

## WOMAN IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue  
That says my hand a needle better fits.

Men can do best, and women know it well ;  
Preëminence in each and all is yours,  
Yet grant some small acknowledgment of ours.

—*Anne Bradstreet, 1640.*

Let us be wise, and not impede the soul. Let her work as she will. Let us have one creative energy, one incessant revelation. Let it take what form it will, and let us not bind it by the past to man or woman.—*Margaret Fuller, 1844.*



It is difficult to disengage a single thread from the living web of a nation's literature. The interplay of influences is such that the product spun from the heart and brain of woman alone must, when thus disengaged, lose something of its significance. In criticism a classification based upon sex is necessarily misleading and inexact. As far as difference between the literary work of women and that of men is created by difference of environment and training it may be regarded as accidental; while the really essential difference, resulting from the general law that the work of woman shall somehow subtly express womanhood, not only varies widely in degree with the individual worker, but is, in certain lines of production, almost ungraspable by criticism. We cannot rear walls which shall separate literature into departments, upon a principle elusive as the air. "It is no more the order of nature that the especially feminine element should be incarnated pure in any form, than that the masculine energy should exist unmingled with it in any form." The experiment which, Lowell tells us, Nature tried in shaping the genius of Hawthorne, she repeats and reverses at will.

In practice the evil effects which have followed the separate consideration of woman's work in literature are sufficiently plain. The debasement of the coin of criticism is a fatal measure. The dearest foe of the woman artist in the past has been the suave and chivalrous critic, who, judging all "female writers" by a special standard, has easily bestowed the unearned wreath.

The present paper is grounded, it will be seen, upon no preference for the Shaker-meeting arrangement which prevailed so long in

our American temple of the Muses. It has seemed desirable, in a historical review of the work of women in this country, to follow the course of their effort in the field of literature; to note the occasional impediments of the stream, its sudden accessions of force, its general tendency, and its gradual widening.

The colonial period has, of course, little to give us. The professional literary woman was then unknown. The verses of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet, called in flattery "the tenth Muse," were "the fruit but of some few hours curtailed from her sleep and other refreshments." The negro girl Phillis Wheatley, whose poetical efforts had been published under aristocratic patronage in England, when robbed of her mistress by death "resorted to marriage" — not to literature — "as the only alternative of destitution." Mrs. Mercy Warren was never obliged to seek support from that sharp-pointed pen which copied so cleverly the satiric style of Pope, and which has left voluminous records of the Revolution. She too wrote her tragedies "for amusement, in the solitary hours when her friends were abroad."

Miss Hannah Adams, born in Massachusetts in 1755, may be accepted as the first American woman who made literature her profession. Her appearance as a pioneer in this country corresponds closely in time with that of Mary Wollstonecraft in England. She wrote, at seventy-seven, the story of her life. Her account sets forth clearly the difficulties which in her youth had to be dealt with by a woman seriously undertaking authorship. Ill health, which forbade her attending school, was an individual disadvantage; but she remarks incidentally on the defectiveness of the country school, where girls learned only to write and cipher, and were in summer "instructed by females in reading, sewing, and other kinds of work. . . . I remember that my first idea of the happiness of heaven was of a place where we should find our thirst for knowledge fully gratified." How pathetically the old woman recalls the longing of the eager girl! All her life she labored against odds; learning, however, the rudiments of Latin, Greek, geography, and logic, "with indescribable pleasure and avidity," from some gentlemen boarding at her father's house. Becoming interested in religious controversy, she formed the plan of compiling a "View of Religions"; not at first hoping to derive what she calls "emolument" from the work. To win bread



she relied at this time upon spinning, sewing, or knitting, and, during the Revolutionary war, on the weaving of bobbin lace; afterwards falling back on her scant classical resources to teach young gentlemen Latin and Greek. Meanwhile the compilation went on. "Reading much religious controversy," observes Miss Adams, "must be extremely trying to a female, whose mind, instead of being strengthened by those studies which exercise the judgment and give stability to the character, is debilitated by reading romances and novels." This sense of disadvantage, of the meekly accepted burden of sex, pervades the autobiography; it seems the story of a patient cripple. When the long task was done her inexperience made her the dupe of a dishonest printer; and, although the book sold well, her only compensation was fifty copies, for which she was obliged herself to find purchasers, having previously procured four hundred subscribers. Fortunately she had the copyright; and before the publication of a second edition she chanced to make the acquaintance of a clerical good Samaritan, who transacted the business for her. The "emolument" derived from this second edition at last enabled her to pay her debts, and to put out a small sum upon interest. Her "History of New England," in the preparation of which her eyesight was nearly sacrificed, met with a good sale; but an abridgment of it brought her nothing, on account of the failure of the printer. She sold the copyright of her "Evidences of Christianity" for one hundred dollars in books.

This, then, is our starting-point — evident character and ability, at a disadvantage both in production and in the disposal of the product; imperfect educational equipment; and a hopeless consciousness of inferiority, amounting almost to an inability to stand upright mentally.

Susanna Rowson, who wrote the popular "Charlotte Temple," may be classed as an American novelist, though not born in this country. She appears also as a writer of patriotic songs, an actress, a teacher, and the compiler of a dictionary and other school-books. "The Coquette; or, the History of Eliza Wharton," by Hannah Webster Foster, was another prime favorite among the formal novels of the day.

