

as institutions of learning. We heard an eminent university president say the other day, that it was idle to call Horace Greeley, for instance, a self-made, *i. e.*, an uneducated man, for he was educated in the great university of the city of New York,—not the institution of that name on Washington Square, but the metropolis itself, with all its thousand influences of culture.

There are a good many "college-bred" men in our present Congress, but not a few of these seem to have gained very little of true culture in their college studies, and count in Congress among the uneducated, prejudiced, immoral, or mentally feeble; while some of the ablest and most influential men at the capital are without any college diploma,—though not, of course, without the advantages of schools and of study. What we say is, that politics under the spoils system

does not tend to bring into public life the really well educated and thoughtful men of the country,—who, under present circumstances, as a rule, prefer other professions to that of government. We believe, however, for reasons given in the former editorial, that the prospect has recently improved for the influx into political life of a more thoroughly trained class of politicians and legislators; and we believe that our schools and colleges ought to, and will, give more and more of the training which is especially useful in public life as well as in all practical affairs. The recent extraordinary confession and exhortation of Charles Francis Adams, Jr., at Harvard (no matter how one-sided his comments on Greek may be regarded), will help to make our institutions of learning see their duty in this respect more clearly than ever.

 OPEN LETTERS.

New York as a Field for Fiction.

Now that the great literary symposium on the novel has resolved itself into a general experience-meeting, perhaps the man-in-the-corner-under-the-gallery has a right to make his voice heard in the way of modest suggestion.

My text will be found in "The House of a Merchant Prince," by W. H. Bishop, pp. 1 to 420. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) It is a somewhat ungracious thing to complain of good work that it is not better; but that is exactly what I wish to do. And I choose Mr. Bishop's book because it is the latest, and in some ways the strongest book of a class against which I think I have good grounds of complaint—rather as a reader than as a critic. Its bold sub-title, "A Novel of New York," may fairly be held to imply that its author means to draw us a picture of social life in New York. Now, my point is that he has drawn his picture, not from life, but from a well-worn and conventional model. And if I can make my point in such space as you can afford to give me, I may have some hopes of getting that model sent out of the literary workshop, and of inducing the literary artist to go out among living folk to study character and color—and elsewhere than at the dinner-table or the five-o'clock tea. My crusade is against the model, and in behalf of the artist.

Mr. Bishop gives us a plot which, were his method more dramatic,—less purely narrative,—would be of startling force and interest. As it is, the story is strong and natural. This is much to be thankful for, in a day when the æsthetic elect frown on the telling of a story in picture, poem, or novel, and snub the laymen of the Philistine public who believe that, while Cinderella lasts in her meek youth and beauty, a plain tale will find readers, and that "Little Bo Peep," in its pastoral simplicity and its purely Greek trust in the omnipotence of Fate, gives guarantee that the narrative poem hath some hold on immortality.

But a story is a narration of the doings and sayings of men and women, and it seems to me that Mr.

Bishop has intrusted the acting out of his history mainly to mere figures representative of certain classes of men and women. He takes the typical merchant prince, the self-made and self-reliant man; his wife, the typical weak and indulgent mother and ambitious woman of the world; his daughter, the typical spoiled child of wealth and superficial culture; her lovers, the typical patrician noodle and the typical handsome, selfish, undisciplined young parvenu. These are all types, not individuals; they all talk alike, and they all talk too well; they have no dramatic verisimilitude in them; they do not live. They are well described; but we believe in them so long as Mr. Bishop is telling us of them, and no longer.

Yet he has been at the minutest pains to reproduce every detail of their manners and their belongings and their looks. He even goes so far as to inform us that his impetuous young lover, at an important crisis of his life, passed "a cambric handkerchief over his forehead," thereby removing any fears of his readers that the youth's plebeian extraction might have been shown unpleasantly in the use of the humble yet strangely ostentatious bandanna. And, apart from such excesses as this, the work is singularly conscientious and accurate. Nothing has escaped this keen observer's eye—nothing save the vital essence that is all the difference between the conventional figure and the creation of character.

