

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

"THE DAYS OF APRIL."

"The days of April" they are sweet, so sweet,
Flushing with tender green the meadow ways,
Where June will dance with her gay, gladsome feet,
To music of a thousand warblers' praise.

"The days of April" they are fair, so fair,
With precious promise in the budding flowers,
Promise of days all radiant, fresh and rare,
Mellowed by gentle dews and fleeting showers.

"The days of April" they are green, so green !
And maple buds grow brilliant in the sun,
Golden the brookside with the cowslips' sheen,
And fragile wind-flowers steal out one by one.

"The days of April" they are dear, so dear,
To hearts grown weary of the winter cold,
Longing for sunny skies all blue and clear,
For birds to pipe, and blossoms to unfold.

"The days of April" they are bright and coy ;
But one glad April, years and years ago,
Held more of charmed hope and love and joy
Than all my life again can ever know.

Isabel Gordon, in *April Lippincott's*.

LITERATURE AND THE MINISTRY.

By examining the published sermons of successful preachers we should doubtless be able to determine with more or less confidence whether literature had been a chief nourisher of their genius. Take Jeremy Taylor, sometimes called the Shakespeare of the pulpit. The sources of his inspiration are not doubtful. In spite of the vicissitudes of his troubled career, he managed to read all the important publications of the day. If he did not neglect the soberer writers, neither was he indifferent to Robert Greene or Mademoiselle de Scudéri. Like Petrarch, he might have fitly died with his head on a book. Scarcely less were the obligations to literature of another great preacher, Robertson of Brighton. So conscious was he of its beneficent power in his own experience that he urged the reading of poetry upon the workmen of his parish, as at once a powerful reprieve:—

Which can commute a sentence of sore pain
For one of softer sadness,

and an inspiration which could lift them into the higher moods of living. No one who is familiar with the remarkable sermons of the late Canon Liddon will have failed to observe that only a man of letters could have written them. If there should be appeal from the discourses of clergymen to the testimony of laymen, I should be inclined to quote the opinion of Thomas Nash, which deserves whatever attention the conclusions of a keen, observant Elizabethan may happen to be worth: "How admirably shine those divines above the common mediocrity," he exclaims, "that have tasted the sweet springs of Parnassus!"—*Professor Leverett W. Spring, in the April Atlantic*.

A FORETASTE OF PARADISE.

At every epoch there lies, beyond the domain of what man knows, the domain of the unknown, in which faith has its dwelling. Faith has no proofs, but only itself to offer. It is born spontaneously in certain commanding souls; it spreads its empire among the rest by imitation and contagion. A great faith is but a great hope which becomes certitude as we move farther and farther from the founder of it; time and distance strengthen it, until at last the passion for knowledge seizes upon it, questions and examines it. Then all which had once made its strength becomes its weakness; the impossibility of verification, exaltation of feeling, distance. At what age is our view clearest, our eyes truest? Surely in old age, before the infirmities come which weaken or embitter. The ancients were right. The old man who is at once sympathetic and disinterested, necessarily develops the spirit of contemplation, and it is given to the spirit of contemplation to see things most truly, because it alone perceives them in their relative and proportional value. A sense of rest, of deep quiet even. Silence within and without. A quietly burning fire. A sense of comfort. The portrait of my mother seems to smile upon me. I am not dazed or stupid, but only happy in this peaceful morning. Whatever may be the charm of emotion, I do not know whether it equals the sweetness of those hours of silent meditation, in which we have a glimpse and foretaste of the contemplative joys of Paradise. Desire and fear, sadness and care, are done away. Existence is reduced to the simplest form, the most ethereal mode of being; that is, to pure self-consciousness. It is a state of harmony, without tension and without disturbance, the dominical state of the soul, perhaps the state which awaits it beyond the grave. It is happiness as the Orientals understand it, the happiness of the anchorite, who neither struggles nor wishes any more, but simply adores and enjoys. It is difficult to find words in which to express this mortal situation, for our languages can only render the particular and localized vibrations of life; they are incapable of expressing this motionless concentration, this divine quietude, this state of the resting ocean which