Kind Miss Hannah Adams, in her old age, chanced to praise a certain metrical effort, unpromisingly labeled "Jephthah's Rash Vow," put forth by a girl of sixteen, Miss Caroline Howard. Here occurs an indicative touch. "When I learned," says this commended Miss Caroline, "that my verses had been surreptitiously printed in a newspaper, I wept bitterly, and was as alarmed as if I had been detected in man's apparel." Such was the feeling with

which the singing-ropes were donned by a maiden in 1810 — a state of affairs soon to be replaced by a general fashion of feminine singing-ropes of rather cheap material. During the second quarter of the present century conditions somewhat improved, and production greatly increased. "There was a wide manifestation of that which bears to pure idealism an inferior relationship," writes Mr. Stedman of the general body of our literature at this period. In 1848 Dr. Griswold reports that "women among us are taking a leading part"; that "the proportion of female writers at this moment in America far exceeds that which the present or any other age in England exhibits." Awful moment in America! one is led to exclaim by a survey of the poetic field. Alas, the verse of those "Tokens," and "Keepsakes," and "Forget-Me-Nots," and "Magnolias," and all the rest of the annuals, all glorious without in their red or white Turkey morocco and gilding! Alas, the flocks of quasi swan-singers! They have sailed away down the river of Time, chanting with a monotonous mournfulness. We need not speak of them at length. One of them early wrote about the Genius of Oblivion; most of them wrote for it. It was not their fault that their toil increased the sum of the "Literature suited to Desolate Islands." The time was out of joint. Sentimentalism infected both continents. It was natural enough that the infection should seize most strongly upon those who were weakened by an intellectual best-parlor atmosphere, with small chance of free out-of-door currents. They had their reward. Their crude constituencies were proud of them; and not all wrought without "emolument," though it need hardly be said that verse-making was not and is not, as a rule, a remunerative occupation. Some names survive, held in the memory of the public by a few small, sweet songs on simple themes, probably undervalued by their authors, but floating now like flowers above the tide that has swallowed so many pretentious, sand-based structures.

Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney, the most prolific poetess of the period, was hailed as "the American Mrs. Hemans." A gentle and pious womanhood shone through her verse; but her books are undisturbed and dusty in the libraries now, and likely to remain so. Maria Gowen Brooks — "Maria del Occidente" — was, on the other hand, not popular at home; but put forth a far stronger claim than Mrs. Sigourney, and won indeed somewhat disproportionate praises abroad. "Southey says 'Zophiel; or, The Bride of Seven,' is by some Yankee woman," writes Charles Lamb; "as if there had ever been a woman capable of anything so great!" One is glad that we need



not now consider as the acme of woman's poetic achievement this metrical narrative of the loves of the angels; nevertheless, it is on the whole a remarkably sustained work, with a gorgeousness of coloring which might perhaps be traced to its author's Celtic strain.

As Mrs. Samuel Gilman, Caroline Howard, of whom we have already spoken, carried the New England spirit into a Southern home, and there wrote not only verses, but sketches and tales, much in the manner of her sisters who never left the Puritan nest, though dealing at times with material strange to them, as in her "Recollections of a Southern Matron." With the women of New England lies our chief concern, until a date comparatively recent. A strong, thinking, working race—all know the type; granite rock, out of its crevices the unexpected harebells trembling here and there. As writers they have a general resemblance; in one case a little more mica and glitter, in another more harebells than usual. Mrs. Sigourney, for instance, presents an azure predominance of the flowery, on a basis of the practical. Think of her fifty-seven volumes—copious verse, religious and sentimental; sketches of travel; didactic "Letters to Mothers," "Letters to Young Ladies"; the charmingly garrulous "Letters of Life," published after her death. Quantity, dilution, diffusiveness, the dispersion of energy in a variety of aims—these were the order of the day. Lydia Maria Child wrote more than thirty-five books and pamphlets, beginning with the apotheosis of the aboriginal American in romance, ending in the good fight with slavery, and taking in by the way domestic economy, the progress of religious ideas, and the Athens of Pericles, somewhat romanticized. Firm granite here, not without ferns of tenderest grace. It is very curious and impressive, the self-reliant dignity with which these noble matrons circumambulate the whole field of literature with errant feet, but with a character central and composed. They *are* "something better than their verse," and also than their prose. Why was it that the dispersive tendency of the time showed itself especially in the literary effort of women? Perhaps the scattering, haphazard kind of education then commonly bestowed upon girls helped to bring about such a condition of things. Efficient work, in literature as in other professions, is dependent in a degree upon preparation; not indeed upon the actual amount of knowledge possessed, but upon the training of the mind to sure action, and the vitality of the spark of intellectual life communicated in early days. To the desultory and aimless education of girls at this period, and their continual servitude to the sampler, all will testify. "My education," says Mrs. Gilman, "was exceed-