Did this spring from the author's incapacity, it would not be worth the protest I am making. But it is done with deliberate intent. Mr. Bishop has accepted that weary old saying, "There is nothing in New York society to write about"; and, finding that, notwithstanding the people clamor for a novel of New York society, he takes up this old model that has seen so much service, dresses it for a dance and for a dinner and for a walk down "the avenue," and with its aid gives us a picture of New York life as unreal as the lithographed revels on the lid of a bonbon box.

Where the book does not treat of "society," it is written on a different plan. With a sharp eye for

what an artist might call social and intellectual "values," the author sketches the picturesque differences between the hurrying rout that roars up Broadway when night calls her brief truce in life's war of labor, and that calm and pleasing procession that loiters, gracious and fair to look upon, along Fifth Avenue on a mild spring Sunday. His clerks and other plain folk at the shop and in the boarding-house are natural people. The old Irishman, who appears for five minutes on Harvey's Terrace, McFadd, who was "knowin' to it," is a positive bit of character. We can go home with him, and fancy for ourselves how he looks and talks, and what he thinks, after he has left the scene. So with the two young lovers. Mr. Bishop believes in them, and makes us believe in them. Bainbridge is genuine, and a very pleasant fellow to know. Otilie is only a commonplace girl; but she is just as charming and lovable as many other commonplace girls that we know. Between these two are delightful and delicate episodes of love; and it is not often that they drop into an unpleasant habit, affected by their "society" companions, of writing out their talk—as, for instance, where Otilie, telling her betrothed of her uncle's business troubles in 1861, says: "Under the influence of the imminent prospect of war, the prices of commodities were advancing almost from moment to moment. Small dealers everywhere were desirous to buy, to realize the further rise themselves." For surely these phrases never came impromptu from between the red lips of even the precisest and best informed of Vassar's daughters—unless, it may be, she had just been reading "Norman Leslie" or "Vassall Morton," of which fine old curiosities of American literature I don't believe the dear girl had ever heard. Yes, they are most agreeable company, these young people; but when they leave us for a chapter, on comes "society" again, a phantasmal parade, with dinners and dog-carts, napery and drapery.

But is not this indeed society, you ask? Does not society "entertain," and dress, and drive? Is it not ambitious, showy, luxurious?

Oh, yes, society is all that, and does all these things; but any society that is worth writing about is a great deal more, and does many other things. You cannot tell all about people from their occupations. That is wherein people differ from machines. Silas Marner was a weaver; but we know something more of him than that "his hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort." Major Pendennis was a "club man"; yet Thackeray introduces us not only into the privacy of his club, but into the intimacy of his very soul—or whatever you please to call it. Giboyer was one of a thousand Bohemians; but he was *one*, a very distinct individuality, not merely a bunching together of the salient characteristics of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine.

But may we find such a field for character-study in New York as Thackeray found in London and Augier in Paris? Must we not import our character, like our fashions, and our dressing-cases, and our wine?

Why?

This city was a well-to-do Dutch colony. It was strengthened by a forced infusion of English blood. Later, it became the home of many political refugees

from France, and it drew to itself, in time, some part of the Huguenot colony in Westchester. It grew to maturity in provincial conservatism. Suddenly, within the span of a man's life, it has become the sole receiving port of a marvelously great immigration, the commercial and financial center of the nation, and one of the largest and richest cities of the world. This, it seems to me, is a promising place to look for social phenomena, if only in the clash of the old and the new, and the general struggle to fix standards of society.

Go down to Trinity, whose chimes, heard most clearly by brief-hungry young lawyers and shabby-speculators in the skyward storied of tall office buildings, call the unheeding living where Wall street's whirlpool sucks in the tide of Broadway, and bewail the dust-eaten dead within the peaceful pale below. Note the elaborate monuments carved with honored names, and the simple brown stones beneath which lie plain so-and-so, "tallow-chandler, and his beloved wife." This was the fashionable quarter of the city when the century was young—

"In days when Bleeker street was *rus*,
And Murray Hill as is to us
Champlain—Au Sable; when this fuss
And fret were quiet;
When ladies yet might think it queer
To date in '18—'; when all here,
In brief, was 'up-town'; in the year,
Say, '08 * * *"

—in the days when citizen Morris, of the United States, gave Louis Philippe, destined to become king of the French, a pair of boots to help him on his way to Canandaigua. (And right grateful was that "king in exile," then and thereafter.) Here we may read a record of the simple social system of that time. Try to trace, to-day, the classes then so clearly defined. And yet it is but two or three generations since then—a couple of turns of the kaleidoscope.

