

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

BREAD OR A STONE.

PRISONED we are within these walls of time,
And through our bars we yearn with hungry eyes,
For all the angels' freedom of the skies.
We cannot fly, we cannot even climb,
We hear their psalms antiphonal sublime,
Beloved, where our souls must agonize
In longing, loneliness and sacrifice.
We ask why are these fetters; what our crime?
We reach out for the touch of some warm hand,
Responsive to the clasping of our own,
Our mutual needs crave human sympathy,
How few we find who see or understand.
Instead of bread they give to us a stone,
Oh! say, my friend, which you will give to me?

—Emma P. Seabury.

SHOOTING AN ALLIGATOR.

THE oars were stopped, resting in the water; the skiff half turned, drifting in the sluggish tide; the long beam of the lantern, with its oval disc of dim light resting far out on the surface, swept slowly around over the waters looking for the two lost lights. Ten minutes or more thus passed, and suddenly the two lost sparks gleamed back in a new direction. A gentle, noiseless push on the port oar headed the skiff toward them again. "Doucement!" whispered Paul. His associate, still more gently, guided the boat to the left till only one light shone from the obscure object in the water. This showed that he had got on its side, as was desired, because a forward shot always glances. Cautiously the silent oarsman again turned his craft to the right. Paul raised his long rifle ready to fire. The disc of the lantern on the water, contracting gradually, grew proportionately more brilliant. As it contracted the solitary light shining back on the water from its centre became larger and brighter, till at last the eye of the great saurian glittered as if he had the "Koh-i-noor" itself in his head. Slowly, silently, nearer the boat moved, till within ten yards of the reptile. The glow of the lantern flashed along the barrel of the rifle for a few seconds; then came the ringing report. The light on the water instantly went out, and the glow of the lantern, now shining in a circle only a few feet in diameter over the place where it disappeared, showed only a few foamy bubbles and little whirlpools. Thirty seconds passed in silence; then an immense dark form bounded from the depths below above the surface of the water, and, rolling over on its back, showed the broad, yellow-white belly of an enormous alligator. The shuddering reptile remained otherwise motionless for a few minutes; then, spasmodically stretching and stiffening its ugly legs and feet, and leaping half its length in the air, fell back again, beating the water with its tail in blows sounding as loud as the report of the weapon which had slain him. "Moi tué li," muttered Paul, in an accent of quiet triumph. His associate, after a few exclamations of more voluble admiration, rolled another cigarette, and quietly turned his boat off in search of other game. In a few hours of this hunting five alligators were shot.—*The Century*.

THE GREAT MISTAKE OF THE ULTRA-REALISTS

THE first great mistake made by the ultra-realists, like Flaubert and Zola, is, as I have said, their ignoring the line of distinction between imaginative art and science. We can find realism enough in books of anatomy, surgery, and medicine. In studying the human figure, we want to see it clothed with its natural integuments. It is well for the artist to study the *écorce* in the dissecting-room, but we do not want the Apollo or the Venus to leave their skins behind them when they go into the gallery for exhibition. Lancelotti's figures show us how the great statues look when divested of their natural covering. It is instructive, but useful chiefly as a means to aid in the true artistic reproduction of nature. When the hospitals are invaded by the novelist, he should learn something from the physician as well as from the patients. Science delineates in monochrome. She never uses high tints and strontian lights to astonish lookers on. Such scenes as Flaubert and Zola describe would be reproduced in their essential characters, but not dressed up in picturesque phrases. That is the first stumbling-block in the way of the reader of such realistic stories as those to which I have referred. There are subjects which must be investigated by scientific men which most educated persons would be glad to know nothing about. When a realistic writer like Zola surprises his reader into a kind of knowledge he never thought of wishing for, he sometimes harms him more than he has any idea of doing. He wants to produce a sensation, and he leaves a permanent disgust not to be got rid of. Who does not remember odious images that can never be washed out from the consciousness which they have stained? A man's vocabulary is terribly retentive of evil words, and the images they present cling to his memory and will not loose their hold. One who has had the mischance to soil his mind by reading certain poems of Swift will never cleanse it to its original whiteness. Expressions and thoughts of a certain character stain the fibre of the thinking organ, and in some degree affect the hue of every idea that passes through the discoloured tissues.—*From Over the Teacups. By Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

THE PERSONALITY OF HOBBS.

HOBBS' health was weak in youth, but improved after he was forty. He was over six feet high, and in old age erect for his years. He had good eyes, which shone "as with a bright live coal" under excitement. His black hair caused him to be nicknamed "Crow" at school. He had a short bristling auburn moustache, but shaved what would have been a "venerable beard" to avoid an appearance of philosophical austerity. He took little physic, and preferred an "experienced old woman" to the "most learned but inexperienced physician." He was generally temperate, though he calculated that he had been drunk a hundred times during a life of ninety-two years. His diet was regular; he drank no wine after sixty, and ate chiefly fish. He rose at seven, breakfasted on bread and butter, dined at eleven, and after a pipe slept for half-an-hour, afterwards writing down his morning thoughts. He took regular exercise, playing tennis even at seventy-five, and in the country taking a smart walk, after which he was rubbed by a servant. He is said to have had an illegitimate daughter, for whom he provided. He was affable and courteous, a pleasant companion, though it is recorded that he sometimes lost his temper in arguing with Thomas White or "Albius." A common story of his fear of ghosts is denied in the *Vite Auctarium*. He read not much, but thoroughly, and was fond of saying that if he had read as much as other learned men he would have been as ignorant. He was charitable and very liberal to his relations. His long connection with the Cavendishes is creditable to both, and he appears to have been a faithful friend. He was constitutionally timid, though intellectually audacious, and always on his guard against possible persecution. But the charges of time-serving seem to be disproved. There is a portrait of him by J. M. Wright in the National Portrait Gallery, and two in the possession of the Royal Society. A portrait by Cooper was formerly in the royal collections.—*Dictionary of National Biography*.

COLUMBUS AND MAGELLAN.

A QUESTION of no little interest yet remains for consideration—the question of what rank ought to be assigned to Magellan as a navigator and explorer. In the history of geographical discovery there are two great successes, and two only, so much do they surpass all others—the discovery of America, and the first circumnavigation of the globe. Columbus and Magellan are the only possible competitors for the supremacy. Were the vote of the majority taken, it would without a shadow of doubt be recorded in favour of the former. We can see easily enough that it could not well be otherwise. Fortified by the dangerous possession of a little knowledge, the mass would grant the palm to him who first brought the vast continent of America to the ken of Europeans. It is difficult to free the mind from the influence of the well-known couplet over the grave of Columbus:—

A Castilla y Leon
Nuevo mundo dio Colon.

But without detracting in any way from the ample honour which is his just due, and unbiassed comparison of his great voyage with that of Magellan leaves the latter navigator with the verdict in his favour on almost every point. If it be claimed for Columbus that he crossed an ocean of vast size whose western half was unknown to the inhabitants of the old world, it is equally incontrovertible that Magellan traversed a far vaster sea, upon whose waters no European ship had ever floated. When Columbus started on his voyage, his work lay immediately before him. Magellan did not arrive at the Pacific until more than a year after he weighed anchor from S. Lucar de Barrameda, for months of which he had undergone great and continued hardships. While the great Genoese made land on the thirty-sixth day after leaving the Canaries, the little armada of Magellan struggled for no less than three months and eighteen days across the unknown waste of the Pacific. Little wonder that they said it was more vast than the imagination of man could conceive! As an explorer then, the merits of Magellan must be ranked as superior to those of the discoverer of the New World. The long foreseen mutiny, the ceaseless tempests and cold of Patagonia, the famine that stared him in the face, failed to daunt him, and he carried out an expedition infinitely more lengthy and difficult in the face of incomparably greater hardships.—*The Life of Ferdinand Magellan. By F. H. H. Gaillardet, M. A., M. D.*

A TALE OF BURMAH RUBIES.

THE London correspondent of a provincial paper has encountered a gentleman, the story of whose life would read like a romance of the Elizabethan adventures in America. Some sixteen years ago, when quite a young man, he left England to seek his fortune. After wanderings in the various and remote Eastern countries he came to Burmah while the "boom" in rubies was on. His ardour was fired, and he determined to see what success he could achieve in that direction, the more so as he came across a native who was willing to show him a district to which tradition had attributed marvellous wealth. Preliminary enquiries did not discredit the story, so the journey was decided upon. Taking with him some forty attendants, the traveller started. The story of the march is a thrilling one, the party traversing the thickest of forests, totally devoid of any track, and seemingly untraced by any previous explorer. For some days the pri-

vations endured were of a harrowing character, and it looked as if the idea would have to be given up, for the natives were rapidly dying off. Notwithstanding this, however, the original plan was adhered to, and, coming to the spot he was in search of, the intrepid adventurer was gratified beyond all bounds to find that his labours had not been in vain, and that rubies were procurable in such quantities that for the rest of his life he would be in possession of an ample fortune. The return march was of a similarly difficult character. The severity of the business can be imagined when it is stated that of the forty men who started only six returned home. The gentleman is now in England, and having, as he says, had "a youth of labour," he looks forward with hopefulness to an "age of ease."

THREE THOUSAND POUNDS FOR THREE LOGS OF MAHOGANY.

WE stumbled across an old volume the other day—"The Library of Entertaining Knowledge," published by Charles Knight in 1829. Part I., treating of "Vegetable Substances: Timber Trees," besides containing much valuable information for sylviculturists and others, is full of interesting facts connected with the discovery and introduction into this country of the various kinds of wood used in commerce. The introduction into notice of mahogany appears to have been slow; the first mention of it was that it was used in the repair of Sir Walter Raleigh's ships at Trinidad in 1597. "Its finely variegated tints were admired; but in that age the dream of El Dorado caused matters of more value to be neglected. The first that was brought to England," says the writer, "was about the beginning of last century, a few planks having been sent to Dr. Gibbons, of London, by a brother, who was a West India captain. The doctor was erecting a house in King Street, Covent Garden, and gave the planks to the workmen, who rejected it as being too hard. The doctor's cabinet-maker, named Wollaston, was employed to make a candle-box of it, and as he was sawing up the plank he also complained of the hardness of the timber. But when the candle-box was finished, it outshone all the doctor's other furniture, and became an object of curiosity and exhibition. The wood was then taken into favour. Dr. Gibbons had a bureau made of it, and the Duchess of Buckingham another; and the despised mahogany now became a prominent article of luxury, and at the same time raised the fortunes of the cabinet-maker by whom it had been at first so little regarded." A single log of mahogany imported at Liverpool some years after weighed nearly seven tons, and was first sold for £378; resold for £525; and would, the account goes on to say, have been worth £1,000 had the dealers been certain of its quality. Speaking of the various uses to which the wood eventually came to be applied, the writer says: "Mahogany is of universal use for furniture, from the common tables of a village inn to the splendid cabinets of a regal palace. But the general adoption of this wood renders a nice selection necessary. The extensive manufacture of pianofortes has much increased the demand for mahogany. This musical instrument, as made in England, is superior to that of any other part of Europe, and English pianofortes are largely exported. The beauty of the case forms a point of great importance to the manufacturer. This circumstance adds nothing of course to the intrinsic value of the instrument, but it is of consequence to the maker, in giving an adventitious quality to the article in which he deals. Spanish mahogany is decidedly the most beautiful, but occasionally, yet not very often, the Honduras wood is of singular brilliancy, and it is then eagerly sought for to be employed in the most expensive cabinet work. A short time ago Messrs. Broadwood, who have long been distinguished as makers of pianofortes, gave the enormous sum of three thousand pounds for three logs of mahogany. These logs, the produce of one tree, were each about fifteen feet long and thirty-eight inches wide. They were cut into veneers of eight to an inch. The wood, of which we have seen a specimen, was peculiarly beautiful, capable of receiving the highest polish, and, when polished, reflecting the light in the most varied manner, like the surface of a crystal, and from the many forms of the fibres offering a different figure in whatever direction it was viewed."—*London P., O., and Music Trades Journal*.

THE JEW.

JUDGING by police reports, there has been less of the deceitfulness, chicanery and fraud that are popularly and often unjustly held to be distinctive of the poorer Jews in the acquisition of this amazing wealth and influence than among an equal number of nominal Christians of similar class. It is certain that the homely virtues of which King Solomon, Franklin and Smiles are the apostles, have been the principal creators of Jewish affluence and power. The prudence which confines expenditure within the limits of income, the diligence which rejoices in improving opportunity, the far-sightedness which deposits money where it will do the most good, and the promise which is held to be as binding as the legal contract, are the chief factors of fortune with them, as with all men. The best proof of the moral standing of the Hebrews is to be found in the relatively low percentage of their number in prisons and reformatories. Only two murderers, it is said, have sprung from their ranks in 250 years. Drunkenness is not a Jewish vice. Neither is anarchism a Jewish insanity. Its subjects disavow and even revile Judaism.—*The Century*.