ingly irregular, a perpetual passing from school to school. I drew a very little and worked 'The Babes in the Wood' on white satin, with floss silk." By and by, however, she "was initiated into Latin," studied Watts's "Logic" by herself, and joined a private class in French. Lydia Huntley (Mrs. Sigourney) fared somewhat better, pursuing mathematics, though she admits that too little time was accorded to the subject, and being instructed in "the *belles-lettres* studies" by competent teachers. Her school education ceased at thirteen; she afterwards worked alone over history and mental philosophy, had tutors in Latin and French, and even dipped into Hebrew, under clerical guidance. This has a deceptively advanced sound; we are to learn presently that she was sent away to boarding-school, where she applied herself to "embroidery of historical scenes, filigree, and other finger-works." (May we not find a connection between this kind of training and the production of dramatic characters as lifelike as those figures in floss silk? Was it not a natural result, that corresponding "embroidery of historical scenes" performed by the feminine pen?) Lydia Maria Francis (Mrs. Child), "apart from her brother's companionship, had, as usual, a very unequal share of educational opportunities; attending only the public schools,"—the public schools of the century in its teens,—"with one year at a private seminary." Catherine Sedgwick, "reared in an atmosphere of high intelligence," still confesses, "I have all my life felt the want of more systematic training."

Another cause of the scattering, unmethodical supply may have been the vagueness of the demand. America was not quite sure what it was proper to expect of the "female writer"; and perhaps that lady herself had a lingering feudal idea that she could hold literary territory only on condition of stout pen service in the cause of the domestic virtues and pudding. "In those days," says Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "it seemed to be held necessary for American women to work their passage into literature by first compiling a cookery book." Thus we have Mrs. Child's "Frugal Housewife"; and we find clever Eliza Leslie, of Philadelphia, putting forth "Seventy-five Receipts" before she ventures upon her humorous and satirical "Pencil Sketches." The culinary tradition was carried on, somewhat later, by Catherine Beecher, with her "Domestic Receipt Book"; and we have indeed most modern instances in the excellent "Common-sense Series" of the novelist "Marion Harland," and in Mrs. Whitney's "Just How." Perhaps, however, it is not fancy that these wear the kitchen apron with a difference.

In addition to lack of training, and to the



vague nature of the public demand, a third cause operated against symmetrical artistic development among the women of those electric days preceding the civil war. That struggle between the art instinct and the desire for reform, which is not likely to cease entirely until the coming of the golden year, was then at its height. Both men and women were drawn into the maelstrom of the antislavery conflict; yet to a few men the artist's single aim seemed still possible—to Longfellow, to Hawthorne. Similar examples are lacking among contemporary women. Essential womanhood, "*das Ewigweibliche*," seems at this point unusually clear in the work of women; the passion for conduct, the enthusiasm for abstract justice, not less than the potential motherhood that yearns over all suffering. The strong Hebraic element in the spiritual life of New England women in particular tended to withdraw them from the service of pure art at this period. "My natural inclinations," wrote Lydia Maria Child, "drew me much more strongly towards literature and the arts than towards reform, and the weight of conscience was needed to turn the scale."

Mrs. Child and Miss Sedgwick, chosen favorites of the public, stand forth as typical figures. Both have the art instinct, both the desire for reform: in Mrs. Child the latter decidedly triumphs, in spite of her romances; in Miss Sedgwick the former, though less decidedly, in spite of her incidental preachments. She wrote "without any purpose or hope to slay giants," aiming merely "to supply mediocre readers with small moral hints on various subjects that come up in daily life." It is interesting to note just what public favor meant materially to the most popular women writers of those days. Miss Sedgwick, at a time when she had reached high-water mark, wrote in reply to one who expected her to acquire a fortune, that she found it impossible to make much out of novel-writing while cheap editions of English novels filled the market. "I may go on," she says, "earning a few hundred dollars a year, and precious few too." One could not even earn the "precious few" without observing certain laws of silence. The "Appeal in Behalf of that Class of Americans called Africans" seriously lessened the income of Mrs. Child. That dubious America of 1833 was decided on one point—this was not what she expected of the "female writer." She was willing to be instructed by a woman—about the polishing of furniture and the education of daughters.

And now there arises before us another figure, of striking singularity and power. Margaret Fuller never appeared as a candidate for popular favor. On the polishing of fur-

niture she was absolutely silent; nor, though she professed "high respect for those who 'cook something good,' and create and preserve fair order in houses," did she ever fulfil the understood duty of woman by publishing a cookery book. On the education of daughters she had, however, a vital word to say; demanding for them "a far wider and more generous culture." Her own education had been of an exceptional character; she was fortunate in its depth and solidity, though unfortunate in the forcing process that had made her a hard student at six years old. Her equipment was superior to that of any American woman who had previously entered the field of literature; and hers was a powerful genius, but, by the irony of fate, a genius not prompt to clothe itself in the written word. As to the inspiration of her speech all seem to agree; but one who knew her well has spoken of the "singular embarrassment and hesitation induced by the attempt to commit her thoughts to paper." The reader of the sibylline leaves she scattered about her in her strange career receives the constant impression of hampered power, of force that has never found its proper outlet. In "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" there is certainly something of that "shoreless Asiatic dreaminess" complained of by Carlyle; but there are also to be found rich words, fit, like those of Emerson, for "gold nails in temples to hang trophies on." The critical Scotchman himself subsequently owned that "some of her Papers are the undeniable utterances of a true heroic mind; altogether unique, so far as I know, among the Writing Women of this generation; rare enough, too, God knows, among the Writing Men." She accomplished comparatively little that can be shown or reckoned. Her mission was "to free, arouse, dilate." Those who immediately responded were few; and as the circle of her influence has widened through their lives the source of the original impulse has been unnamed and forgotten. But if we are disposed to rank a fragmentary greatness above a narrow perfection, to value loftiness of aim more than the complete attainment of an inferior object, we must set Margaret Fuller, despite all errors of judgment, all faults of style, very high among the "Writing Women" of America. It is time that, ceasing to discuss her personal traits, we dwell only upon the permanent and essential in her whose mind was fixed upon the permanent, the essential. Her place in our literature is her own; it has not been filled, nor does it seem likely to be. The particular kind of force which she exhibited—in so far as it was not individual—stands a chance in our own day of being drawn into the educational field, now that the "wider and more generous culture"



which she claimed has been accorded to women.