Is this harking back too far? Go up to the Latin quarter of New York, between Fourth and Thirteenth streets and Sixth and Second avenues. Go into any street and pick out the family mansion that was once the pride of the block. It is now a cheap lodging-house. Clinched with nails are the great mahogany folding-doors that in the old years were never closed between room and room. In the parlor tinkles and crashes a cheap grand piano, where once stood Gertrude's inlaid Broadwood—the little spinet-like affair over which her lover leaned when she played—the Battle of Prague, was it? Upstairs is her own room, where she stood, now white and now red, in that awful five minutes before they called her down to be wed, while her mother strained her to her heart in convulsive embraces, and then held her off at arm's length, lest a tear should fall on the snowy satin. There is a young couple to-night in the room that was so dainty then, that is so shabby now. A young couple from England it is. They sit hand in hand before the unhome-like anthracite fire. They are having a hard time of it, waiting for the business men of New York to awake to a sense of their own needs and march in a procession to beg for the services of that able and highly recommended young graduate of Cambridge, who has come to make his fortune in a new country, where, of course, skilled labor is at a premium. She is trying to cheer him up, as young

wives will. Their time will come, she tells him—"for I'm sure there's nothing they can do here that *you* couldn't do, dear." In the next room sit two young Bohemians, smoking bad cigarettes, discussing the best places to get cheap dinners and the best places to sell great poems, incidentally settling questions of art and literature that have bothered the world these many years, and casting glances of not ungenerous calculation at the ever-lessening amber beer in the cracked pitcher between them. It would not much disturb their stout and hopeful young spirits if they knew that in that very chamber the first master of the house once on a time lay dead. Nay, I think they would only write poems about it, could they fancy him stretched out there, a day's growth of gray beard on his stern old chin, pointing at the ceiling from out the folds of the white handkerchief, all the strangeness and distance of death setting the familiar face apart from the household heart.

For Gertrude and her young bridegroom we must perhaps look in Greenwood. But where are their children? Down or up in the world? Their gentleness crushed out of them by that poverty which is the destruction of the poor, or leading the dance of youth and love in some grander, newer home far uptown? For such changes there are in this city, of which some novelists will have it that it has no more interesting social life than is shown in a report of Mrs. Blank's kettledrum or Mrs. Dash's theater party, or than we may study in the columns of the "Society Journal" or the "Upholsterers' Weekly Chippendale."

To me it has always seemed that there is one class in New York that sits guard over a past full of romance and quaint color. This is what I suppose must be called, conventionally, the Knickerbocker class—not those uncommonly proud Vans and Vanders who stalk loftily through Mr. Augustin Daly's American vaudevilles from the German, but the agreeable relics of the simple provincial society of two generations ago. A class not unthrifty, not extravagant, yet not well fitted to make or to hoard money, they live in a golden mean of comfort, perhaps even in an atmosphere of mild luxury, on the borders of the world of fashion. They know little of Kensington stitch or of Eastern-woven portières: their parlors are upholstered in damask and their bedrooms in chintz. They are outdazzled by the glare and glitter with which the newer folk of vaster fortunes surround themselves. Living mostly upon the rentals of shops and warehouses built upon what were once their country-places, they draw year by year more closely to themselves, forming a sort of little Faubourg St. Germain, a colony of their own, among a faster-going people who respect them and despise their surroundings. It is a colony of rheumatic old beaux and faded old belles; where young faces are rare, and To-day somehow seems half Yesterday.

This is the world which interested Mr. Henry James when he wrote "Washington Square." But Mr. James had but a mild æsthetic sympathy with it; and, in fact, his Washington Square might as well have been the smokiest of sparrow-haunted London parks as that fair old spot that was once the Potter's Field, and then the Parade Ground, and where, for many years, old Pop Willis (a brother of the poet, and

he was proud of it) ruled, majestic and many-buttoned, over nurse-maids and grass-plot-invading children.

