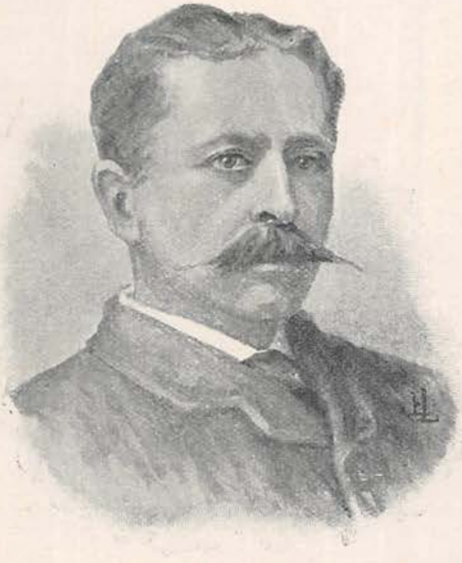
AMERICAN AUTHORS OF TO-DAY.

By James Ramsay.

AMERICA is like England at the present moment: her literary giants are all dead, and she is not quite sure who, if any, of her striplings are to take their place. And so, if you go to Sleepy Hollow Churchyard, at Concord, where Emerson, Hawthorne and Thoreau lie, the well-worn paths leading up to the pine-clad ridge where they are buried may be taken to indicate not only that the sleepers are not forgotten, but that literary America worships at the graves of the dead and not at the shrines of the living. Within a few minutes' walk from Sleepy Hollow, on the bank of the Concord River—I cannot say whether the right or the left bank, for the stream flows even more slowly now than it did in Hawthorne's day—lives Mr. Sanborn, ever genial and ready to tell to every sympathetic ear of the days he spent with the Concord worthies, especially with Thoreau; but Hawthorne's old manse and Emerson's house tell only of a day that is dead. Boston, like Edinburgh, is becoming a city of literary memories rather than a city of literary life. Its great writers are also asleep; you visit their graves in Mount Auburn. Mr. Sanborn and his friends are passing far down life, and are connecting links merely. When they die they will have no successors.



MR. T. B. ALDRICH.
(*Sketched by L. Luker.*)

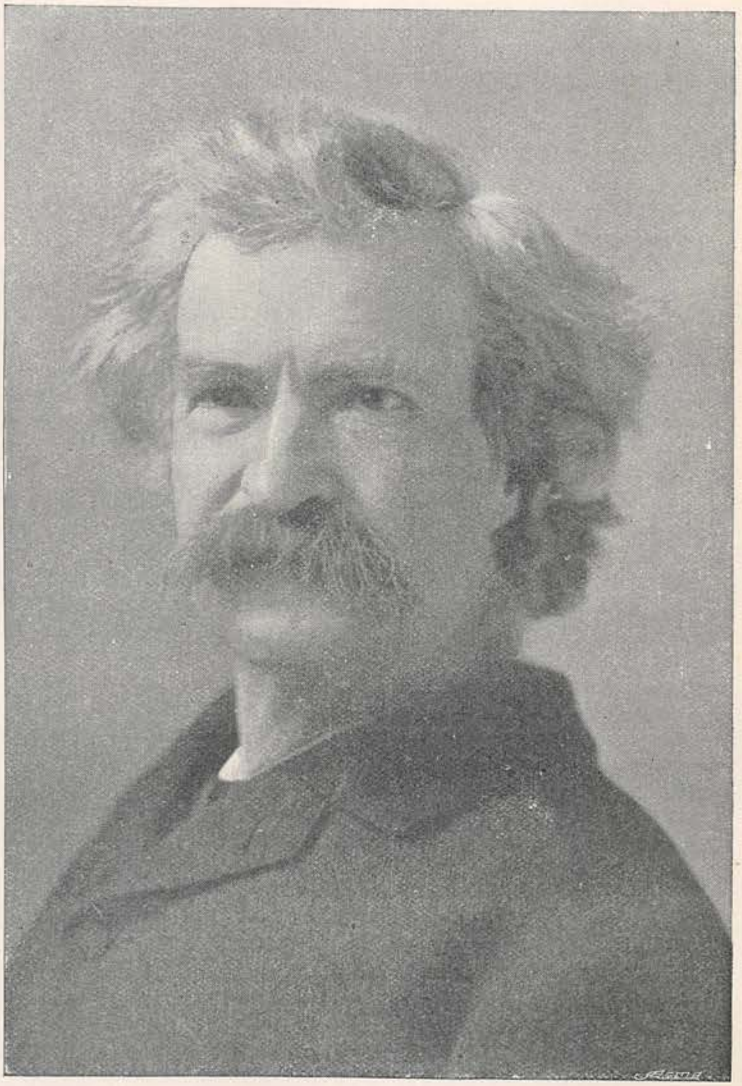
The literature of to-day that is specially American is fiction. There are poets, with Mr. Aldrich at their head; but America's young singers of promise are Canadians; and now Mr. Aldrich is beginning to recognise that he is no longer young, and has weeded out his work, and published a collected edition of his poems. Besides, although I, following Mr. Stedman's eulogy, that he is "the most pointed and exquisite of our lyrical craftsmen," speak of him here as a poet, "Prudence Palfrey" or "A Story of a Bad Boy" is likely to survive his verse. He was born in 1836; but the spry man, well dressed almost to foppishness, belies dates. He was intended for a merchant, and first took up his pen for a living in an office. Like other Bostonians of substance, he lives under the shadow of the State House; but if you want to see him in summer you have to go south, just beyond the hills on the horizon, and you will find him rusticating in all the exquisite rural charm of Ponkapog. Mark Twain has said that the view from this house is the most impressive he knows.