We may trace from the early publications of Lydia Maria Francis and Catherine Sedgwick the special line along which women have worked most successfully. It is in fiction that they have wrought with the greatest vigor and freedom, and in that important class of fiction which reflects faithfully the national life, broadly or in sectional phases. In 1821 Miss Francis, a girl of nineteen, wrote "Hobomok," a rather crude novel of colonial Massachusetts, with an Indian hero. Those were the times of the pseudo-American school, the heyday of what Mr. Stedman has called "the supposititious Indian." To the sanguine "Hobomok" seemed to foreshadow a feminine Cooper, and its author put forth in the following year "The Rebels," a novel of Boston before the Revolution. A more effective worker on this line, however, was Miss Sedgwick, whose "New England Tale"—a simple little story, originally intended as a tract—was published in 1822, and at once drew attention, in spite of a certain thinness, by its recognizable home flavor. The plain presentation of New England life in "Redwood," her succeeding book, interests and convinces the reader of to-day. Some worthless elements of plot, now out of date, are introduced; but age cannot wither nor custom stale the fresh reality of the most memorable figure—that manly soul Miss Deborah, a character as distinct as Scott himself could have made her. "Hope Leslie," "Clarence," and "The Linwoods" followed; then the briefer tales supplying "small moral hints," such as the "Poor Rich Man and Rich Poor Man." All are genuine, wholesome, deserving of the hearty welcome they received. "Wise, clear, and kindly," one must echo the verdict of Margaret Fuller on our gentle pioneer in native fiction; we may look back with pride on her "speech moderate and sane, but never palsied by fear or skeptical caution"; on herself, "a fine example of the independent and beneficent existence that intellect and character can give to women." The least studied among her pathetic scenes are admirable; and she displays some healthy humor, though not as much as her charming letters indicate that she possessed. A recent writer has ranked her work in one respect above that of Cooper, pronouncing it more truly calculated to effect "the emancipation of the American mind from foreign types."

Miss Sedgwick, past threescore, was still in the literary harness when the woman who was destined to bring the novel of New England to a fuller development reached fame at a bound with "Uncle Tom's Cabin." At last the artist's instinct and the purpose of the re-

former were fused, as far as they are capable of fusion, in a story that still holds its reader, whether passive or protesting, with the grip of the master-hand. The inborn powers of Mrs. Stowe were fortunately developed in a home atmosphere that supplied deficiencies in training. Fate was kind in providing occasional stimulants for the feminine mind, though an adequate and regular supply was customarily withheld. Miss Sedgwick attributes an especial quickening force to the valuable selections read aloud by her father to his family; Miss Francis, as we have seen, owed much to the conversation of her brother. To Harriet Beecher was granted, outside her inspiring home circle, an extra stimulus in the early influence of the enthusiastic teacher whose portrait she has given us in the Jonathan Rossiter of "Oldtown Folks." A close knowledge of Scott's novels from her girlhood had its effect in shaping her methods of narration. She knew her Bible—perpetual fountain feeding the noblest streams of English literature—as Ruskin knew his. Residence for years near the Ohio border had familiarized her with some of the darkest aspects of slavery; so that when the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law roused her to the task of exhibiting the system in operation, she was as fully prepared to execute that task as a woman of New England birth and traditions well could be. Since the war Southern writers, producing with the ease of intimacy works steeped in the spirit of the South, have taught us much concerning negro character and manners, and have accustomed us to an accurate reproduction of dialect. The sublimity of Uncle Tom has been tried by the reality of the not less lovable Uncle Remus. But whatever blemishes or extravagances may appear to a critical eye in the great antislavery novel, it still beats with that intense life which nearly forty years ago awoke a deep responsive thrill in the repressed heart of the North. We are at present chiefly concerned with its immense practical success. It was a "shot heard round the world." Ten thousand copies were sold in a few days; over three hundred thousand in a year; eight power presses were kept running day and night to supply the continual demand. The British Museum now contains thirty-five complete editions in English, and translations exist in at least twenty different languages. "Never did any American work have such success," exclaims Mrs. Child, in one of her enthusiastic letters. "It has done much to command respect for the faculties of woman." The influences are, indeed, broad and general which have since that day removed all restrictions tending to impress inferiority on the woman writer, so that the distinction of sex is lost in the distinction