Truly, it were but a dull life to chronicle now, but it had its youth. You may listen to some gracious and garrulous old lady, with hair in puffs whiter than her widow's cap, purring over her reminiscences, until fancy begins to mimic memory, and to vivify for you some few hours of the dead days, and you almost believe that you yourself were at that fine party in Chambers street, where they had tea and cakes for the ladies, and sherry,—no, sherry-wine, if you please,—and where the gentlemen wrote verses in their hostess's album. And you may see the gentle old gossip, a bright-eyed girl, with brown hair done up in a knot *à la Grecque* high on her pretty nape; you may see her tie her fleecy hood under her chin, when ten o'clock strikes, and set out with mammá and papá—no "mommer" and "popper" then, the gods be thanked!—for her home in Greenwich Village or Chelsea, to lay her innocent head upon her pillow and blush in her dreams with thinking of that young man whose hair was curly, whose cheeks were red, whose black satin stock could not dim the glory of the Newgate collar, which the old people thought rakish and scarcely Christian.

And the young man? Well, you may fancy him sitting with his host and a few choice companions over a bowl of punch, and issuing forth into the lonely street what time the watchman cried "Twelve o'clock, and all's well!"—there to join in a baritone chorus of:

"Says I, 'Fair maid, where are you going,
All a-blowing,
 All on a day so fine?'
 Says she, 'I'm going to the Bricklayers' Arms.
 Says I, 'Oh, come to mine!'"

—until Mr. Jacob Hays warned them to cease.

A very ungentlemanly performance, you think. So it was. But it occurs to me that I have heard some young gentlemen from Columbia College do pretty much the same thing of winter nights, only the hour was three instead of twelve, and they sang "The Babies on our Block."

But the readers of the present demand a novel of the present? So be it. Let the deodorized American Zola go down into the old Ninth Ward any Sunday, and watch the solid burgesses heading their family processions churchward, as staidly as though they had not been in their youth, every man of them, members of the volunteer fire department, and had not broken the laws of God and the heads of their fellow-men whenever they got a chance.

This is the true bourgeois class of New York, made up of eminently respectable, commonplace, well-to-do, narrow-minded men and women, among whom, of course, there must be, here and there, a few young hearts fluttering with nobler ambitions, a few finer natures yearning for a finer and higher life. Let this deodorized Zola record the fortunes of some Greenwich Dorothy, whose ideas of life were something too delicate for her plain-going elders, who "loved, may be, perfume, soft textures, lace, a half-lit room"—some

"Poor child—with heart the downiest nest
 Of warmest instincts unconfest,
 Soft, callow things that vaguely felt
 The breeze across, the sunlight melt,
 But yet, by some obscure decree,
 Unwinged from birth."

Let him record the history of one such, "far too subtly graced" for her surroundings, who, more lucky than her sisters, found a way to a wider, livelier, and more cultured world; and let him tell us what breath of her own she brought into its hot-house atmosphere.

Or who will write us a tale of the New England invaders? New York was a good place for trade; Boston was not. But New Yorkers were a poor lot at trading, and Bostonians had business at their fingertips. So thousands to whom the ungrateful soil of New England would not give subsistence came hither and made money out of the very stones of New York. They had the largest share in building up the new city north of Fourteenth street, and to this day many of them hold together in a solid phalanx, with one wing there and the other resting on Lenox, Massachusetts. They take all the London reviews, and they believe in the higher culture. They are liberal in religion, and intensely protectionistic in political economy. They were the right arm of loyalty in New York during the late war, and they have never quite got over it—like a certain estimable family, of whom a bored friend once remarked that their grandfather had signed the Declaration of Independence, and they had all been signing it ever since. Contrast this class, which represents what the British would call "progressive conservatism," with the restless, rootless Western element, full of a wild love of magnificence and the luxury of display, full of a hearty bear-a-hand hospitality toward new men and new ideas indiscriminately. What Romeo-and-Juliet dramas may not be enacted between a house in one and a house in the other of these two sets! Let us hear of the loves of Priscilla Hoskins and Calaveras Gashwiler, Jr.

