

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

A LITERARY INTERREGNUM.

THE field of literature must have its periods of rest and recuperation like the soil which the farmer tills. The nineteenth century has been one of extraordinary activity in literary production, but its closing decade begins with partial stagnation, and it may be that the year 1900 will still find the soil lying fallow. There are certainly no great masters of literary art now occupying the attention of the world with original creations of their genius. The wonderful Russian, Tolstoi, seems to have passed the climax of his powers, and nowhere can be found a commanding personality in literature. The Germany that gave us Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Auerbach, Freytag, Reuter, Spielhagen, supplies no figure among younger men more striking than that of Ebers, who, with all his learning and a fine poetic and dramatic faculty, must still be regarded as an imitator of Sir Walter Scott rather than as a creator of original work. The France of Balzac, of George Sand, of Flaubert, of Victor Hugo, is now the France of Zola, with his gross materialism; of Ohnet, fascinating but often trivial and occasionally repellent with the immorality which taints the whole of modern French fiction; of Daudet, delightful at times but more frequently stiff, artificial, with a straining for effect that becomes very tiresome, and of Francois Coppee, a master of compression and purity of style, but with a vein of gloomy pessimism running through his work which seems to offer a fatal obstacle to any great achievement. In England the race of great novelists, poets, historians has not, perhaps, become extinct, but at present there is no one to supply the place of Thackeray or Dickens, or even Wilkie Collins, and there is no indication that when the genius of Tennyson goes into final eclipse, there will be any star to furnish its brilliant but steady glow in the literary firmament. The latest literary lion in London, Rudyard Kipling, is merely a writer of short stories, varying greatly in merit. Rider Haggard is a sensationalist, whose reign must needs be brief, and Blackmore, Black, and Walter Besant are, perhaps, the only English story-tellers of our day who rise to secondary rank. George Meredith must be considered more seriously, but his genius, which is indubitable, is so eccentric and is obscured by so many faults of style that he can not justly be regarded as a literary artist.—*Baltimore Sun*.

CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES.

THE differences that I have shown to exist between the political systems of the two countries are of so important a character as to exercise a very decided influence on the political and social conditions of each. Allied with a great respect for law, which is a distinguishing feature of all communities of the Anglo-Saxon race, they form the basis of the present happiness and prosperity of the people of the Dominion and of their future national greatness. It was to be expected that two peoples lying alongside each other since the commencement of their history, and developing governmental institutions drawn from the same tap-root of English law and constitutional usages, should exhibit many points of similarity in their respective systems and in their capacity for self-government. But it is noteworthy that their close neighbourhood, their means of rapid communication with one another, the constant social and commercial intercourse that has been going on for years, especially for the past forty years, have not made a deeper impress upon the political institutions and manners of the Canadian people, who being very much smaller in numbers, wealth, and national importance, might be expected to gravitate in many respects toward a nation whose industrial, social and political development is one of the marvels of the age. Canada, however, has shown a spirit of self-reliance, independence of thought and action in all matters affecting her public welfare, which is certainly one of the best evidences of the political steadiness of the people. At the same time she is always ready to copy, whenever necessary or practicable, such institutions of her neighbours as commend themselves to the sound judgment of her statesmen. Twenty-five years ago at Quebec they studied the features of the federal system of the States, and in the nature of things they must continue to refer to the working of their constitution for guidance and instruction. Canada has been steadily working out her own destiny on sound principles, and has in no wise shown an inclination to make the United States her model of imitation in any vital particular. It is quite clear that Canadians who have achieved a decided success so far in working out their plan of federal union on well defined lines of action, in consolidating the union of the old provinces, in founding new provinces and opening up a vast territory to settlement, in covering every section of their own domain with a network of railways, in showing their ability to put down dissent and rebellion in their midst, are not, I think, ready, in view of such achievements, to confess failure and absence of a spirit of self-dependence, a want of courage and national ambition, an incapacity for self-government, and to look forward to annexation to the United States as their "manifest destiny." But whatever may be the destiny of this youthful and energetic community, it is the earnest wish of every Canadian that, while the political fortunes of Canada and the United States may never be united, yet each will endeavour to maintain that free, friendly, social and commercial intercourse which should naturally exist between peoples allied to each other by ties of a common neighbourhood and a common inter-

est, and that the only rivalry between them will be that which should prevail among countries equally interested in peopling this continent from North to South, from East to West, in extending the blessings of free institutions, and in securing respect for law, public morality, electoral purity, free thought, the sanctity of the home, and intellectual culture.—*J. G. Bourinot, in Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science for July*.

A STORY OF JOSEPH JEFFERSON.