of schools. Yet a special influence may be attributed to this single marked manifestation of force, to this imposing popular triumph. In the face of the fact that the one American book which had stormed Europe was the work of a woman, the old tone of patronage became ridiculous, the old sense of ordained and inevitable weakness on the part of the "female writer" became obsolete. Women henceforth, whatever their personal feelings in regard to the much-discussed book, were enabled, consciously or unconsciously, to hold the pen more firmly, to move it more freely. In New England fiction what a leap from the work of Miss Sedgwick, worthy as it is, to that of Mrs. Stowe! The field whence a few hardy growths were peeping seems to have been overflowed by a fertilizing river, so rich is its new yield. It is "the soul of Down East" that we find in "The Minister's Wooing" and "Oldtown Folks." Things spiritual are grasped with the insight of kinship, externals are drawn with the certainty of lifelong acquaintance. If we glance at the humorous side of the picture, surely no hand that ever wrought could have bettered one smile-provoking line in the familiar figure of Sam Lawson, the village do-nothing. There is a free-handedness in the treatment of this character not often found in more recent conscientious studies of local types; it is as a painting beside photographs. A certain inequality, it may be admitted, appears in the range of Mrs. Stowe's productions. They form links, more or less shining, between a time of confused and groping effort on the part of women and a time of definitely directed aims, of a concentration that has, inevitably, its own drawbacks.

The encouragement of the great magazines, from the first friendly to women writers, is an important factor in their development. "Harper's" dates from 1850; "The Atlantic Monthly," in 1857, opened a new outlet for literary work of a high grade. Here appeared many of the short stories of Rose Terry, depicting the life of New England; unsurpassable in their fidelity to nature, their spontaneous flow, their grim humor, pathos, tragedy. In the pages of "The Atlantic," too, suddenly flashed into sight the brilliant exotics of Harriet Prescott, who holds among American women a position as singular as that of Poe among men. Her characters have their being in some remote, gorgeous sunset-land; we feel that the Boston Common of "Azarian" is based upon a cloud rather than solid Yankee earth, and the author can scarce pluck a May flower but it turns at her touch to something rich and strange. Native flavor there is in some of her shorter stories, such as "The South Breaker" and "Knitting Sale-Socks"; but a sudden

waft of foreign spices is sure to mingle with the sea-wind or the inland lilac-scents. "The Amber Gods" and "The Thief in the Night" skillfully involve the reader in a dazzling web of deceptive strength.

In "Temple House," "Two Men," and "The Morgesons," the peculiarly powerful works of Mrs. Stoddard, the central figures do not seem necessarily of any particular time or country. Their local habitation, however, is impressively painted; with a few swift, vigorous strokes the old coast towns spring up before us; the very savor of the air is imparted. Minor characters strongly smack of the soil; old Cuth, in "Two Men," dying "silently and firmly, like a wolf"; Elsa, in the same book. There are scenes of a superb fierce power—that of the wreck in "Temple House," for instance. The curt and repressed style, the ironic humor of Mrs. Stoddard, serve to grapple her work to the memory as with hooks of steel; it is as remote as possible from the conventional notion of woman's writing.

The old conflict between the reformer's passion and the art instinct is renewed in the novels and stories of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who possesses the artist's responsiveness in a high degree, with but little of the artist's restraint. Exquisitely sensitive to the significant beauty of the world, she is no less sensitive to the appeal of human pain. In "Hedged In" and "The Silent Partner," in her stories of the squalid tenement and the storm-beaten coast, her literary work reflects, point for point, her personal work for the fallen, the toiling, and the tempted. Her passionate sympathy gives her a power of thrilling, of commanding the tribute of tears, which is all her own. An enthusiast for womanhood, she has given us in "The Story of Avis" and "Dr. Zay" striking studies of complementary themes; "Avis," despite certain flaws of style to which objection is trite, remaining the greater, as it is the sadder, book. All Miss Phelps's stories strike root into New England, though it is not precisely Mrs. Cooke's New England of iron farmers and stony farms; and none strikes deeper root than "Avis," a natural product of the intellectual region whence "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" sprang thirty years before. No other woman, among writers who have arisen since the war, has received in such fullness the spiritual inheritance of New England's past.

The changes brought about by the influx of foreigners into the factory towns of the East are reflected in the pages of Miss Phelps, particularly in "The Silent Partner." A recent worker of the same vein is Lillie Chace Wyman, whose short stories, collected under the symbolic title "Poverty Grass," are marked by sincerity and simple power. Sarah Orne



Jewett roams the old pastures, gathering many pungent handfuls of the familiar flowers and herbs that retain for us their homely preciousness. She is attracted also by the life of the coast. Without vigorous movement, her sketches and stories have always an individual, delicate picturesqueness, the quality of a small, clear water-color. "A Country Doctor" is to be noted for its very quiet and true presentation of a symmetrical womanhood, naturally drawn towards the large helpfulness of professional life.

A novel which has lately aroused much discussion, the "John Ward, Preacher," of Margaret Deland, is, although its scene is laid in Pennsylvania, a legitimate growth of New England in its problem and its central character. The orthodox idea of eternal future punishment receives a treatment somewhat similar to that applied by Miss Phelps in "The Gates Ajar" to the conventional heaven. The hero seems a revisitant Thomas Shepard, or other stern yet tender Puritan of the past, miraculously set down in a modern environment. The incisiveness of portions of "John Ward," as well as the grace of its side scenes, gives promise of still more valuable coming contributions to American fiction by the poet of the charming "Old Garden." A yet later New England production is the book of stories by Mary E. Wilkins, "A Humble Romance," a work brimful of vigor and human nature.

