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THE AMERICAN LITERARY CENTRE

WHENEVER the literary writer for the editorial pages of our newspapers finds himself without a topic he brings to life one of two subjects: the profits of authorship, or the particular American city best entitled to the distinction of being regarded as the literary centre. Of late, the last-named topic has been made to do duty again in various editorial quarters, and, of course, Boston has come in for the usual number of derogatory remarks as to its literary prestige. This literary pre-eminence of New England's principal city is either refused it by these editorial writers or it is challenged. The claims of New York are then generally brought forth, and if it is a New York writer who has the pen in hand—which is generally the case—it is settled, to his satisfaction at least, if not to the conviction of his readers, that the literary palm belongs to the Empire City. Not an author of repute can die in New England, but the question is brought to the fore; nor can an author remove his residence from Boston to some other city, but the discussion, so far as it concerns Boston, is renewed. All this discussion of the question of literary ascendancy, so far as cities are concerned, rests between Boston and New York. Naturally New England people hold out for Boston, while New Yorkers "root," as they say in base-ball, for their own city. Of course, controversies of this sort result in settling nothing definite; frequently their only value lies in the suggestion of interesting thoughts which they bring out. It must be confessed that if this result were not attained, the repeated discussions of this subject would savor very strongly of monotony.

THERE was a time in our literary history when we were accustomed to look upon Boston as the centre of everything literary—the wellspring whence all that was best in literature emanated. There was no dispute about the city's right to pre-eminence in a literary sense. The foremost authors congregated either within or around its borders, the leading literary periodicals of the country belonged largely to Boston and bore the imprints of its publishing houses. An American school of literature was fostered, such as this country never had before and has never had since. It was a brilliant school, too, when we regard such a list of authors as Hawthorne, Emerson, Theodore Parker, Winthrop, Margaret Fuller, Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, Parkman, George Ripley, Prescott, Thoreau, Sumner, Longfellow, Palfrey, Seba Smith, Phillips, Agassiz, Webster, the Alcotts, Everett, Mrs. Stowe, Dana, Gray, Phelps, and a score or more whose names now escape immediate recall. But, one by one, in the natural course of events, these men and women passed away, until now only one of those whose names are mentioned remains with us. As time went on another, if lesser, school of writers took the places of those departed, and the literary prestige of Boston has been sustained. But, as happens with cities so close to each other as are our American cities, the growth of New York as a commercial centre turned the eyes of the author to that city as a market for his wares. Magazines were started there, publishing houses multiplied, and, as a natural sequence, authors flocked to the metropolis to be closer to what promised a better market and a more productive avenue for the disposal of their writings. Twenty years, let us say, have rolled by, and where do the cities of Boston and New York stand to-day in a literary sense, considering them impartially?

NEW YORK undoubtedly offers the largest market for literature of any city in America. This is naturally so, as must always follow in the case of the largest and wealthiest city of any country. Where the most money is the best brains of a country will, by force, be attracted. The Empire City controls the largest number of publishing houses, even though it cannot claim all the principal ones. It has a larger number of magazines and periodicals of all kinds than any other city, even though it is deprived the right to the first and foremost of all American literary periodicals, the leading eclectic magazine of the world, or of the most widely-circulated channels of serial literature. But, unquestionably, it has the majority, and a powerful majority it is. It has libraries galore, one might almost say, yet the two principal libraries of the country are in other cities. Its list of authors, resident of the city or near it, is long and representative, embracing some of the most gifted pens which make contemporaneous American literature. All these things New York can lay claim to, and justly. It is the first, the most profitable, the most lucrative American literary mart. For the sale of an author's wares it offers more channels than any other city. If all our best writings do not emanate from its immense places of output, a goodly portion undeniably do. But because a city is a great literary mart does it, by that fact, necessarily become a literary centre, in the true sense of that word? Has New York, because of its greater number of publishing houses, periodicals, libraries and resident authors, a truer claim to be regarded as the American literary centre than Boston, with a lesser number of similar institutions? In the eyes of New York Boston is barren of literature and literary talent. But is it barren in reality? For, after all, much as we all most respect New York's opinions, they cannot always be said to be infallible. The most powerful of cities is apt sometimes to err in its judgment of people, or be prejudiced in its opinion of other communities.

