

Notches on The Stick

Thomas Wentworth Higginson may be termed a prince of raconteurs. A mellow and gracious personality, full of goodfellowship; an accomplished and polished gentleman, and foremost among American scholars and literati; long familiar with men and affairs, the associate of authors, artists, musicians, statesmen and philanthropists; furnished with many an apropos, well crammed with ana and reminiscence; it is not strange that he should be found an agreeable companion, nor unlikely that he should write such a book as "Cheerful Yesterdays", full of genial light, of piquancy and flavor. That he is now in the fullness of his years, with a wide backward range of memory and experience, and the intimacy and friendship of men who are now historic or classical memories, qualifies him to take the head of the table, while all the enlivened company, without thought of objection, lend him their ears. His book, though autobiographical, is less about himself than others: a silken string on which his pearls are strung, and which is therefore a thing both of use and ornament. A denizen of Cambridge, Mass., where he was born in 1823, and one of that coterie of men who have given social and literary prestige to Boston, "he found there all that human heart and mind could need for elementary training. He tumbled about among books from his birth. Of how many children could mothers record that at four years of age they had 'read many books?' The primer and Mother Goose usually suffice. If they proceed then to a book of fables it must be by the assistance of their elders. Yet Higginson does not complain of injurious consequences from his precocity. We may imagine the boy stretched on a rug before the fire-light on winter evening, reading, or listening to the Waverley Novels, so recently added to the world's literary property. They were but a morsel. What a hunger, my masters, is the book-hunger! Do you think the libraries will ever be able to satisfy it? And would an eternity without books be a blank! That he should deal with books and be himself a maker of them, in future life was a foregone conclusion. He might have been many things,—a lover and helper of his fellowmen, a knightly gentleman, a warrior sans reproche,—but an author he must have been! "Lying in his bed the boy heard serenaders under his sister's window, singing the fine old glees, 'To Greece we give our shining blades'; it made him feel, in Keats' phrase, as if he were going to a tournament." Fitted for Harvard at the private school of William Wells, he received this impression there: "The ill effects of a purely masculine world" by which he was given "a life-long preference for co-education." And again! "One almost romantic aspect of the school was the occasional advent of Spanish boys, usually from Porto Rico, who were as good as dime novels to us, with their dark skins and sonorous names—Victoriano, Rosello, Magin Royal, Pedro Mangual. They swore superb Spanish oaths, and they once or twice drew knives upon one another with an air which the 'Pirate's Own Book' left nothing to surpass." This is romance—the concrete thing! And a boy's delight in athletic adventure was known to him. Riley had not greater delight in the use of the 'swimmin' hole' than had Higginson. He tells us how he enjoyed learning: "Few moments in life ever gave a sense of conquest and achievement so delicious as when I first made my way through water beyond my depth." To be a master of two elements must give one a sense of gratified ambition.

Life was enlarged for him when college days came. He records some of his impressions of University conditions, and their effect on the community in which such a seat of learning may be located: "Living in a college town is like dwelling inside a remarkably large beehive, where one can watch all day long the busy little people inside; can see them going incessantly too and fro honey making, pausing occasionally to salute or sting one another, all without the slightest peril to the beholder."

