

AMERICAN POETRY. — Is there an American poetry? Have we done only what Longfellow in his youth averred he was content to do? Have we merely continued English literature, or are there a genuine nationality, an indigenous growth, an aboriginal quality in our production hitherto? It is well enough to let the mind wander, after a Spencerian fashion, over the distant future, when from the attrition of our immigrant races a new people shall result, with a literature of its own; but, in that, posterity has the principal interest. Such speculation may fill a paragraph; it is not the theme of the chapter. There is an abundance of literary fossils in our past, and from the study of them it appears that there was great effort at one time to breed a *genus Americanum* to browse on the pasturage of Pegasus. Here are relics of epic, pastoral, and lyric which belong to the period of the Red-Skin. The mass of our inspired writing about the Indians and their myths was extraordinarily voluminous, and it seems to have sprung from the notion that for our poetry to be original it must be aboriginal. A national literature, however, needed some other voucher than the trick of local colour could give. It was as if Swinburne should claim admittance to Greek anthologies on the score of Atalanta, or Erichtheus or Shakespeare seek some Latin apotheosis for his Roman plays. This attempt of our earlier poets to develop a native literature by experimental variation was abortive. The effort merely to be different leads usually only to affectation, and so it was with those who were over-anxious for the coming of a poetry as original as the very *Burd o' Freedom*. The error of method is illustrated by a contrast with *The Biglow Papers*. Mr. Lowell found a living dialect, which was a natural channel of sense, and quick, brief tenderness, of grit and humour and shrewdness very near to sarcasm; and he, as the poet does, in making it the mould of his own kindred spirit, illuminated it. *The Biglow Papers* are American in a narrower than the national sense; they are Yankee, but the "new birth of our new soil" beyond all cavil. Those who, on the other hand, strove to make the Indian character a means of imaginative expression lacked power to subdue it, finding it altogether too alien; with all their efforts, the work they left of this kind is a decaying fungus. Doubtless it is true that Longfellow, in his *Hiawatha*, was obeying the same motive so far as his choice of a subject was concerned. That poem remains the single success in its class; but is as little national in itself as is Thackeray's *Virginians*.

Mr. Stedman thinks it is best that poets should take their topics from their own land, but he sets forth very emphatically his opinion that nationality is something that goes far below such surface matter as the theme. The youthful artifices of young America in wat' paint and feathers have passed into contempt, but without any special or conscious intention, did not our poets prove, after all, compatriots? There is a far-reaching truth in the doctrine that the test of a poem's worth is the extent to which the nation absorbs it. There are poets' poets, of course, —verses for the "fit audience, though few;" but, to leave the question of intrinsic excellence and the finer qualities of elect spirits, it is certainly an indication of some national characteristic in a poem if the people absorb it by preference. Now, with the exception of a few, the American poets, whom Mr. Sted-

man has selected for detailed examination, have been thus absorbed by the reading class at large, and, intellectually speaking, that means the nation. Bryant, Longfellow and Whittier are popularly felt to be our own, not by birth only, but by a consanguinity of thought and character; and in a less degree the same is true of the others. With Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, and possibly Scott, left out of the account, no English poets come home to our people as do our own. Wordsworth has a literary, Shelley a poetic, constituency; even Tennyson has only a half-hearted vogue; but with the exception of the three great names which have been mentioned, we believe that to our country to-day the word poetry means, in real knowledge, care, and affection, American poetry. Nor is this choice of the American branch of poetic literature one determined by a pseudo-patriotism, or merely by nearness to a home market. There is a real community between the commonalty and the poets in what is coming to be recognized as specifically American character, in certain preferred modes of looking at things, and in certain established moral values.—*January Atlantic*.

A MISNOMER.—There is no lead pencil, says the *Scientific American*, and there has been none for fifty years. There was a time when a spiracle of lead, cut from the bar or sheet, sufficed to make marks on white paper or some rougher abrading material. The name of lead pencil came from the old notion that the products of the different Cumberland mines, were lead, instead of being plumbago or graphite—a carbonate of iron capable of leaving a lead-coloured mark. With the original lead pencil or slip, and with the earlier styles of the "lead" pencil made direct from the Cumberland mine, the wetting of the pencil was a preliminary of writing. But since it has become a manufacture, the lead pencil is adapted by numbers or letters, to each particular design. There are grades of hardness, from the pencil that may be sharpened to a needle point, to one that makes a broad mark. Between the two extremes there is a number of graduations that covers all the conveniences of the lead pencil. These graduations are made by taking the original carbonate and grinding it, and mixing it with a fine quality of clay in different proportions, regard being had to the use of the pencil. The mixture is thorough, the mass is squeezed through dies to form and size it, is dried, and encased in its wood envelope.

BRIGHT AND BUSINESS-LIKE.—A good cleaning powder for show-windows, and one which leaves no dirt in the joints, is prepared by moistening calcined magnesia with pure benzine, so that a mass is formed sufficiently moist to let a drop form when pressed. The mixture has to be preserved in glass bottles with ground stoppers, in order to retain the easily volatile benzine. A little of the mixture is placed on a wad of cotton and applied to the glass plate. It may also be used for cleaning mirrors.

The *Stationers' Trades Journal* calls attention to what might be a matter of profit to the Canadian trade: —FLORAL PICTURE BOOKS.—The more these useful little articles become known the greater the sale for them will be, as their points of recommendation are very numerous. They are devised to do away with