IT is, of course, true that an Emerson, a Longfellow, a Parkman or a Lowell no longer lightens the New England horizon. But what horizon does any successor to these masters of essay, poetry, history or prose illumine to-day? Where, in any American city, have we a Longfellow or an Emerson? So far as authors are concerned Boston is hardly barren. We would scarcely so designate a city which has for residents such men and women as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Edward Everett Hale, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Margaret Deland, Julia Ward Howe, Horace E. Scudder, W. R. Alger, Mrs. James T. Fields, President Eliot, General Walker and John Fiske. And one may even continue such a list with the recital of such names as Robert Grant, F. J. Stimson, Arlo Bates, Frank B. Sanborn, Henry Cabot Lodge, Maria Parloa, Maud Howe Elliot, Mrs. William Claflin, Louise Chandler Moulton, Hezekiah Butterworth, Nathan Haskell Dole and scores of others who have a rightful place in the same connection. Nor, when we speak of Boston's authors, can we stop at those living within its immediate city limits, any more than New York does when it recites its list of literary spirits. No one speaking of Boston literary people could very well omit naming Mary E. Wilkins, who is so fast winning her way to the first place among American writers. Nor can we overlook the fact that Boston can even more rightfully claim Rudyard Kipling, who chose a spot in the New England hills for his desk when he settled in America to strengthen his fame as the foremost writer of the day. Surely Boston can, likewise, claim Elizabeth Stuart Phelps-Ward and Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney as belonging to it—two women who have done so much to dignify and sweeten their country's literature. Only a little farther from Boston's gilded-domed State House, but as closely in touch with it, are Sarah Orne Jewett and Harriet Prescott Spofford, who, with each piece of work they do, add to New England's literary reputation. And one might go on in this way, naming Edward Bellamy, George W. Cable, Edna Dean Proctor, Nora Perry, J. T. Trowbridge, William T. Adams, Susan Coolidge, Sophie Swett—all living close to the centre of New England.

BUT, aside from the men and women who grace and dignify her life, Boston's chief hold upon the cultivation of our country lies, I think, in that literary atmosphere which surrounds her and makes her positively fragrant. Go where you will in Boston it becomes manifest to you that her people are a literary, artistic and cultured people. This cannot be said of many other of our American cities. If a thousand other influences in her life or a score of her institutions did not point to this fact her noble Public Library would alone attest it. One is in no fear of contradiction when he speaks of the new Boston Library as the most magnificent library structure in the world. But it is in its significance that its greatest value rests. It stands as the pioneer of free American libraries supported by general taxation, and as such it is Boston's greatest monument. No two millions of dollars were ever so well spent. Go outside the city and through any of the hundreds of towns in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the smallest of them sustains a library, always well selected. Where other States must make offers of contributions for the establishment of libraries in their smaller communities, and make them without acceptance, Massachusetts has a centre of literary knowledge fixed in the smallest hamlet, village or community within its borders. Such things inspire intellectual vitality, from which the true kind of literary atmosphere springs. Things such as these one must consider when any section of our country is spoken of as a literary community or a literary centre. I do not speak at all now of Boston's publishing houses or its periodicals. It has not as many as New York, it is true, but it need not be ashamed of those which it has. It must never be forgotten that the most distinctively American publishing house is in Boston—a house which has done more than any other in this country for the dissemination and upholding of pure American literature. Nor must the fact be overlooked that we are still compelled, when we speak of American magazines, to point to Boston as issuing the most meritorious literary periodical printed in this country. And there are other factors in Boston's literary life equally as commanding. But I do not think their recital is necessary. It does not seem to me that Boston depends upon these factors for her literary standing. Her literary supremacy comes not so much from her institutions as from her people. It is something more than bricks and mortar.

A CONGLOMERATION of publishing houses or a settlement of authors does not make a literary centre by any means. It is the life of the people of a community which gives a place the stamp of intellectuality, a ganglion to which run all lines of influence—literary, artistic or scientific. It is as often in the history which it has made as in the history it is making. An intellectual basis for a literary centre is not made in ten, fifteen or even twenty years. A literary centre is not shifted from one place to another by the removal of some of its principal personages. Authors may move from a certain section, but they cannot carry its literary atmosphere away with them. That remains. Literary history has a way of sticking close to its original environment. This does not mean that Boston or any other city, having been the cradle of a school of literature, can rest upon its laurels and do nothing for the perpetuation of its early influences. Influences can die out, and they do run out unless they are nourished and kept alive. And so far as Boston is concerned no city in America is truer to its repute of the past, nor more careful and watchful of the extension of the influences of that past to its present. It cannot be expected of it, any more than it could be expected of any city, that it shall give two distinct schools of literature to a country. Boston, with New England, has given us one, and a notable school it was and is. The influence of that school is still alive and fresh in every New England home. Every child inhales it and imbibes it. No section has given our country stronger men; no section is yet as marked or as strongly defined in its contribution to American manhood or womanhood of to-day as New England. She sends her people to the West, and centres of cultivation spring up about them. She sends them to the Northwest, to the Southwest and to the Pacific coast, and they at once make an impress upon the intellectual life of the community in which they make their new homes. Such is the influence of Boston and of New England that wherever her people go, there reading, a love of the arts, an understanding of the sciences begin.