reflects the sky and is master of its own profundities. Things are then reabsorbed into their principles; memories are swallowed up in memory; the soul is only soul, and is no longer conscious of itself in its individuality and separateness. It is something which feels the universal life, a sensible atom of the divine, of God. It no longer appropriates anything to itself; it is conscious of no void. Only the Yoghis and the Soufis perhaps have known in its profundity this humble and yet voluptuous state, which combines the joy of being and of non-being, which is neither reflection nor will, which is above both the moral existence and the intellectual existence, which is the return to unity, to the pleroma, the vision of Plotinus and of Proclus—Nirvana in its most attractive form. It is clear that the western nations in general, and especially the Americans, know very little of this state of feeling. For their life is devouring and incessant activity. They are eager for gold, for power, for dominion; their aim is to crush men and to enslave nature. They show an obstinate interest in means, and have not a thought for the end. They confound being with individual being, and the expression of the self with happiness; that is to say, they do not live by the soul; they ignore the unchangeable; they live at the periphery of their being, because they are unable to penetrate to its axis. They are ardent, positive, because they are superficial. Why so much effort, noise, struggle and greed? It is all a mere stunning and deafening of the self. When death comes they recognize that it is so—why not, then, admit it sooner?—*Aniel's Journal*.

CHARLES KEENE, CARICATURIST—"PUNCH" AND ITS ORIGINATORS.

KEENE was intensely original, and, as one writing of *Punch* on the death of Mark Lemon truly remarked: "Originality is a dangerous game to play, with the public as an opponent. It takes a long time to turn the public mind to a new direction, however much 'to the point' that direction may be." Keene's work was *caviare* to a public which had been brought up to feast upon the strong, exaggerated humour of Rowlandson, Gillray, and the Cruikshanks. This was the public that Mark Lemon, Leech and Mayhew determined to cater for in 1811—a public which they foresaw was ready to pay for a regular weekly supply of laughter stimulants, in place of the erratic provision such as was made by Mrs. Humphrey and her "silent, shy, and inexplicable" designer during their twenty years of association. It was a public which wanted to laugh heartily, while they were about it; a public which, while recovering from a roaring dissoluteness, which had been caught from examples in high places, had not yet come to the more modern conclusion that a "guffaw" is incorrect, and that laughter should swoon away into a yawn. It was a public which looked for low rather than high comedy, and that was what the great trio determined they should have. Fortunately they came early across John Leech, who led the inextinguishable laughter of England for over twenty years. *Punch* was indeed, during those years, what "Uncle Mark" had just christened it, the "guffawgraph" *par excellence*, and the public got their laughter stimulant and cachinnated unrestrainedly. In those days people there were who, like Nic, "grinned, cackled, and laughed, till they were like to kill themselves, and fell a-frisking and dancing about the room." But now, what do we find? The rising generations only smile. What hearty laughter we do hear is from the "old boys" whose cracked voices have still a remnant of the true, unrestrained ring about them. This is the reign of reason, we know, and we have the high Miltonic authority for saying that—

Smiles from reason flow
To brute denied.

—From "*Charles Keene, of 'Punch,'*" by George Smes Layard, in *April Scribner*.

LONDON AND LITERATURE.

"LONDON," said Mr. Andrew Lang in his recent address to the Edinburgh Burns Club, "would inevitably have sucked the poet into its dingy and disastrous Corrie-vrechan." And then, what change would the poet have suffered, what would he have become? He would have battered at the theatre doors, Mr. Lang thinks; he might have drunk strong liquors in Fleet Street, and scribbled articles for the daily press, or, worse still, he might have contributed verses to the magazines. "His magnificent genius would have been frittered away in the struggle for life." It might have been so, of course; one who succumbed to the temptations of Ayrshire would hardly be likely to resist those of London. But the speculation, as far as Burns is concerned, is an unprofitable one. It is as absolutely impossible to picture the genius of Burns bound by the conditions of our modern life, and feeding on the excitements of the crowded metropolis, as it would be to translate his Scotch songs into smooth English verse. Still, when Mr. Lang speaks of the frittering away of his genius as being the necessary outcome of the influence of London, we are tempted to demur. The whirlpool of London life is dingy and disastrous enough, and many a strong swimmer has been sucked down and engulfed in it before now; but many, too, have been the victims of the still waters, the deep stagnation of country life. Looking at the influence that London has exercised upon the imaginations and lives of her children of genius, it can hardly be fairly contended that she has stunted their growth, or wasted their energies by tempting them into barren ways and