Mr. Aldrich's poems are frequently on English subjects, and his threats to decamp to this side are conveyed as much in the quality of his work as in his letters to his friends. Were he here, he might join Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. Austin Dobson in writing *vers de société*.

> I'll not confer with sorrow
>   Till to-morrow;
> But joy will have her way
>   This very day

is a true note in that song of cavalier gaiety which the Provençal troubadour gave to the world. Moreover, if you get within the sanctuary of Mr. Aldrich's library, you will find that, like those masters of that gay song, he loves old china and choice books. One of his great faults is that he is never quite sure of his *r*'s. He will rhyme "morn" with "gone," quite unconscious that his devoted readers will remark on his verses, as he has on Meredith's, "They break one's teeth to read them."

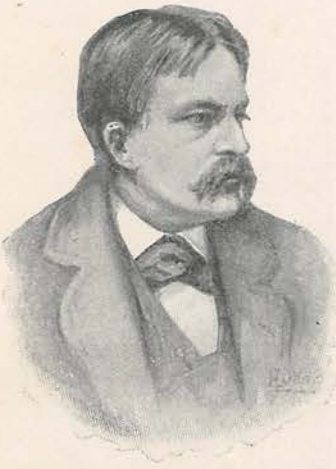
Even in its humour the literature of America seems to be resting. Mark Twain survives, but in Europe; and his reputation stands upon work now growing old. "Thish yer Smiley's yeller, one-eyed, banana-tailed cow" type of fun, which came in with John Phœnix (Lieutenant George H. Derby) in the fifties, is dying out with the social conditions that allowed the American to take life calmly. If ever you visit the house that he occupied in the days when, like Scott, he prospered and went into publishing, you will see Mark Twain and the Smiley's cow quality of American humour in brick and mortar. It is out at Hartford, the capital of Connecticut, and is a long, rambling, roomy, cornered affair that laughs at you from the midst of a wooded lawn. But the Hartford gentry took it seriously; and if you ask why the capital of Connecticut has run so much into red-brick houses, you will be told that it is because this humourist house was taken as a model. A large room at the top was the workshop. A pile of cigar boxes supplied tobacco, and the companion in furniture to the desk was a billiard table, for Mark gets much inspiration from the cue. A Ruskin alongside of a Commentary on the Old Testament told of his literary and ethical interests. From his window he commanded a wide view over that lovely vista along the Farmington Valley, one of the most delightful spots in Connecticut. The national desire of Americans for the antique stared unblushingly at the visitor in the shape of a baronial fireplace in the library; and the other furniture of the house gave evidence of its owner's weakness for old Venetian beds. Many and many a time when he was living in Hartford did his friend and neighbour, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, drop in and pull her chair up to that fireplace in the evenings; and, in his parlour, literary Hartford frequently gathered to Browning and Shakespeare readings. But Mark Twain has gone to Vienna, and Hartford is dull. His inventive genius could not save him. For



MR. SAMUEL L. CLEMENS ("MARK TWAIN").

although he has made a note-book that opens at the spot required, a vest that performs the functions of vest and suspenders in one, a shirt with collar and cuff attachments that need neither buttons nor studs, he thought that anyone could publish, and that was fatal.

