

Notches on The Stick

It was in the power of a missive from the editor of the Home Journal (N. Y.) to induce a sigh, and to determine my evening meditation. It was to inform me of the death of my venerated friend, Rev. Dwight Williams. Was it indeed time for him to lay aside the garment of mortality preparatory to his celestial initiation into the mystery our heart chiefly craveth? It must be even so! And yet, I give thanks for the assurance that, except in the mortal seeming, it is not for such as he to die.

When such depart, though we hasten to make our record, that is often futile. It is the record they have made that avails. To be missed and mourned and regretted by those whose source of light has waned, whose moral and social comfort has fallen away—this is tribute before which all our eulogies and elegies are but dewless and faded flowers. For, though it belongs not to me to do it, and I may but arrogate the task, it may be justly said that our friend's life is well expressed by the term, *GOODNESS*. His was innocence of life, which, by excellent practice and the following of the Christian ideal, had matured to virtue. I can testify that his pure and genial influence touched with brightness and warmth those who were privileged to come only within its outermost sphere,—for so did it touch me. The term of our acquaintance has been brief, (some five years), and my impression of him was remotely received; and yet I believe the truth of what I assert: he was a good man, excellently gifted.

In casting about for terms fit to describe him, the words of Crabbe occur to me; where he speaks of Isaac Ashford:

"Noble he was, containing all things mean,
His truth unquestioned, and his soul serene;
Shame knew him not, he dreaded no disgrace;
Truth, simple truth, was written in his face;
Yet, while the serious thought his soul approved,
Cheerful he seemed, and gentleness he loved;
To bliss domestic he his heart resigned,
And with the firmest had the fondest mind;
Were others joyful, he looked smiling on,
And gave allowance where he needed none;
Good he refused with future ill to buy,
Nor knew a joy that caused reflection's sigh;
A friend to virtue, his unclouded breast,
No envy stung, no jealousy distressed;
Yet far was he from stoic pride removed;
He felt humanely, and he warmly loved."

With all his sweetness and saintliness his character was full of vigor. His mind was enriched with the choicest treasures of literature and art, and well he loved to discourse upon such themes. He helped to make life pleasant, to make it hopeful. He was a blessing to his household mates; and they who knew him most intimately knew him most favorably. Dr. Manly S. Hard a minister prominent in the Connexional society of church extension of our church, told me, when recently at our Annual Conference, that he had long been his friend and household intimate, and that from such an actual character he had shaped his idea of the divine Saint John.

The incidents of his life among us, subject to our record, are few and brief. That life began in the beautiful village of Cazenovia, N. Y., April 26, 1824; where it was terminated, June 13, 1898. He was the son of Elijah Williams and of Sophia Brigham and was descended from English ancestors, who came to America in 1635. His great-grand-father was a soldier in the French and Indian wars, and an officer in the war of the Revolution—having been noted at Ticonderoga. His grandfather was a corporal in the war of 1776 and of 1812.

The greater part of his life was that devoted to distinctive reform work, and to the religious ministry in the Methodist Episcopal church, of which he was for many years a faithful, devoted pastor and preacher. Every benevolent and righteous cause found in him an advocate, and to improve society and advance the public welfare employed his tongue and pen. He had reached the bound of life where a preacher's most active responsibility ceases; but from his enforced retirement he frequently issued in person to engage in the work which had become his habit and which he so greatly loved.

He has long and favorably been known as a writer in the religious press, and as a poet. The discerning reader will have appraised the artistic skill and the lyric spirit of many a rich morsel of verse he from time to time gave the public. In many a home is doubtless treasured some volume of rondeaux's, sonnets, and hymns, or some delicate booklet, or single poem clipped from the journal in which it appears.

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ed, which will testify to the talent and industry of this gifted and good man. His work appeared in many papers and magazines, but most frequently, perhaps, in the two Christian Advocates published in his native State, and in the Home Journal.

For his domestic life, he found and lost a loving woman, and lived for some time in loneliness, but with loving friends ever near him. Of four children three survive to cherish his hallowed memory,—Dwight Williams, Jr.; Miss Susan B. Williams, and Mrs. R. Vernam Barto.

I take down from their place from their shelf above my desk two booklets, the gift of my friend, and neatly bound by his own deft and busy fingers. Can it be that they are busy no longer? These white pages hold his rondeaux and sonnets, and are beautifully printed. They picture the avenues and green lawns about "Owahgea" the poetical Indian name of Cazenovia Lake; Elfin Dell, with its "delicious water fall that breaketh o'er the mossy wall;" the "Bar of the Columbia," with its "paths of all flags," haunted ever by the "wings of white gulls," and many another delightful scene. One of those booklets is dedicated to his son with the simple lines:

"Thy thought takes color, mine seeks rhyme,
But tint and tone are still one chime."

"Thy pencil and thine easel tell
What I could wish to write as well."