sterile by-paths. Could Shakespeare have written "Hamlet" in Stratford-on-Avon? Could one imagine Dr. Johnson in any other surroundings? Would Goldsmith have ever made his voice heard from his native village!—and to him the streets of London were full of temptations that were not resisted. Think of Dickens or of Thackeray, and what they owed to the seething restlessness of the life that surrounded them. London has no Cockney poet to match her Cockney novelist; but is it so impossible that she should have one?—a poet, that is to say, born to poverty and labour, for of other poets she cherishes a hundred or so, and very charming poets too. Not the least of them is Mr. Lang himself—surely he might have a better word for the great city that has become the land of his adoption, for to him she has never been unkind. Born, bred, and nurtured in the very heart of London, she not only gave us our Dickens, but she made him what he was. Though not born to poverty and labour in the strictest sense of the word, he was born to the grinding penury of middle-class thriftlessness, and the task of illustrating, helping, and enlightening his people was one that he fulfilled nobly. What would have become of the genius of Dickens had he been born and bred in some out-of-the-way country spot? Surely there is no reason for thinking that his magnificent genius would have starved for want of opportunity, and been utterly wasted for the world's use and enjoyment? Why should one suppose, then, that the genius of Burns, born under those conditions, would have been frittered away in the ceaseless struggle for existence that is entailed by London life upon those that live it? Genius is a fire which burns as brightly whatever the fuel it feeds upon, whether it consumes the logs of Scotch pine, or the coal of the London grates; there may be a difference in the smoke, but the flame is much the same. What has London done, that this reproach should be cast upon her? The latest and the youngest of those who have changed the clearer air of other skies for a shelter under her sooty canopy, Rudyard Kipling, who has deserted the teeming millions of India for the even more crowded press of the London pavements, does not yet seem to have suffered any change in consequence of the change of climate. Is that result still one that may be expected, and are we to view the gradual frittering-away of his powers in the pages of magazines and the feuilletons of newspapers? Why should it be so? The bribe to exceed one's powers and write for easy hire, is a very great one; but is it more detrimental than the pressure of want in forcing out work unnaturally? The pressure of civilization that one seems to feel the actual weight off in London, and the struggle for life around one, are quite as likely to condense as to fray out in shreds the gift that is within the Londoner.—*Spectator*.

THE DATE OF THE EXODUS.

WHAT was the precise date of the Exodus from Egypt? A German astronomer, according to one of our contemporaries, has solved this knotty problem. Jewish tradition gives the date as the 1st Nisan, 1312 B.C. In order to test this, our astronomer has assumed that the Egyptian Darkness which immediately preceded the Exodus was an eclipse. He has consequently calculated all the eclipses of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., and having selected those which took place in the spring, has then chosen from them those which come nearest to the date given by the Jewish tradition. The eclipse he finally selected was one which took place on March 13, 1335 B.C. It is curious to note that this date agrees with Jewish tradition, so far as the month and the day are concerned. The year is, however, twenty-three years out. The astronomer declares that this is a mistake of the Jewish historians, since no eclipse occurred in the year 1312 B.C. He seems to forget that the alleged darkness is described in the Scriptures as having been a miracle. However, the result of his calculation is to show that the Exodus took place on March 27, 1335—a discovery which will be appreciated when our iconoclastic Reformers lay violent hands on the Jewish calendar.—*Jewish Chronicle*.

THE Princess Marie, wife of the Danish Prince Valdemar, came through Elsinore incognito on a recent excursion to Sweden. The station master heard of her coming, and promptly decorating the waiting-room with calla-lilies from his parlour, set a watch at the door to prevent the public from intruding upon the royal privacy. Shortly the princess and her sister appeared, each with a small chip basket they had brought home from their trip. The brusque watchman blocked the door. These surely were not princesses. "You cannot enter," he said. "Why not?" asked the astounded princess. "Because we expect the Princess Marie." "Then keep a good lookout for her," laughed the amused lady, and went through the common gate to the platform. The station-master concluded, after waiting all day, that the princess had taken another route.

POSSESSION, why more tasteless than pursuit? Why is a wish far dearer than a crown? that wish accomplished, why the grave of bliss? Because in the great future, buried deep, beyond our plans of empire and renown, lies all that man with ardour should pursue; and He who made him bent him to the right.—*Young*.

TEARS may be dried up, but the heart never.—*Marquise de Valois*.