Mention of the humourists of America naturally recalls the work of Mr. Frank R. Stockton. His Pomona is a true child of American humour in her rollicking extravagance. Mr. Stockton himself is an American of the Americans, born sixty years ago in Philadelphia. He now lives at Morristown on the St. Lawrence, in the region which the American millionaires have made sacred to themselves. He inhabits an old colonial house which stands in its own grounds, and in his solitary walks in the woods behind he creates his characters and plans his stories. The house had a ghost that was so fearsome that it is said a lawyer who was in negotiation for the place refused to have it at any price; but Mr. Stockton got rid of the unearthly visitor by cutting off a branch from a tree that scraped a window. He has told us that his people are drawn from real life. Of Pomona he has said that "Mrs. Stockton went into the city one day and brought the young woman out"; and the canal boat upon which she first sailed into fame was occupied by an acquaintance before it appeared in "Rudder Grange." His first story, "Kate," was rejected by nearly every editor in America, until it found a resting-place somewhere down South. No pay was forthcoming, but the editor was cute enough to ask his contributor for further work, and induced him to comply by offering a small consideration for a second story. "Rudder Grange," like "Tom Cringle's Log," grew out of one or two separate stories contributed to an American magazine, and when they were collected no publisher could be induced to take them. After that, Mr. Stockton's manuscript had no lengthy wanderings. He has not written a great deal, but then he has told us that composition is such a difficult matter for him that he has to "wait an hour for a word."



MR. W. D. HOWELLS.

In the realm of pure fiction, however, Mr. William Dean Howells is master in America. Mr. Howells is not American in an aggressive sense, but thoroughly American in his point of view. You feel that, whether you are reading "The Wedding Tour" or "A Chance Acquaintance," with their Canadian savour, or "A Foregone Conclusion" or "An Indian Summer," with their Venetian atmosphere. And yet there is the saving grace of the cosmopolitan about Mr. Howells. When he was yet a youth writing poetry, so steeped was he in Heine, that Lowell, when editing the *Atlantic Monthly*, held over one of his poems to assure himself that it was not a translation from the German. "You must sweat the Heine out of you," wrote Lowell to him. His later literary guides are Turgenieff, Björnson, Tolstoi and Zola. It is, therefore, easy to see that Mr. Howells has been in many controversies. He has been blamed for depreciating Scott, Thackeray and Dickens, and for attempting to rearrange the literary Walhalla on an absurd plan, putting Mr. Henry James at the head of the modern men; he has fought stoutly for realism in literature both by argument and by his own example in such tales as "The Rise of Silas Lapham"; latterly he has identified himself with Socialist opinions.

MR. FRANK R. STOCKTON.

The explanation of Mr. Howells is his

family history. His thick, solid, yet genial face is an appropriate mask from which a line of Quakers and Abolitionists look out upon the world of to-day. His father, lovingly sketched in the opening chapters of "A Chance Acquaintance," edited one of the first Abolitionist papers published in America, and after that, the first organ of Swedenborgianism that appeared in the States. One of the many stories told about him is worth repeating, as it helps to an understanding of his simple, honest character. When he was called to the deathbed of his father, he found the pious old man spending his last moments declaiming on the goodness of Heaven and of everything in general and particular. The son listened with growing impatience until the strong, aggressive opinions of a man who had not yet come to his end forced him to forget the occasion, and he burst in with, "Yes, father, praise God for all things in the universe, except the Ohio Legislature, and that is Democratic."

MR. F. HOPKINSON SMITH.