"If I have caught a vision clear,
May I translate it to thine ear?"

The other is dedicated to his daughter, Mrs. Barto, and begins with this expression of fatherly love:

"My child, thy love to me is as a star
That shineth through the distances serene,
And thus it drew me to fair Puget's sheen,
To look with thee across the wondrous bar
Where come the ships, stormed-bruised with
strain and jar,
To rest like me behind the mountain-screen,
Harbor to me in thy sweet eye-light seen
With gorgeous vision from the outline far;
A thousand leagues from paths I only knew,
What revelations far beyond my dreams
Of the Pacific world with vistas through,
That led my soul to new, unthought-of themes,
Thou wert the magnet child, that fondly drew
Me thence. In love's Northwest the star still
gleams."

I turn to the opening page, whereon is imprinted the figure of my gracious friend, seated in his easy chair against a background of books and drapery. He holds in his hand a paper, which he seems to peruse intently. Is this the study in the seminary of Cazenovia, whence came to me those occasional notes, those confidential and brotherly letters, and those souvenirs, now so choice and precious that I can never add to their number? Sit there before me, my friend, till the light shall fade from mine eyes. I will still dream of thee as living,—for living thou art,—and I will believe that thy gentle presence still haunts the shady walks of thy natal village, whose very name has something pleasant and poetical to me. Still maintain the noble ascendancy thou hast over my spirit, and teach me to live, and to cease from living, as thou hast done.

"St ill o'er my life preserve thy mild control;
Correct my views and elevate my soul;
Grant me thy peace and purity of mind;
Devout, yet cheerful; active, yet resigned;
Grant me like thee, whose heart knew no disguise
Whose blameless wishes never aimed to rise,
To meet the changes time and chance present
With modest dignity and calm content."

A memorial window has recently been placed in the Church of the Transfiguration New York City, in honor of Edwin Booth, the great histrionic master. It is the gift of the Players' club, of which he was the first president, and is the work of Mr. John LaFarge. "It is in the form of a single lancet, and represents an actor seated, musing upon the mask which he has just taken from his face; the whole theme conveying the beautiful idea that the soul of the actor's own personality must be revealed when the personality he has assumed has had its short career. The true spirit is thus seen gazing upon the assumed spirits, (the former eternal, the latter transitory): a meditation which leads to the highest flights of imagination and to the most inspired hopes of a beautiful attainable goal. 'Vanitas Vanitatum' is the title of the picture. On the lower part of the window is the quotation:

As one in suffering all suffereth nothing,
A man that fortune buffets and rewards
Has ta'en with equal thanks.

Beneath the verse are the lines: "To the glory of God, in loving memory of Edwin

Booth, this window has been placed here by the Players in 1898."

Next to a human life, or that of an innocent and helpless animal, I hold sacred the life of a tree. If it be one of noble stateliness, or venerable age,—one of "Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,"—I look with the deeper disfavor on whomsoever will lift an axe to do it needless harm. To cut down a tree that stands for shade and ornament, the pride of many an eye, is an impiety to be resented; it is wantonness, or a barren theft; it argues insensibility,—a barrenness of the heart and of fancy, a want at once of sentiment and of tenderness. I love to greet my neighbor; I love to lift my hat in deference to a lady; but when she has slain her brother in his green leaves, I look askance at her. Such a lack of reverence for our kinsmen, and our superior in age, is ill-seeming in a man, but expressly so in a woman. Therefore we shall not be first to welcome on her return that masculine spinster who before leaving for her summer vacation doomed without reprieve, though many a plea had been offered, one of our magnificent elms, because it could not avoid her roof, and would cast its moisture on her shingles. She acknowledges no error, discourses eloquently of what she terms "holiness," is well versed in the sacred science of eschatology, and would do about right to her fellow-man; but I fear she cannot be convinced of her duty to a tree, with only a dryad for a soul. But I, who lapse so often, and have so tremulous a liver, would as soon have slain my grandmother. I, even I, who am versed in that art, would have taken a public collection to hire the moss scraped from her roof, or to replace the rotted shingles, and I feel sure the community would have supported my laudable efforts. The roof-tree may be caused quickly to grow again; but how shall her withering brow survive its unconscious shame, and witness the return of what she could banish in a single hour! Shade of George P. Morris! we summon thee to avert such another vandal act. But, alas! she who would not sing a profane song, nor listen to it, must miss your sweet moral, and can never know your mind on the subject:

Coleridge points out the imaginative vigor of a really sublime passage in that nearly forgotten poem,—usually diffuse in its topographical minuteness,—the "Polyolbion" of Drayton. The English forests of his day had been decimated, and poet-like he expresses his resentment:

"Our trees so hacked above the ground,
That where their lofty tops the neighboring count-
ries crowned,
Their trunks like aged folks, now bare and naked stand,
As for revenge to heaven each held a withered hand."