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Life becomes rich in this safe and curious contemplation." An intimate college friend, and one to whom he accounted himself most deeply indebted, was Levi Lincoln Thaxter, a Browning lover, and a man of exalted literary tastes. Of him Higginson says: Thaxter's modesty and reticence, and the later fame of his poet-wife, Celia, have obscured him to the world; but he was one of the most loyal and high-minded of men." From Harvard it is a step into the best society of New England, for such as he. Our teller of the story of old days can trace the rise and progress of transcendentalism in a time when as saith Emerson, there was "not a reading man but had a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket." He was therefore in the secret of Brook Farm, and its philosophers were to him but common oracles. Charles A. Dana is said to have been their best "all-round man," and his lips were then eloquently opened, while George William Curtis' silver tongue was silent in public assemblies. "The latter was seen at the Farm walking about in shirt sleeves with his boots over his trousers, yet escorting a maiden with that elegant grace which was native to him. The elder brother of our raconteur could see without illusion and speak without ceremony, for he is remembered as saying of that favorite of courtly men: "Jim Lowell doubt whether he shall really be a lawyer, after all; he thinks he shall be a poet." And, for a wonder he thought wisely, as 999 out of every 1000 who propose the same thing, do not. Of Lowell, N. P. Willis said that he was "the best launched man of his time. It is an preternatural wakefulness. . . . Much as I love the mountains I do not think their solitudes good medicine for the brain sick. There is something in the savagery of nature, as evidenced in rude gorge deep canyon and beetling rock mass, that can have only a depressing effect on the unfortunate, who conscious of the disturbance of his mental poise, lives day by day and hour by hour in deadly fear of that 'horror of great darkness,' worse than annihilation that he feels impending. The companionship of a wise and loving friend can do more toward the healing of such an one than the lonely quiet of nature. Two persons, brought hither in the hope that the change from the busy life of the city might heal their mental ail, committed suicide in the Park. One eluded the vigilance of the friend who accompanied him, and securing a gun,—fatally easy to find in a mountain cabin,—went up a near by eminence and now called from him Mount Wolfert, and shot himself. His body was found sometime next day and taken out for burial. . . . No, the mountains are not good medicine for the unbalanced, with suicidal predilections; but for all other ones physical or mental, this little valley, nestling in the embrace of the hills, with its clear rapid river and health-giving Thermal Springs, is a natural sanitarium. From the porch of the office I have such beautiful glimpses of the Front Range seen through Windy Gap, Long's Peak with the deep cleft in its side, and the three Arapahoe Peaks. These mountains are about forty miles away, and the tints they take on at sunset are most lovely. The latter half of our day is the shortest, which may seem paradoxical; but the explanation is that the sun rises over a low ridge south of the Gap, and sets beyond Continental Divide, which is much higher. So old Sol smiles benignantly upon our little world at an early hour, and leaves a little ahead of schedule time for the outside world. But we don't mind, for the long spurs of Medicine Bow Range running down into the valley from the south-east, and the mountains walling in Windy Gap still hold his parting beams, and as he sinks lower and the light climbs higher up their rugged sides, they take on the most beautiful tints. First a pale yellow deepening to orange, then changing to pink, (a color I never saw elsewhere at sunset.) Fades, and the deep blue veil is drawn over all. But still we don't mind, for the moon comes out with all her glorious retinue of stars, not set in the blue vault, but projected far in front, seeming very near, to our Happy Valley. The other night I heard a man remark to his companion, as they left the Bath House: 'Look at that moon, just a few feet above the ridge!' (evidently not the moon he was accustomed

ed to.) 'I've a notion to throw a stone at it.'

Bliss Carman has a poem in his recent book of Elegies on Paul Verlaine, the French Bohemian, who only after his death took his place among the great poets of his age. In this tributary piece occur some of his telling characteristic phrases, such as,—

"The loving-kindness of the grass,
The tender patience of the flowers;"
which reminds us of Lanier's sentiment,—
"The little gray leaves were kind to him
The thorn tree had a mind to him
When into the woods he came."
Not less striking are the closing lines:
The little grass; of the leaves,
The Nunc dimittis of the rain!"

Prof. Charles G. D. Rober's writes approvingly of Le Gallienne's rendering of Omar Khayyam: "One needs both his Fitzgerald and his Le Gallienne; and might well pray that yet a third poet, nobly reared might take up with as magical fingers the rich gleanings which these two have left behind them. The English speaking world, I must conclude, is deeply in debt to Mr. Le Gallienne, not only for his presentation of a new side of the great Persian genius, but also for a very finished and beautiful English poem."

The reader will remember a little fancy or conceit of the flowers by Mrs. Percia V. White, quoted in these columns from the Youth's Companion. We here present a companion piece, not less enticing:

The Daisy Sewing Circle.
Around a tiny grass-green quilt
The Daisy gossips sit,
And in and out, and in and out,
The tiny needles fit.
And right and left the cap-strings fly,
So earnest is the work,
And up and down, and up and down,
The tiny cap-trills jerk!
And many a merry laugh goes round
And many a word of wit,
As round a tiny grass-green quilt
The Daisy gossips sit.