IT is not the purpose of these words to contrast Boston with New York to either the advantage of the former or the disadvantage of the latter. They are written to give voice to the thought that a literary centre cannot be created in a single night. And when New York or any other city chooses to establish itself as a literary centre in the minds of its own or any portion of the American people, this fact should be borne in mind. The literary supremacy of Boston over any other American city is not disposed of when it is coupled with ridicule as to the passing away or removal of its authors or literary people. Its literary institutions, its intellectual atmosphere, its scholarly interests remain, and cannot be wiped out nor dimmed by any other community, however larger in population or more powerful in the wealth of its people it may be or become. All nations have their transitory periods, their times of lassitude, in literature as in all other things. Every art has its storms to weather, its periods of stagnation to pass through, its new votaries to educate. So with communities. Because Philadelphia had its period when it was the centre of literary interest of America, it does not make the Quaker City of to-day a barren and unproductive literary waste. The influences of that period, though long past, are still felt in the institutions which are supported in that city at present. Because Boston is resting from its work in building up the great school of literature which it gave to America, and is not by any means finished in giving, is no indication that its literary strength is fading away from it. Its very life, its people, its environments, its institutions are the best indications that this is not so. It is possible that New York may be preparing to give us the next school. It is possible, I say.

I DO not say that Boston is the American literary centre any more than I would care to say it of New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago or San Francisco. Boston, however, has come closer to giving us a literary centre, and comes closer to it to-day than any American city, the same as Philadelphia came close to it at one time, and New York may in the future. But this country is so peculiarly constituted and formed that it can scarcely maintain any single literary centre. One portion of it may be more productive of good literary work than another. But America is unlike France, which has its Paris; or Germany, which has its Berlin; or England, which has its London. In this country we have too many Parises, Berlins and Londons, and we are constantly making new ones. And so when we speak of an American literary centre we are speaking of what, in our present conditions, is a practically impossible thing to maintain. We are too sectional as yet, in our literature as in all other things. We are too prone to speak of things, literary or otherwise, as being Eastern, Western or Southern. The waters of American intellectual life swirl and eddy, and no man can prophesy whence they come or whence they will go. All we can say of our cities or portions of our country, so far as literary strength or eminence is concerned, is that one may be more productive than another. And if we take such a glance to-day the fact cannot be gainsaid that Boston, with New England, has done more for the tone, quality and maintenance of American literature than any other city or portion of our country. And that she will continue, for some time to come, to contribute the best in quality to our reading there is every hope, with very little room for doubt.

WOMEN AND "TIPPING"

FOR some time it has been apparent to men that the "tipping" system in America is fast becoming a nuisance that cannot much longer be tolerated. There was a time when, in America, we were accustomed to speak of the "tip" given to a servant as a foreign custom, and as a thing to be dreaded whenever business or pleasure compelled us to go abroad. But now the custom has not only come over to us, but it exists here in an exaggerated form. In England a waiter receives a sixpence or in Paris a half-franc with a show of courtesy; in fact, for ordinary service, such a fee in either country is considered generous and somewhat American. But in America things have gotten to such a pass that one hesitates to give a waiter anything less than a quarter as a gratuity for even the most trivial service. In some places, in fact, our high and lordly waiters, cabmen and maids consider the proffer of anything less than that sum as an insult to their position, and even receive twenty-five cents not as a courtesy but as a matter of course. I liked, in this connection, the spirit of a friend, who, upon finishing a simple lunch, handed ten cents to the waiter, and receiving no acknowledgment nor nod of thanks for the courtesy, called the waiter back and asked for the return of the dime. "Now, my friend, the next time," said he, "when you get a fee receive it as such, and thank the person who gives it," and pocketing the coin my friend walked out, leaving the waiter dumb with chagrin. Next day he received a call from the proprietor of the restaurant, who thanked him for enforcing the lesson of politeness.

THE root of this growing evil of "tipping" is not difficult to find. Restaurant keepers and proprietors of public places of all kinds, for the larger part, employ their help at such small wages that it is dependent for its livelihood upon fees from patrons. And the remedy must be found with the employer, who should be compelled to pay his helpers commensurate with the services rendered, and not demand that his customers pay a share of their wages. This is what the public must demand, and what a goodly portion of it will demand if the feeing evil continues to grow. Be that as it may, to apply the best remedy for this obnoxious abuse will be more difficult if women insist upon becoming victims of it, as of late they have shown a tendency to do. As things are at present, and until they can be remedied, a man is more or less expected to fee. But a woman is not. This has always been an understood fact among the class of help which expects fees and gratuities. Recently some women have departed from this line, and if their innovation is followed to any extent the sex as a whole will soon fall under the yoke of the "tipping" system just as men now are. As the matter now stands women have it in their own hands. They are free from the annoyance of the "fee-giving," and they should remain so. The simple rule is to refuse to fee any servant in a public place. The tipping nuisance is one now confined to men; let them abolish or modify it, as soon they must and will. But for women to come under its thralldom will only complicate the matter. It is bad enough as it is; let not the women make it worse.