With the coming of these verses, we seem to see the ghost of our vanished elm, lifting up his arms making his silent appeal to heaven.

Our cheerful correspondent, Mrs. Bryan discourses pleasantly of the forest country of Indiana: "The country about Memphis never looked so beautiful. Both Silver Creek and Blue Lick have been brimming nearly all the springtime, and their wide valleys are fresh, green, and flower-strown. Oh, I wish your poet-friend, who sang so sweetly of The Woods of Maine; might see our Southern Indiana woods in the sweet June-time."

"The woods of Indiana,
How pleasantly they rise," sang Mrs. Sarah R. Bolton, many years ago. But, alas! I have forgotten the song,—can only recall four more times:

The paw-paw rears its silver shaft
Above the mandrake green,
And bounding o'er the fallen tree
The graceful deer is seen."

The graceful deer does not bound to any great extent to-day: hunters from the falls cities have conspired to prevent such acrobatic performances by these woodland gymnasts; but in my childhood deer ranged over the Knob country, black bear were sometimes seen, and the scream of the panther was not infrequently heard, making us little folks curl up very small under the bed-clothes. All the face of the country is so changed by cultivation that the favorite haunts of my childhood are now strange and unfamiliar in aspect. Near my old home, Blue Lick, two miles from Memphis, was a five hundred acre tract of woodland. It was perfectly wild, no axe being permitted to swing there, and the forest growth was massive and towering. Such mighty sycamores as grew along the banks of the Blue Lick! I measured one 23 feet in circumference

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St. John, N. B.

near the base of the trunk;—truly a Forest Queen, laying her white arms about the grove. Do you know the sycamore possesses wonderful vitality. About twelve years ago a cousin of mine—(nine-tenths of the people there are my cousins), for his own amusement had run a telephone line to the house of a friend. Among the poles set was one sycamore. It is now a large tree, and until a few years past the cross-piece through which the wires ran could be seen among the branches. Walking in a thick grove of young trees on the banks of Silver Creek, not long ago, I found four sycamores growing straight and tall, and to my surprise saw they were branches of a large fallen tree. The mother trunk had almost decayed, a small portion projecting over the stream alone being intact. Crumbling, touchword, it was still feeding the strong young trunks that upbore their crowns of verdure high above the thicket,—an illustration of the maternal instinct in vegetable life."

Our friend, Dr. Benjamin F. Lesgett, contemplates withdrawal from the work of teaching, at Ward, Penn.,—it may be to devote himself more exclusively to the literary vocation. "Yesterday I attended" he writes in a recent letter, "the meeting of the Delaware County Historical Society, at the West House on the Swarthmore College grounds. The old house where Benjamin West was born, in 1738, is now occupied by one of the College professors. The Historical Society met there yesterday and had a regular field day. Several addresses were delivered on Benjamin West, and our poet friend,—J. Russell Hayes, of the college,—read a poem, a copy of which I hope to send you later. It was a perfect day, and we had a splendid time. . . . Did I mention to you a poem on the May Atlantic—'Song of the Wandering Dust,' by Anna Hempstead Branch? It is a gem. It is like Carman, only better:

"We are of one kindred, wherever we be,—
Dumb along the high road or fashioned in the brain
Once my flesh was beaten from the white sand by
the sea;
Thou hast made us brothers, God of wind and rain!
Red dust and yellow dust, whither shall we go?
Up the road and by the sea and through the hearts
of men!
Red dust and yellow dust, when the great winds
blow,
We shall meet and mingle, pass and meet again."

And so it goes for thirteen stanzas, though one or two are repeated with slight changes. Is it not musical?

I have read The Rubaiyat, and have not gone crazy over it. Here is the forty-seventh quatrain:

"When you and I behind the veil are past,
Oh but the long, long while the world will last,
Which of our coming and departure heeds,
As the Sea's self should heed a pebble cast."

Of certain of Carman's verses it may be said there is a resemblance to the above, though Carman, it is likely, wrote earlier:

"In the beginning God made man
Out of the wandering dust, men say;
And in the end his life shall be
A wandering wind and blown away."
and again in "Pulvis et Umbra":
For man walks the world with mourning
Down to death and leaves no trace,
With the dust upon his forehead,
And the shadow in his face."

We will close this paper with the latest sonnet of Prof. Leggett:

Loon Lake.

BY BENJAMIN F. LESGETT.
The lapping waves from out the dewy dark,
The flinty pebbles rattle at my feet;
Beyond the lake one shy faint star I greet
Above the hills the hearing shadows mark,
And inland reels the fire-fly's measured spark:—
The night wind comes with cool caresses sweet—
A blessed boon for weary labor meet,
To hush the lips of fevered care and cark.
The stars increase,—the waves to silence creep
And hill and mountain wear a quiet gleam,
The lake is folded in her starry sleep.—
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