Paris may be Paris, London may be London, Berlin may be Berlin; but every country of the civilized world has had its influence on the social life of New York. Even the troubles of the last French empire troubled us. For that mad whirlwind of shameless and senseless gayety that danced and fluttered along before the deadly leaden deluge of war and revolution, sent a hot puff over to these shores, and blew hither a host of fortuneless and fortune-hunting French aristocrats—and, moreover, alas! blew homeward many American butterflies whose wings had lost their bloom in Louis Napoleon's court. These people, finding themselves unwelcome in this clearer and purer air, settled down together and held a carnival among themselves for a little while, and then their carnival ended in a choice collection of domestic tragedies, most of which were wasted on the newspaper reporter, who measures the interest of a divorce case with a column-rule.

The limitations of space kindly help to cover up my inability to write a condensed gazetteer of New York society. I strive only to show that—if I may allow myself a glittering metaphor—we have here, in one firmament, a number of stellar systems, where one star differeth from another in glory, but where all are very particular about being considered glorious; where color, size, luster, age, is variously esteemed the prime qualification of a good star; where orbits often impinge awkwardly on other orbits; where the planet of one system drops into a mere asteroid in another; and where lights wax and wane and flare and flicker and come and go as in no group lit by the sun of an older

civilization.* Or, to put it more simply, I strive to show that here is a field worthy of the same conscientious, earnest, investigating, analytical study that the best English novelists have expended on another,—larger, no doubt, yet scarcely so rich in sharply differentiated products; for class distinction in England has been reduced almost to one of the actual sciences, and, thanks to a well-arranged schedule of social rank, you may, without injustice, clap its appropriate label on almost any British growth, from duke down to navvy.

The field is clear. I do not deny that there are many who have explored it, and successfully to some extent; but I have not yet found the man who has entered it with a full appreciation of its multiform richness, to do work that will live; and I regret to say that no one seems inclined to try the experiment. Mr. Cable has discovered his own city, and has already overpaid the debt that the discoverer owes the world. Mr. Howells and Mr. Lathrop find their account in Boston. Mr. Julian Hawthorne has his duties to his ideal and ennobling hero. Mr. James devotes himself to settling international complications of taste and affection. Mrs. Burnett smiles now exclusively on Thespis.

The novelist of New York will find no competition. Yet none the less will he have, when he comes, a welcome and plenty of work to his hand; for if the mere journalist whose range of vision is bounded by his office walls may see this much, how much more is to be found by the man who has served his apprenticeship to fiction, who has the eye to study and the hand to write!

I cast my hint upon the waters. I hope somebody will fish it out in whose care it will thrive.

H. C. Bunner.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

EDITOR OF THE CENTURY.

SIR: I thank you for this opportunity to present a subject of transcendent interest and importance.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union is the lineal descendant of the woman's crusade of 1874, whose first "praying band" was led from the Presbyterian church of Hillsboro' by Mrs. Thompson, daughter of Governor Trimble. It is, in fact, "the sober second thought" of that marvelous uprising by means of which woman uttered her protest against the

* Dr. J. W. Francis, who certainly should have known whereof he spake, said in 1857, in his address before the New York Historical Society:

"New York is the most cosmopolitan of modern cities; hence, in a great measure, its ineffective municipal government, its rowdiness, its perpetual demolition, its spasmodic and versatile phenomena, its advantages and its nuisances, its dangers and its blessings as a place of abode; larger opportunities with greater risks, more liberality of sentiment with less rectitude of principle, more work and more dissipation, higher achievement and deeper recklessness; in a word, more obvious and actual extremes of fortune, character, violence, philanthropy, indifference and zeal, taste and vulgarity, isolation and gregariousness, business and pleasure, vice and piety. Wherever there is more in quantity, there is a corresponding latitude in quality. Enterprise hath here an everlasting carnival; fashion is often rampant; financial crises sweep away fortunes; reputations are made and lost with magical facility; friends come and go; life and death, toil and amusement, worth and folly, truth and error, poetry and matter of fact alternate with more than dramatic celerity."

[*Old New York*, p. 377.]