The world of English Literature now claims an author named Robert Herrick, who is not to be confounded with the lyric poet who departed this life over three centuries ago. The modern Robert is a divine also, and a graduate of Harvard, and is the author of a book entitled, "The Gospel of Freedom." He is at present a professor in the University of Chicago.

Theodore Roberts has a poem entitled "The Country Day," in The Youth's Companion, worthy of reproduction:

The sun comes over the orchard wall,
The wind wakes up the poplar trees,
I hear Joe sing as he milks Red Bess—
Holding the pail between his knees;
And a robin whistles, "Wake up, tired head
You're needed more in the turnip bed."
The sun drops over the sombre hills,
The wind cries low in the poplar trees,
I hear Joe sing as he milks Red Bess—
Holding the pail between his knees.
The bats twirl blackly about my head,
And the dustman draws me away to bed.

So up I go, with the stars for light,
To the little room with the curtained wall,
Outside the trees are whispering
And the swooping night hawks dip and call—
And presently, when their cries are still,
My dreams climb over the window sill.
agreeable picture we get of Lowell's house-keeping in the upper story of his father's old mansion house, and of his sweet young wife, poet gifted like himself, "keeping the rooms, including his study, as orderly as she could. . . . There she rocked her baby in a cradle fashioned from a barrel cut lengthways, placed on rockers, and upholstered by herself."

What writer alive to his time could discourse of events covering sixty years past and not touch upon those leading up to the Civil War? Not Higginson. He is profoundly moved. The abolition movement had in him a champion. No imprudence of John Brown in his mad foray in Virginia could blind him to the essential nobleness of the man. He knew him, sympathized with his aims, if not his methods and writes of him: "He was simply a high-minded, unselfish, belated, Covenanter, a man whom Sir Walter Scott might have drawn. He had that religious elevation which is a kind of refinement—the quality one may see expressed in many a venerable Quaker face at yearly meeting. He lived, as he finally died, absolutely absorbed in one idea; and it is as a pure enthusiast that he is to be judged. His belief was that an all-seeing God had created the Alleghany Mountains from all eternity as the predestined refuge for a body of fugitive slaves." Of the Liberator's wife he writes: "Never in my life have I been in contact with a nature more dignified and noble; a Roman matron touched with the finer element of Christianity. She told me that his plan for slave liberation had occupied her husband's thoughts and prayers for twenty years; that he always believed himself an instrument in the hands of Providence, and she believed it too."

The poet's of the time have been his associates, and are the subjects of his comment. Of the "Bard of Democracy," first



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It's the wash,
out early, done
quickly, cleanly,
white.

Pure Soap did it
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met in a Boston publisher's office, he thus records his impression: "I saw before me, sitting on a counter, a handsome, burly man, heavily built. I felt perhaps a little prejudiced against him from having read his 'Leaves of Grass,' on a voyage in the early stages of sea-sickness, a fact which doubtless increased for me the intrinsic unsavoriness of certain passages. But the personal impression made on me by the poet was not so much of manliness as of Boweriness, if I may coin the word; indeed, rather suggesting Sidney Lanier's subsequent vigorous phrase 'a dandy roustabout.' This passing impression did not hinder me from thinking of Whitman with satisfaction and hope at a later day when regiments were to be raised for the war, when the Bowery seemed the very place to enlist them, and even 'Billy Wilson's Zouaves' were hailed with delight. When, however, after waiting a year or more, the poet decided that the proper post for him was hospital service, I confess to a feeling of reaction, which was rather increased than diminished by his profuse celebration of his own labors." At this we are not surprised as we are at his estimate of Matthew Arnold, who appeared to him "a keen but by no means a judicious critic, and in no proper sense a poet."