We need not now enter into the circumstances tending to the misdirection of intellectual effort which so affected the work of Southern women in literature that for some time they produced little of enduring value. These causes have been of late fully set forth by a writer of the new South, Thomas Nelson Page, who in naming the women of Southern birth or residence most prominent as novelists before the civil war places Mrs. Terhune in a class by herself. "Like the others, she has used the Southern life as material, but has exhibited a literary sense of far higher order, and an artistic touch." Mrs. Rebecca Harding Davis, a native of West Virginia, has chosen a Pennsylvanian background for some of her best work; producing, perhaps, nothing stronger than "Life in the Iron Mills," published long since in "The Atlantic"—a story distantly akin to those of Miss Phelps and the author of "Poverty Grass." The hopeless heart-hunger of the poor has seldom been so passionately pictured. A distinguishing characteristic of the work of Mrs. Davis is her Browning-like insistence on the rare test-moments of life. If, as in the complicated war-time novel "Waiting for the Verdict,"—a work of high intention,—the characters come out startlingly well in the sudden lights flashed upon them, the writer's idealism is tonic and uplifting.

It was a woman of the North who pictured, in a series of brief tales and sketches full of insight, the desolate South at the close of the civil war—Constance Fenimore Woolson, the most broadly national of our women novelists. Her feeling for local color is quick and true; and though she has especially identified herself with the Lake country and with Florida, one is left with the impression that her assimilative powers would enable her to reproduce as successfully the traits of any other quarter of the Union. Few American writers of fiction have given evidence of such breadth, so full a sense of the possibilities of the varied and complex life of our wide land. Robust, capable, mature—these seem fitting words to apply to the author of "Anne," of "East Angels," of the excellent short stories in "Rodman the Keeper." Women have reason for pride in a representative novelist whose genius is trained and controlled, without being tamed or dispirited.

Similar surefootedness and mastery of means are displayed by Mary Hallock Foote in her picturesque Western stories, such as "The Led-Horse Claim: a Romance of a Mining Camp," and "John Bodewin's Testimony"—in which a certain gracefulness takes the place of the fuller warmth of Miss Woolson. One is apt to name the two writers together, since they represent the most supple and practiced talent just now exercised by women in the department of fiction.

Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, English by birth and education, and influenced by the Dickens tradition, though reflecting the tone of her environment wherever fate may lead her, touches American literature chiefly on the Southern side, through "Louisiana" and "Esmeralda." Despite the ambitious character of her novel of Washington society, "Through One Administration," her most durable work is either thoroughly English or belongs to the international school. This particular branch of fiction we cannot now pause to note, though conscious that such books as the beautiful "Guenn" of Blanche Willis Howard have their own distinct value.

A truly native flower, though gathered in a field so unfamiliar as to wear a seemingly foreign charm, is Mrs. Jackson's poetic "Ramona." A book instinct with passionate purpose, intensely alive and involving the reader in its movement, it yet contains an idyl of singular loveliness, the perfection of which lends the force of contrast to the pathetic close. A novel of reform, into which a great and generous soul poured its gathered strength, it none the less possesses artistic distinction. Something is, of course, due to the charm of atmosphere, the beauty of the background against



which the plot naturally placed itself; more, to the trained hand, the pen pliant with long and free exercise; most, to the poet-heart. "Ramona" stands as the most finished, though not the most striking, example that what American women have done notably in literature they have done nobly.

The magazine-reading world has hardly recovered yet from its shock of surprise on discovering the author of "In the Tennessee Mountains," a book of short stories projecting the lines on which the writer has since advanced in "The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains" and "The Despot of Broomsedge Cove." Why did Miss Murfree prefer to begin her literary career under the masculine name of "Charles Egbert Craddock"? Probably for the same reason as George Sand, George Eliot, Currer Bell; a reason stated by a stanch advocate of women, in words that form a convenient answer to the common sneer, "Not because they wished to be men, but because they wished for an unbiased judgment as artists." The world has grown so much more enlightened on this point that the biased critic is now the exception, and the biased editor is a myth. The precaution of disguise cannot much longer remain a necessity, if, indeed, it was necessary in the case of Miss Murfree.

From whatever cause adopted, the mask was a completely deceptive one. Mr. Craddock's vivid portrayal of life among the Tennessee mountains was fairly discussed and welcomed as a valuable and characteristic contribution from the South; and nobody hinted then that the subtle poetic element and the tendency to subordinate human interest to scenery were indications of the writer's sex. The few cherishers of the fading superstition that women are without humor laughed heartily and unsuspectingly over the droll situations, the quaint sayings of the mountaineers. Once more the *reductio ad absurdum* has been applied to the notion of ordained, invariable, and discernible difference between the literary work of men and that of women. The method certainly defers to dullness; but it also affords food for amusement to the ironically inclined.