Such an independent character could not be a financial success, and young Howells began life in Ohio as a printer, with little schooling and no fortune behind him. He was compositor, reporter, and journalist, until the campaign biography which he wrote of Lincoln when a candidate for the Presidency won for him the American Consulate at Venice, the delightful holiday duties of which he has described in "A Foregone Conclusion." The letters he sent to American papers from Italy secured for him his future place in American literature, and he returned to occupy various editorial chairs with no more distinction than the great personal one—that he proved that a kind heart goes badly with editing. Recently he has left Boston to the shades of its dead, and has made New York his headquarters; but he is often to be seen in Europe. As we might expect, Mr. Howells was never moved by bric-à-brac, choice editions and æsthetic appearances, like so many of his literary fellow-countrymen. His library at Boston has been described as ill-bound and pamphlety, and the fine arts had no toning effect on his house. He writes with difficulty, and his proofs are full of deletions and corrections. Whoever has been privileged to examine those scored and scribbled sheets will have had an excellent opportunity of studying the evolution of the deft and dainty in style.

Mr. Howells, as representative of the better aspects of American globe trotting, suggests that other wanderer and master of dramatic touch, Mr. Francis Hopkinson Smith. Mr. Hopkinson Smith has a Stevensonian record as lighthouse and breakwater builder, for he was a successful engineer before he started on the tramp with knapsack and white umbrella. He was born in Baltimore just sixty years ago, and perhaps the variety of his occupations—he has a reputation in business, water colours, black and white—has delayed his fame in literature, which is his natural sphere. The English reader who happens to stumble across a well illustrated but apparently ordinarily written sort of guide book called "Well Worn Roads," and reads the first paper entitled "The Church of San Pablo Seville," will wonder why the author is so little known here, so exquisite is the art of the story told in that paper. You have a chance of finding Mr. Hopkinson Smith in New York when he is in America, but one of his introductions to his travels indicates how small is your chance of seeing him: "I have been picked up on a roadside in Cuba by a Spanish grandee who has driven me home in his volante to breakfast.

I have been left in charge of the priceless relics of old Spanish churches hours at a time and alone. I have had my beer mug filled to the brim by mountaineers in the Tyrolean Alps, and had a chair placed for me at the table of a Dutchman living near the Zuider Zee." But Venice is his dear love. He pictures her, and he tells stories about her with a fondness that warms and beautifies every line of pencil or pen. He undoubtedly stands the worthiest representative in literature of American curiosity blended with cultured taste and dramatic appreciation.

MISS MARY E. WILKINS.

America has also her "kail-yard" literature, and the two leaders of this school are women—Miss Mary Wilkins and Miss Sarah Orne Jewett. Both are New Englanders. Miss Wilkins's special ground is Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. She lives where she was born, fifteen miles or thereabouts from Boston, in a white, square house, fenced in from the road on the outskirts of the small town of Randolph. Her home is a little paradise, with its wide, open fireplaces and dainty furnishing; and the quiet gentlewoman within is one of those few people who give you a correct idea of what they are like from the books they have written. If you have read Miss Wilkins's stories before you see her, you will greet her with a sense of thorough familiarity. You will notice from her library that Victor Hugo and Tolstoi are honoured authors, and if you get upon the topic of books she will tell you that her favourite novel is "Les Misérables."

She began to write verses almost as soon as she could talk, and it is interesting in connection with her recent success in the famous two thousand dollar prize detective story competition, that a similar competition, but then for only fifty dollars, induced her to write her first tale, "The Ghost Family." If you try to get her to tell of her early difficulties in attaining to fame, she will smile and say that her only hindrance was her bad handwriting—for she nearly lost her first great opportunity with "Two Old Lovers" because the manuscript was so difficult to read.