We must indulge one more citation. Being in England he sought out the Isle of Wight, and, announced by the daughter of Thackeray, presented himself at the door of Farringford. Ushered into the drawing room he sat waiting: "Presently I heard a rather heavy step in the adjoining room, and there stood in the doorway the most un-English-looking man I had yet seen. He was tall and high-shouldered, careless in dress, and while he had a high and domed forehead, yet his brilliant eyes and tangled hair and beard gave him rather the air of a partially reformed Corsican bandit or else an imperfectly secularized Carmelite monk, than of a decorous and well-groomed Englishman. He greeted me shyly, gave me his hand, which was in those days a good deal for an Englishman, and then sidled up to the mantel-piece, leaned on it, and said, with the air of a vexed school boy, 'I am rather afraid of you Americans; your countrymen do not treat me very well. There was Bayard Taylor'—and then he went into a long narration of some grievance incurred through an indiscreet letter of that well known journalist. . . . I noticed that when he was speaking of other men he mentioned as an important trait in their character whether they liked his poems or not—Lowell, he evidently thought did not." We take an exaggerated interest in the straws of error floating on the surface of a great man's mind. But, for this volume, surely it is just the one to lend a charm to a summer afternoon under mountain trees, or upon a verandah or bank by the seaside.

These tender and delicate lines on

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Dwight Williams are by Prof. Benj. F. Leggett. We find them in Zett's Herald, August 17th.

The Silent Song.

Above the sparrows' grassy nest
The willow whispers cease,
The wind-turned leaves fall back to rest
Amid the hush of peace.
O changeful days! O fickle suns!
The kill-deer calls and calls
Above the brook et's minor runs,
And where the silence falls.
Now sunshine giveth place to rain
Across the meadow lands!
And after cease of weary pain,
The peace of folded hands.
And since the days of summer bring
One silence deep and long,
Less bonny seems the blue bird's wing,
Less sweet the thrush's song.

Our correspondent, Mr. H. M. Bryan, now at Sulphur Springs, in Middle Park, Colorado, writes of the effect of mountain scenery: "As is usually the case when I get so far above the sea level, I did not sleep any (for a night or two). I am always conscious of an elasticity of frame and spirit to which I am a stranger elsewhere, and though it seemed the most reasonable thing in the world that I should have been tired after the long ride over the range, I was not conscious of the slightest fatigue. . . . It is an effect of the altitude, with certain temperaments, to produce a

A book on Tolstoi has recently been published, containing a bibliography of the great Russian. Mr. G. H. Ferris is the author, who gives therein a view of Old and Young Russia, and also of the novelist Tourgenieff. This is perhaps the best presentation yet attempted of the great liberalist.

M. Zola, being a Jew, has yet to bear his cross. His recent expulsion from the Legion of Honor has awakened considerable adverse feeling, and some of the membership are sending in voluntary resignations.
PASTOR FELIX.

He Managed It.

A certain wealthy man has set his nephew up in business three times, but the young man lacks something essential to success in the mercantile direction and failed with every effort. When he came with the forth request for financial backing the uncle demurred.

"You must learn to lean on yourself," he said. "I can't carry you all your life. It would be an unkindness in me to keep supplying you with money to carry on enterprises that invariably end in failure. I'll tell you what I'll do. You owe a good deal as a result of that last 'spec.' Pitch in on your own book and go it alone till you pay those debts off. When you've done that I'll give you a cheque for all they amount to. Such an experience would do you more good than all the money I could give you now."

Three months later the nephew walked in with every claim receipted in full, and the uncle was delighted as he gave the promised cheque.

"That's something like it now, and I warrant you feel all the better for the hard training. How did you manage, Tom?"

"Borrowed the money, uncle."

Now the old gentleman is telling everyone that there is the making of a great financier in his nephew.

V. Liable Record.

When the furniture of Charles James Fox, the famous English orator and statesman, was sold by auction, there was among the books a copy of the first volume of Gibbon's Roman History.

It appeared by the title-page that the book had been presented by the author to Fox, but no considerations of sentiment deterred the recipient from writing on the fly-leaf this anecdote:

"The author at Brookes's said there was no salvation for this country until six heads of the principal persons in administration were laid on the table. Eleven days after, this same gentleman accepted a place of lord of trade, under those very ministers, and has acted with them ever since."

Such was the avidity of bidders anxious to secure the least scraps of the writing and composition of the famous owner of the copy that, owing to the addition of this little record, the book sold for three guineas, a large sum for the time.