This review, cursory and incomplete as it is, of the chief accomplishment of American women in native fiction, serves to bring out the fact that they have during the last forty years supplied to our literature an element of great and genuine value; and that while their productions have of course varied in power and richness, they have steadily gained in art. How wide the gap between "Hobomok" and "Ramona"! During the latter half of the period the product gives no general evidence of limitation; and the writers would certainly be placed, except for the purposes of this arti-

cle, among their brother authors, in classes determined by method, local background, or any other basis of arrangement which is artistic rather than personal. In exceptional cases a reviewer perhaps exclaims upon certain faults as "womanish"; but the cry is too hasty; the faults are those of individuals, in either sex. It is possible to match them from the work of men, and to adduce examples of women's work entirely free from them. Colonel Higginson has pointed out that the ivory miniature method in favor with some of our masculine artists is that of Jane Austen. Wherein do Miss Sprague's "Earnest Trifler" or "The Daughter of Henry Sage Rittenhouse" display more salient indications of sex than works of similar scope by Mr. Henry James?

"The almost entire disappearance of the distinctively woman's novel" — that is, the novel designed expressly for feminine readers, such as "The Wide, Wide World" and "The Lamplighter" — has lately been commented upon. It is to be observed that this species — chiefly produced in the past by women, as the Warner sisters, Maria S. Cummins, Elizabeth Payson Prentiss, the excellent Miss McIntosh — has become nearly extinct at the very time when women are supplying a larger proportion of fiction than ever before; and, further, that the comparatively few "domestic semi-pious" novels, very popular in late years, have been of masculine production. The original and suggestive, though perhaps at times over-subtle, work of Mrs. Whitney, thoroughly impregnated with the New England spirit, and portraying with insight various phases of girlhood, takes another rank. Whatever may be concluded from the decadence of fiction, written of women, for women, by women, it is certainly probable that women will remain, as a rule, the best writers for girls. In connection with this subject must be mentioned the widely known and appreciated stories of Louisa M. Alcott, "Little Women" and its successors, which "have not only been reprinted and largely sold in England, but also translated into several foreign languages, and thus published with persistent success." We are told that when "Little Men" was issued "its publication was delayed until the publishers were prepared to fill advance orders for fifty thousand copies."

A like popularity is to be noted of the spirited and artistic "Hans Brinker; or, the Silver Skates," of Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, which "has had a very large circulation in America; has passed through several editions in England; and has been published in French at Paris, in German at Leipsic, in Russian at St. Petersburg, and in Italian at Rome. . . . The crowning tribute to its excellence is its perennial sale in Holland in a Dutch edition." No



name in our juvenile literature so "brings a perfume in the mention" as that of Mrs. Dodge, who for years has been as "the very pulse of the machine" in the making of that magazine for children, which is not only an ever new delight, but a genuine educational power.

In poetry the abundant work of women during the last half-century shows a development corresponding to that traced in the field of fiction. As the flood of sentimentalism slowly receded hopeful signs began to appear—the rather vague tints of a bow of poetical promise. The varying verse of Mrs. Oakes Smith, Mrs. Kinney, Elizabeth Lloyd Howell, and Harriet Winslow Sewall represents, in different degrees, a general advance. The "little vagrant pen" of Frances Sargent Osgood, as she confessed, "wandered lightly down the paper," but its fanciful turns had now and then a swift, capricious grace. The poems of Sarah Helen Whitman, belonging to the landscape school of Bryant, are of marked value, as are also the deeply earnest productions of Mrs. Anna Lynch Botta, which display a new distinctness of motive, possibly attributable to the influence of Longfellow. The same influence is felt in some of the early work of Alice Cary, whose individual strain of melancholy melody clings to remembrance, its charm stubbornly outliving our critical recognition of defects due, in great measure, to overproduction. Emily Judson sometimes touched finely the familiar chords, as in the well-known poem of motherhood, "My Bird." The tender "Morning Glory" of Maria White Lowell, whose poems are characterized by a delicate and childlike simplicity, will be remembered.

In 1873 a critic, not generally deemed too favorable to growths of the present day, recorded the opinion that there was "more force and originality—in other words, more genius—in the living female poets of America than in all their predecessors, from Mistress Anne Bradstreet down. At any rate there is a wider range of thought in their verse, and infinitely more art." For the change first noted by Mr. Stoddard there is no accounting; the tides of genius are incalculable. The other gains, like those in fiction, are to be accounted for partly by the law of evolution working through our whole literature, by the influence of sounder models and of a truer criticism, and by the winnowing processes of the magazines; partly, also, by the altered position and improved education of women in general—not necessarily of the individual, since change in the atmosphere may have important results in cases where other conditions remain unchanged.

The poems of Mrs. Howe express true wom-

anly aspiration, and a high scorn of unworthiness, but their strongest characteristic is the fervent patriotism which breathes through the famous "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The clear, hopeful "orchard notes" of Lucy Larcom,—it is impossible to refrain from quoting Mr. Stedman's perfect phrase,—first heard long since, have grown more mellow with advancing years.

