClure declares that "Good poetry is read everywhere. The poems of James Whitcomb Riley are read as widely as any other form of literature. I should like nothing better than to publish half a dozen poems every month in McClure's if I could get good interesting poetry." Mr. Munsey, editor of Munsey's Magazine is of the opinion that "The day of the epic seems to be over, but a good lyric or ballad was never more popular." Dr. William Hayes Ward, editor of the Independent says: "The subscribers of the Independent want poetry, and indicate their appreciation by letters of approval. Poetry is studied in all our schools and colleges; our magazines must have them: our daily papers publish columns of it. A really fine poem makes a hit as no prose writing can do." Mr. Charles A. Dana's reply was brief to the point. "Nonsense," said he, "the interest in poetry is as great as it ever was." Not a single magazine or new paper editor expressed a different opinion. Of the publishers those who were of the view that interest in poetry was declining were, with one or two exceptions, those who did not publish any poetry at all. Houghton, Mifflin & Co. said: "The demand for the standard poets whose works we publish—Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, etc.—is quite large and very steady. We should say that there is no indication whatever that poetry is losing its hold." T. Y. Crowell & Co. declared: "From our standpoint we should say that the interest in poetry remains about the same as it has for a number of years back. The interest in some of the standard poets is increasing very perceptibly."

The letters from booksellers bristled with facts. Brennan's may be considered a fairly typical one:

"We do not think facts will warrant the supposition that readers of poetry are fewer, or that general interest in poetic literature is declining or has declined during the past generation. It seems to us that at no time during an experience of twenty years, has there been a more appreciative and general demand for good poetry than at the present writing. We cite only a few examples. In the case of Shakespeare—despite the fact that numberless editions at all prices were on the market, when less than two years ago, the Temple edition was inaugurated—no one anticipated more than moderate success. At a time when five more volumes were needed to complete the set, the sales had mounted up to over one million copies. Some months since, a brief notice was made that a new edition of Byron was projected. There was a universal inquiry as to possible price, and probable completeness. While there may be a falling off in the demand for minor poets of a generation ago, it has not affected in any way the continuous and constantly increasing demand Keats, Tennyson and Browning. We find that our native writers have only to prove their merit to receive reward on their native soil, as witness James Whitcomb Riley, than whom few writers of fiction command larger sales, and much of whose verse is highly prized in England, although the dialect must be most difficult of comprehension. But his English publishers have brought out a fifteenth edition within eight years. We ought not to omit the host of minor poets, such as Frank Dempster Sherman, Walter Learned, Samuel Minturn Peck, George Baker and that class of writers of society verse both in America and England whose books are reprinted and sold in charmingly made editions year after year. We have neglected

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to mention also the case of Omar Khayyam, who was totally unknown to general readers twenty years ago, but whose Rabiyyat is now annually sold in thousands—one firm has five different and distinct editions on their list at the same time.

Mr. Thomas Wentworth Higginson raises a very interesting point. "The popularity of poetry cannot be judged by the number of volumes sold," says he, "for a poem that touches the heart will reappear in hundreds of newspapers, while a volume is selling a thousand copies." Dr. Edward Everett Hale and Francis F. Browne, editor of the Dial expressed the same opinion.

It is but recently we came upon a clerical exhortation of Walt Whitman, in which the critic exhausted his vocabulary in seeking to "away with this fellow," on the ground of his criminal indecency, and the effrontery of his barbaric yawp. We thought then, as we do now, that the writer's indignation was forced and excessive, and quite unwarranted by the poet's offences. It is not ours to apologize for the erotic wanton, in verse or prose, and in which Whitman set forth his ideas is a matter hardly yet determined; but we have not recognized in him any lurking virus of that sort. Justice must acquit him of any Byronic taint, either in his life or his writings. He has chosen subjects for discussion and poetic description that are by universal consent tabooed in modern society. He is accused of a gross unblushing naturalism, of which he approves, and with which he would make his hardy reader familiar. For this he has reaped thistles of public avoidance and rebuke,—for

"What old Chaucer's merry page betide, The chaster muse of modern days omits."

We are glad the literary age errs so little in that direction; nevertheless we are inclined to think it not only purist, but prudish. The writers who emulate Fielding and Smollett can scarcely be tolerated, and we can approve a certain sensitiveness on the score of a Hardy or a D'Annunzio; but even the books of Dickens and Hugo suffer reprobation on the ground of alleged immorality. The mawkishness of our literary appetite has become whimsical indeed! We doubt not an excellent effect in some cases, may have been induced by the labors of Anthony Comstock and his associates; but there has lately set in a fantastic phase of their work, and there is danger here, as elsewhere, that before we know it, an excellent virtue will have run to seed.

A small portion of Whitman's writing, however, falls under this reprobation; and it may, hereafter, if that is desirable, by judicious editing be entirely eliminated. There is, fortunately, another side to the Whitmanian character than the poetic, which may serve to set before us in fairer light his somewhat dishonored memory. His service in the hospitals at Washington in the time of war, where, from the close of 1862 to the middle of 1864, he ministered, with boundless brotherliness and eminent success to upwards of 100,000 men, is matter of general knowledge; but the recent publication of his letters, written during that period, ["The Wound Dresser," forming the second volume of the new edition of Whitman's complete works, published by Small, Maynard & Co., of Boston,] will set that period of his life, and

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that phase of his character, before us more luminously and completely, and "write him as one who loved his fellowmen."

Whatever we may find to repel or to startle us in the "Leaves of Grass", there is nothing in these Letters to neutralize the respect and sympathy we instinctively feel when we see an earnest man busily toiling for the amelioration of human suffering, animated by love and sustained by an unflinching courage. There is nothing ambitious or literary in their style; they are often scrappy, giving evidence of having been hastily written, and addressed in the plainest conversational terms to familiar friends; but they present an indubitably faithful record of that troublous, uncertain time, rife with bitterest hardship. That harsh selfishness, that lack of human sympathy and loving kindness where, above all places, it was so sorely needed, only sets his heroic strength and woman like tenderness into bolder relief. His crowning, peculiar quality as a nurse may best be exhibited in the following extract:

"To many of the wounded and sick, especially the youngsters, there is something in personal love, caresses, and the magnetic flood of sympathy and friendship, that does, in its way, more good than all the medicine in the world. I have spoken of my regular gifts of delicacies, money, tobacco, special articles of food, knick-knacks, etc. But I steadily found more and more that I could help and turn the balance in favor of cure by the means here alluded to. The American soldier is full of affection and the yearning for affection. And it comes wonderfully grateful to him to have this yearning gratified when he is laid up with painful wounds or illness, far away from home, among strangers. Many will think this mere sentimentalism, but I know it is the most solid of facts. I believe that even the moving around among the men, or through the ward, of a hearty, healthy, clean, strong, generous-souled person, man or woman, full of humanity and love, sending out invisible, constant currents thereof, does immense good to the sick and wounded."

During the time Whitman was doing this invaluable work, he was himself living precariously,—performing odd jobs as a copyist, that he might procure little gifts and delicacies for his sick and wounded boys; living on the plainest fare, in some obscure back chamber, and hoarding as a select treasure the occasional contribution of friends, with which he might bring relief to the war, the homesick, the miserable, who came by hundreds to the wards of Washington hospitals. While, to our imagination, like a form of light, Florence Nightingale moves amid the horrors of Eastern war, laying the gentle and loving touch where sorely tried hearts could only repay her with blessings, shall we not only refuse to see any of the like celestial brightness about the man who, whatever his creed or philosophy, "did what he could," when to do was greatly needful, but seek also to exclude him, by reprobation, from human interest and sympathy? God holds the scale, and adjusts the balance; we dare not determine. We can but see him devoting the best years of his life to so sacred a service, and adding the significance of his act to that familiar watchword—The Brotherhood of Man. We can but remember the words of Him who came to bind the wounds of humanity, and heal with celestial kindness the broken hearted.—"Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."

A friend sends us a critique on Dr. Ross "Clarinda." It is from the Saturday Review, and is intended to be a crusher. It certainly does not fail to be pungent: "A more shameless piece of book-making was never given to the world; there is positively something loathsome in such a volume as this; it is brutal, it is mean; if ever a woman disgraced womanhood it was the voluptuous and puritan prude, Clarinda." So the reviewer walks into the editor, the contributors, and all who have had to do with the book. We are asked what we think of it,—the review, we mean. Now don't! Dr. Ross need not take it ill, nor lose any sleep, because a dog barks at him; this is among the most indifferent of consequences. He is a dog without a collar, too,—quite nameless, and without even a number. Nor are at issue with the dog. Even that gentlemanly and extremely agreeable person may reflect,—"Have I not, too, at times condescended to be a critical dog, and have I not barked?" Sometimes, indeed, it is the poor cur's only chance of distinction? Why should he not, when all the shaggy generation lift up their voices, seek to excel in the chorus? If the good dog only barks well, (the present one is dubious,) it advances the cause of the one at whose heels he barks. We take up this denounced book, to renew our impression, and running down the title-page and index we find the names of Blackie, Shairp, Latto, Waddell, and of the Scotch poet, Alexander Smith. We are reminded of

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the old farmer's reply to the remonstrance against his eating skippery cheese: "Never mind: I guess I can stand it if they can." If the critic survives, Dr. Ross may rest easy. As for the critic's pendant,—that disquisition on the wives of poets,—it is an old story, often told, and in which the merit must needs lie in the quality of the teller's invention.

We are informed by the editor of the Evening Express, Los Angeles, Cal., that Henryk Sienkiewicz. (Pr. S.n.gay-vits) author of that Neronian romance which has become the most popular book of the day, was once "this world's tired denizen," on the Pacific coast of America, and in that veritable city. "But," as we are assured, "he was here in 1876, for some time, and it is asserted by some that he worked for a short time in a store on Main St. He came out from Poland with the colony that was headed by the husband of Modjeska, intending to lead a farmer's life on the land that was purchased by the colony near Santa Ana. Finding that he could not enjoy that sort of existence, he withdrew from the colony and made his way into this city. All that remains now of the colony and its original holdings of land, is Modjeska's rural establishment at a place that is prettily called Arden, after Shakespeare's favorite forest of Arden. The great actress has made her most notable triumphs in the character of Rosalind, which is another reason she had for naming her country place Arden, the sweetest of all names of places." The country with all its advantages, did not altogether please the budding romancer; who, like most visitors, was not reluctant to express himself in good round terms of disfavor,—against its cookery, its churches, its custom-house officials, its corrupt courts, and its vulgar people. He remained only about six months, when he returned to his own country. But "the American Notes" could not neutralize the charms of "Nicholas Nickleby" and "David Copperfield"; and no half forgotten sarcasms of Sienkiewicz can prevent the people of this country from relishing to the full, and from buying innumerable copies of, that powerfully melodramatic, "Quo Vadis."

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arranged in a circle and working on a circular track over the central pier. Iron wedges, slightly curved to conform to the circle of the track, were placed back of the rollers. The draw was turned by the regular machinery, and rolled up the wedges, rising about half an inch. Other wedges were placed oppositely, facing, and the bridge was turned back, and rolling up on the new wedges, raised itself about half an inch more. The total rise of an inch or so was enough to enable the requisite replacement of parts to be effected.

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Yours faithfully,  
L. E. Parr, Crystal City, Man.

Sol Smith Russell is 48 years old.  
Rhea's real name is Hortense Loret.