

Literary Notices.

ANECDOTES OF PUBLIC MEN. By John W. Forney. New York: Harper Bros.

These Anecdotes were originally written as weekly correspondence of the *Washington Chronicle* and *Philadelphia Press*. They are chiefly of political interest, and are valuable in a historical point of view. As specimens of his style, we copy two anecdotes, one relating to President Lincoln and the other to Signor Blitz:—

“Most history is false, save in names and dates, while a good novel is generally a truthful picture of real life, false only in names and dates.” I often think of this sensible remark of a veteran statesman, now in Europe, as I glance into the pages of some of the numberless volumes born during and since the rebellion. Many of their writers seem to have no other object than to make gods of their favorites and devils of their adversaries. Perhaps there can be no true philosophy of that tragic interval. Passion and prejudice have given way before judicial impartiality and tranquil reflection. Carlyle’s “*French Revolution*” of 1793, one of the most remarkable of that strange man’s productions, as wonderful for its flashes of individual character as for its accuracy in describing events, was made up from personal investigation and from a careful review of the journals of the day. It inspired Dickens’s “*Tale of Two Cities*,” one of the most grotesque and thrilling of all his creations. Exactly such a mind is required to give us a faithful picture of the inner life of the rebellion. There are several collections of the newspapers of both sides, one that was preserved for some years in the National Library, and, I think, one or two in New York and Boston. Add to these the letters of private soldiers to their families at home, thousands of which are laid away for reference. But who will distill the essence from this mass of material? Who will digest the endless collection? It should be a patriotic and laborious man, a student like Carlyle, blessed with a pleasant style, large sympathies, and a strict and conscientious sense of justice. The incidents of the war, set forth in these private letters of the soldiers and narrated in the newspapers, would make up not only what would be the best of all histories, but reading as absorbing as any romance.

One of these incidents occurs to me as I write. While I was secretary of the Senate there was hardly an hour during any day that I was not called upon to help somebody who had friends or kindred in the army, or had business in the Departments, or was anxious to get some poor fellow out of the Old Capitol Prison. These constant appeals were incessant demands upon the time of a very busy man, but the labor was a labor of love, and I am glad to remember that I never undertook it reluctantly. One day a very energetic lady called on me to take her to the President, and aid her to get a private soldier pardoned who had been sentenced to death for desertion, and was to be shot the very next morning. We were much pressed in the Senate, and she had to wait a long time before I could accompany her to the White House. It was late in the afternoon when we got there, and yet the Cabinet was still in session. I sent my name in to Mr. Lincoln, and he came out evidently in profound thought, and full of some great subject. I stated the object of our call, and, leaving the lady in one of the ante-chambers, returned to the Senate, which had not yet adjourned. The case made a deep impression on me, but I forgot it in the excitement of the debate and the work of my office, until perhaps, near ten o’clock that night, when my female friend came rushing into my room, radiant with delight, the pardon in her hand. “I have been up there ever since,” she said. “The Cabinet adjourned, and I sat waiting for the President to come out and tell me the fate of my poor soldier, whose case I placed in his hands after you left; but I waited in vain—there was no Mr. Lincoln. So I thought I would go up to the door of his Cabinet chamber and knock. I did so, and, as there was no answer, I opened it and passed in, and there was the worn President asleep, with his head on the table resting on his arms, and my boy’s pardon signed by his side. I quietly waked him, blessed him for his good deed, and came here to tell you the glorious news. You have helped me to save a human life.”

This is the material, if not for solemn history, at least for those better lessons which speak to us from the lives of the just and the pure.

William Hazlitt, in his delightful “*Table Talk*,” describes an “*Indian juggler*,” and