The dramatic lyric took new force and naturalness in the hands of Rose Terry Cooke, and turned fiery in those of Mrs. Stoddard, whose contemplative poems also have an eminent sad dignity of style. The fine-spun subjective verse of Mrs. Piatt flashes at times with felicities, as a web with dewdrops. Many names appear upon the honorable roll: Mrs. Fields, Mrs. Spofford,—whose rich nature reveals itself in verse as in the novel,—Mrs. Margaret J. Preston, Mrs. Mary Ashley Townsend; Elizabeth Akers Allen, Julia C. R. Dorr, Mrs. Stowe, Mrs. Whitney, Mrs. Dodge, Mrs. Moulton; Mrs. Thaxter,—the sea's true lover, who has devoted herself to the faithful expression of a single phase of natural beauty,—Mrs. Mary E. Bradley, Kate Putnam Osgood, Nora Perry, Mary N. Prescott, and Harriet McEwen Kimball; Mary Clemmer Hudson, Margaret E. Sangster, Miss Bushnell, "Susan Coolidge," "Howard Glyndon," "Stuart Sterne," Charlotte Fiske Bates, May Riley Smith, Ella Dietz, Mary Ainge de Vere, Edna Dean Proctor, the Goodale sisters, Miss Coolbrith, Miss Shinn, "Owen Innsly," Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Alice Wellington Rollins. There is a kind of white fire in the best of the subtle verses of "H. H."—a diamond light, enhanced by careful cutting. Generally impersonal, the author's individuality yet lives in them to an unusual degree. We may recognize also in the Jewish poems of Emma Lazarus, especially in "By the Waters of Babylon," and the powerful fourteenth-century tragedy, "The Dance to Death," "the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." The poems of Edith M. Thomas, with their exquisite workmanship, mark the high attainment of woman in the mastery of poetic form, and exhale some breath of that fragrance which clings to the work of the young Keats. Miss Hutchinson's "Songs and Lyrics" have also rare quality. The graceful verse of Mrs. Deland has been quick to win the ear of the public. Louise Imogen Guiney, sometimes straining the voice, has nevertheless contributed to the general chorus notes of unusual fullness and strength.

In other branches of literature, to which comparatively few women have chosen to devote themselves, an increasing thoroughness is apparent, a growing tendency to specialism.



The irresponsible feminine free lance, with her gay dash at all subjects, and her alliterative pen name dancing in every *mêlée* like a brilliant pennon, has gone over into the more appropriate field of journalism. The calmly adequate literary matron of all work is an admirable type of the past, no longer developed by the new conditions. The articles of the late Lucy M. Mitchell on sculpture, and of Mrs. Schuyler van Rensselaer on art and architecture; the historical work of Martha J. Lamb and of the lamented Mary L. Booth, the latter also an indefatigable translator; the studies of Helen Campbell in social science; the translations of Harriet Waters Preston — these few examples are typical of the determination and concentration of woman's work at the present day. We notice in each new issue of a magazine the well-known specialists. Miss Thomas has given herself to the interpretation of nature, in prose as in verse; "Olive Thorne" Miller to the loving study of bird life. Mrs. Jackson, the most versatile of later writers, possessed the rare combination of versatility and thoroughness in such measure that we might almost copy Hartley Coleridge's saying of Harriet Martineau, and call her a specialist about everything; but her name will be associated with the earnest presentation of the wrongs of the Indian, as that of Emma Lazarus with the impassioned defense of the rights of the Jew.

The just and genial Colonel Higginson expresses disappointment that woman's advance in literature has not been more marked since the establishment of the women's colleges. "It is," he says, "considerable and substantial; yet in view of the completeness with which literary work is now thrown open to women, and their equality as to pay, there is room for some surprise that it is not greater."

The proper fruit of the women's colleges in literature has, in fact, not yet ripened. It may at first seem strangely delayed, yet reflection suggests the reasons. An unavoidable self-consciousness hampers the first workers under a new dispensation. It might appear at a casual glance that those released from the burden of a retarding tradition were ready at once for the race, but the weight has only been exchanged for the lighter burden of the unfamiliar. College-bred women of the highest type have accepted, with grave conscientiousness, new social responsibilities as the concomitant of their new opportunities.

Pealing, the clock of Time  
Has struck the Woman's hour;  
We hear it on our knees,

wrote Miss Phelps for the graduates of Smith College ten years ago. That the summons has indeed been reverently heard and faithfully obeyed, those who have followed the work of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae can testify. The deed, and not the word, engages the energy of the college woman of to-day; but as these institutions grow into the life of our land that life will be everywhere enriched, and the word must follow in happy time. Individual genius for literature is sure, sooner or later, to appear within the constantly widening circle of those fairly equipped for its exercise. It would be idle to expect that the cases in which native power and an adequate preparation go hand in hand will be frequent, since they are infrequent among men. The desirable thing was, that this rare development should be made a possibility among women. It is possible to-day; some golden morrow will make it a reality.

*Helen Gray Cone.*

## ELF-SHOT.

ON a wild morning, at a highway's bend,  
Three arrows pierced him through.  
They meant no hurt; they only left my friend  
No more to dream or do.

By what fierce wrong this came — what law  
or luck,  
Ask not; his annals all  
In the sharp summary: *the arrows struck!*  
Arise, converge, and fall.

Faith broke, adventure's wing was overwrought,  
Desire's bright spring decayed;  
Upon the curious eye that long had sought  
Too much of sight was laid.

Since then, when wit of his doth make a feast,  
His strength a shelter, know  
His footsteps sound about; and yet he ceased,  
How softly, years ago!

He is secure. A history wraps him close  
To no skilled guess attuned:  
Still smiling, still uncatalogued, he goes  
With his immortal wound.

Oft as you meet my gracious fugitive,  
Salute him, from your strife:  
To you the victory, men who work and live,  
Peace to that ended life!

*Louise Imogen Guiney.*