Miss Jewett, who, though less known in England, is not less worth knowing, like Miss Wilkins, began to write whilst still very young. She finished her first story when she was fourteen, and before she was twenty her work was published in the

Atlantic Monthly. She is New England to the core. You have but to visit her in her fine old family home in South Berwick, in Maine, to feel the age of the Jewetts. The rooms are panelled, the furniture is of old mahogany, the sofas are of antiquated types, the chairs are high-backed, and Miss Jewett herself carries that graceful dignity which is the living breath of an old colonial mansion. She dearly loves her horses, and is no mean oarswoman. A list of the members of the American Psychical Research Society would contain her name and betray one of her mild interests. In winter she comes into Boston, where she lives with one of America's most genial of hostesses, Mrs. J. T. Fields, whose house has sheltered every English visitor of note, including Dickens, Thackeray, and Matthew Arnold. It is Miss Jewett's nature to be more of a romancist than Miss Wilkins. "The busier I get," she says, "I find the more time to read the Waverley Novels." She is an ardent admirer of Stevenson and the modern Scottish school. Miss Wilkins succeeds best with the quiescent, faithful type of character; Miss Jewett with the same folks, touched with a little of that romantic force which George Eliot knew so well how to impart to women. Although her tale of books is mounting up, Miss Jewett has probably not done her best yet, as her last study in character and portraiture, Mrs. Todd and her mother, in "The Country of the Pointed Firs," is better than anything she has hitherto done.

MISS SARAH ORNE JEWETT.

Nor ought we to forget the novelist who loves the South with an ardour that only the Southern blood can feel. Mr. Thomas Nelson Page is something more than a "kail-yarder." He is the vindicator of the South before the war—the South of slavery. To him the Southern was the gentleman of America, and he lives like a Simeon awaiting the birth of the historian who is to do Virginia justice. Meanwhile, in such books as "The Old South," he himself has done something to make smooth the way of the coming historian. But the most effective word he has ever uttered in vindication of his people is "Marse Chan," the first of his stories, and the one that made him famous almost within an hour of its publication. It was over "Marse Chan" that Henry Ward Beecher cried like a child, doughty Abolitionist though he was. The story is a tale of love, war and slavery, that for pathos, humour, and dramatic touch has no superior in American literature. In "Marse Chan" Mr. Page only wrote what was in his blood and bone. His family comes of an old Virginian stock, his maternal grandfather having been one of the signatories to

MR. THOMAS NELSON PAGE.

the Declaration of Independence. He was too young to take active part in the war—he was born in 1853—but his father was an officer in the Confederate Army. He practises as a lawyer in Richmond, the tobacco metropolis and the capital of Virginia; but those who know him meet him frequently in London.

As at home, so in America, the "kailyard" school has its complement in a new literature of romance. Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's recently published novel, "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," is at present the high-water mark of this department in American literature. Dr. Mitchell is the ideal medical man in heart and culture, and his friends, partly from sentiment and partly because some real likeness exists, compare him with his old friend, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. In appearance he is "a tall man with a colossal head" and most impressive face, and his manner is hearty but quiet. It is needless to tell anyone who has experienced Dr. Mitchell's hospitality that it is to him that Dr. Holmes refers in his Ode when he sings of "Mitchell's generous board." He is still in practice, and can be found any morning after nine at his consulting room in Philadelphia. Long before he wrote a novel he was known as a poet, and, with a strength of will which foreboded no literary genius, he deliberately forsook the muse for medicine. Only after his reputation as a doctor had been made—he is an expert in neurology—did he return to his pen. As a poet he shows a keen love of nature and a serious and philosophical outlook upon life. Browning and Matthew Arnold are after his own heart. But, when he liked, he could sing a good ballad, like—

I would I were an English rose,
In England for to be,
The sweetest maid that Devon knows
Should pick and carry me.

In "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," which, although its literary value is below an earlier story, "Far in the Forest," has made him one of the most widely read authors in the United States, he has simply told a story from the revolutionary history of his city. Both characters and incidents are, for the most part, real, the Wynnes being an old Pennsylvanian family with property at Merion, that charming suburb of Philadelphia from the high ground of which you can still see the vast town, with the figure of Penn towering over it from its exalted position on the top of the City Hall tower. Wide literary fame has come late in life to Dr. Mitchell, who is over seventy, but so keen is the interest now being taken in American history that I should not be surprised though there arose an important school of American historical romance owing to the success of his novel.

DR. S. WEIR MITCHELL.

(From the picture by Frank Holl. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. T. Fisher Unwin.)

These are a few of the writers who, America hopes, have done, or may yet do, something that the future may consider worthy of being mentioned with the work of those men who lie in the Sleepy Hollow of Concord or in the Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge.