

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

ACHERON.

Toward his Ionian haven hurrying on,
Mid castled cliffs, wherefrom ye may descry
His white-plumed torrent roaring thunder-
ously,
Adown the sheer steep plunges Acheron:
Nor has the old-world glamour wholly gone
From shores, where sadness everlastingly
Chilled the pale Shades, and for Eurydice
Rapt Orpheus shrilled his fruitless orison.
For Virgil's hand has flung a fadeless bloom
O'er yon drear vale, where streams Plutonian
flow,
That pilgrimage through rayless realms of
doom,
Sung by the Mighty master long ago,
Has glorified the murky Tartarean gloom,
And diadem'd those darksome waves of woe.
—MR. C. A. KELLY, in London *Public Opinion*.

POISONING BY THE PLATYPUS.

The Australian correspondent of the *Lancet* writes:—"The platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*) has always been a most interesting animal, occupying as it does an intermediate position between reptiles, birds and mammals; on the hind limb of the male is a hollow curved spur communicating with a gland in the leg in much the same way as the poison fang of a snake is connected with the poison-producing salivary gland. At the last meeting of the Victorian Branch of the British Medical Association Dr. Lalor made a preliminary communication suggestive of the fact that the gland of the platypus also secretes poison. He narrated the case of a man who was wounded in the hand by this spur of the platypus and felt stung. Cellulitis of the arm followed, and acute blood-poisoning. The subject is to be further investigated, but of course it is quite possible that the symptoms can be accounted for by the inoculation of a simple wound with the ordinary micro-organisms of septicæmia."—*London Public Opinion*.

SOME STRANGE STORIES.

Those of us who stumble at belief in the supernatural, may find it easier to discuss mysteries when the term super-material is used. Those who are not ashamed to acknowledge that inexplicable things do happen, can claim fellowship with a goodly host. The writer of this paper will relate nothing herein that is not true and absolutely worthy of trust, within personal experience, or that of well-known and excellent friends.

A clever divine was, for many years, rector of a country parish, and built, for his own convenience, a handsome parsonage, fitting up therein a library, replete with every literary luxury, and rich in comfortable appliances. Here he, for the most part, lived for a long period, and within those four delightful walls were written the books and pamphlets which eventually raised him to the dignity of a bishop. A new and more stately house became his happy home again, while the parish he had vacated fell into the hands of another. Some years passed. The new vicar of the country parish was one day writing his sermon within the closed doors of the bishop's old library, now more modestly called "the study." He was disturbed by hearing a hoarse, distressed voice exclaiming, "Mary! Mary!" The speaker seemed at his elbow, yet the room had no second occupant; and the double doors shut off extraneous noises. As

he looked about in surprise, the call for "Mary! Mary!" came more urgently still. He rose and went to the window. The sun was shining. All was quiet without. No one was in sight. He resumed his work. It did not progress, however. He had hardly taken up his pen when he laid it down again. Drip, drip, drip, as of some liquid slowly flowing disturbed him now. "Rain dropping off the eaves, and I thought it had been fine all the morning!" he muttered, again going to the window. His impression had been correct. The day was glorious, and he could not discover whence or where the dropping came from. Yet he distinctly heard this drip, drip, drip. A little later he learned that, at this same hour, on this very day, his predecessor had committed suicide, under the stress of some sudden brain-pressure; that he had hoarsely called his wife Mary, and that she, alas! had not come to his assistance until the life-blood had drip-dripped away. This most strange occurrence was related direct to the narrator by the person to whom it occurred.

There is a lonely, lovely, darkly-shadowed lake in Ireland called Lough Derg, famous alike for good fishing and sudden squalls. My friend went to spend a fortnight with an aunt, whose house was near the water. Her rector lived on the opposite shore. They were all at lunch one wild October day, when the lady looking up from her plate suddenly exclaimed: "Why, there are the C. boys coming up the drive! what a day for them to venture across the lake; and we have eaten up everything!" She left the table, and went to the kitchen to order the hasty preparation of some fresh dish for the coming guests. Her daughter and nephew crossed the room, stood at the window, watching the young men approaching, and commenting upon the habit the elder youth had of swinging his arm as he walked. My friend then went and opened the hall-door to admit these frequent guests, that there might be no delay in their entrance on such a blustering day, the servants being occupied with their mistress, who at this moment came forward from the back of the house. "Well, where are they?" she inquired, going to the door. "Not here! Oh, I know their tricks! They are hiding round the corner just to make us hunt and feel foolish. They are a pair of scamps!" But they were not round the corner, nor visible any longer in any direction. The home party had finally to conclude that their young friends had changed their minds and given up the purposed visit for some other expedition. However, in a couple of hours, they were horrified to hear of a terrible boat accident. The rector's sons had been rowing themselves across the lake, intending to lunch with their friends, when a sudden squall overturned their boat, and both were drowned.

There is an old town in Ireland still surrounded with walls. It is noted as the centre of a rebellious district. It was also in ancient days a favourite spot for concealing smuggled goods, being intersected with secret passages and underground rooms. Ruined castles and modern abbeys, monasteries and convents abound. It is perhaps as well to make this statement: although it has, so far as we, the leading actors in the matter, are aware, nothing to do with the story. One of our home party was ordained and became the curate of a rich and kind old rector here. A local banker formerly had this house, but was shot dead on his own doorstep in the midst of a Fenian outbreak. Having been nearly a month in residence

the curate called one day at the police station to ask that some patrolling should be done outside his dwelling, as runaway knocks annoyed the servant at night. "All right, sir. I'll look after them boys," was the cheerful response. Meeting the constables a few days later, however, the curate reproached them. "I really wish you would come our way sometimes at night," he said. "We are quite tormented. The annoyance goes on up to near midnight." The sergeant stared. "Why, sir," he said, "my men have been about every evening since, and have seen no one. To-night I will put one of them indoors, if you like. With two outside we are sure to catch them." They did not, however, although the knocking was kept up vigorously. The knocking soon changed its venue, as well as its character. Four bedrooms opened off a small landing. Some frightened person seemed to be within one or another of the rooms, usually within one occupied by the curate's sister and the young domestic, who refused to remain under present circumstances if compelled to sleep alone. The knocking began now on the door with a tone as of one anxious to get out. The urgency and sound of the entreating knocks increased until the noise seemed created by an iron hammer, vigorously used. On opening the door no cause could ever be discovered. Fifteen persons were assembled one night endeavoring to catch the ghost by systematic search, but all in vain. This disturbance would go on until two and three o'clock on some occasions. Soft footsteps were also heard pattering up and down the short, steep stairs, down which also tumbled at intervals cart-loads as of invisible coal or stones. A young policeman fled from the house one night in pallid terror, declining ever again to seek to unearth unearthly enemies. Through it all the young curate and his sister endeavoured to keep a brave heart, even going so far as to hold a service within the walls to exorcise the spirits, if spirits they were. He wrote to his predecessor in office, and learned from him that the house had been so uncanny that it was quite too much for him and his wife. They had left the place as soon as possible. While this went on the old rector came down one day on a tour of inspection, certain that he could track the ghost. He could not, but advised the curate to make his sister change her bedroom; as within her present apartment he had visited a former tenant dying a very terrible death. This advice was taken, and undoubtedly when this particular chamber was vacated, the disturbances abated, although the house was never as other houses.—*Miss Alice Quarry, in the "Argosy."*

The letter Q is the least useful of all its twenty-five companions. It never ends an English word, and cannot begin one without the aid of the letter U, being invariably followed by the last-mentioned letter in all words belonging to our language. The man doesn't live who can tell the "why" of the peculiar relation of the letters Q and U, or why the former was given its curious name. Some argue that its name was applied because of the tail or cue at the bottom of the letter, but the original Q, when sounded just as it is to-day was made without the cue, the character much resembling the English sign for pound.

Life is a comedy to him who thinks, and a tragedy to him who feels.—*Horace Walpole.*