JOSEPH JEFFERSON relates in the July *Century* the following concerning a London experience of his: "My approaching appearance was the important dramatic event of my life. I had been five years from America and was on my way home, and I felt satisfied that if this new version of 'Rip Van Winkle' succeeded in London my way was quite clear when I returned to the United States.

"One Sunday evening, being alone in my lodgings, I got out for my own admiration my new wig and beard, the pride of my heart, and which I was to use in the last act. I could not resist trying them on for the twentieth time, I think; so I got in front of the glass and adjusted them to my perfect satisfaction. I soon became enthused, and began acting and posing in front of the mirror. In about twenty minutes there came a knock at the door.

"'Who's there?' said I.

"'It's me, if you please,' said the gentle but agitated voice of the chambermaid. 'May I come in?'

"'Certainly not,' I replied; for I had no desire to be seen in my present make-up.

"'Is there anything wrong in the room, sir?' said she.

"'Nothing at all. Go away,' I replied.

"'Well, sir,' she continued, 'there's a policeman at the door, and he says as 'ow there's a crazy old man in your room, a-flingin' of his 'arnds about 'and a-goin' on hawful, and there's a crowd of people across the street a-blockin' up the way.'

"I turned towards the window, and to my horror I found that I had forgotten to put down the curtain, and, as it seemed to me, the entire population of London was taking in my first night. I had been unconsciously acting with the lights full up, to an astonished audience who had not paid for their admission. As I tore off my wig and beard a shout went up. Quickly pulling down the curtain, I threw myself in a chair, overcome with mortification at the occurrence. In a few minutes the comical side of the picture presented itself, and I must have laughed for an hour. I had been suffering from an attack of nervous dyspepsia, consequent upon the excitement of the past week, and I firmly believe that this continuous fit of laughter cured me."

THE HOODED SEAL.

AN interesting denizen of the ice-fields off the Greenland and Labrador coasts is the stemmatopus, or hooded seal. This is an ungainly beast, often larger than an ox. He lies in a great heap on the ice, and is much the colour of soot. On days when the sun is strong, as the spring advances, the oil fairly oozes out of his glistening skin. I have sometimes seen him lying so still, and bathed in his perspiration of oil, that I imagined him dead, and "rendering" out in the heat. The seal-hunters call him the "dog hood," because he has a huge hood or membrane consisting of blubber and a tough tissue, several inches thick, which in the twinkling of an eye he can draw over his head. He is then safe from all ordinary assault, being shielded all over the body by several inches thick of blubber or fat, through which the heavy shot of the seal-hunters' guns cannot reach vital parts. The greenhorn delights to capture the pelt of a dog hood, but the experienced hunter is just as content to let the ugly brute alone.—*Harper's Young People*.

THE DEFECTS OF SOCIALISTIC SCHEMES.

PROF. GOLDWIN SMITH, in the August number of the *Forum*, makes a critical study of a good many plans for regenerating society, and of Mr. Bellamy's plan in particular, in order to show that all the builders of Utopias make one long, unexplained leap, namely: from human nature as it is to human nature as it ought to be; and they refuse to explain how the necessary change in man's passions and conduct is to be made. There seems to him something so comical in Mr. Bellamy's plan that he expresses a fear lest the talented author of "Looking Backward" will laugh at him for seriously criticising what he may have meant as pleasant fiction.

A STRANGE APOLOGY FOR LITERARY PIRACY.

PERHAPS the coolest of all the apologists for literary piracy in America is a writer in a Milwaukee paper, who considers that the attempt to create sympathy for the English publishers of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," because an American publisher happens to have appropriated a work in which they have invested a million of dollars, is "absurd." "The probability," says this expounder of the ethics of publishing, "is that before Messrs. Black went into their enterprise they calculated all the chances. If they miscalculated, that is their affair." This, it has been well observed, resembles the "Bedouin robber's argument."—"He knew the kind of place the Desert is: if he did not like being robbed, why did he travel in it?"—*Daily News*.

SOME FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT STANLEY'S BOOK.

THE first English edition numbers 20,000 copies (this is inclusive of the *luxé* edition, etc.). It is estimated that during the last four months nearly 11,000 men, women and children, have been employed upon it. In England alone 60 compositors, 17 readers, 12 reading boys, and 200 machine and warehousemen were at work on it. In the binding of 40,000 volumes 500 men and 600 women were employed. There are ten foreign editions. The printing ink consumed amounts to 1 ton 10 cwt.; multiply these figures by eight for the foreign editions, and you arrive at the enormous quantity of 12 tons. The paper of the English edition weighs 65½ tons. As the foreign editions are not so large as the English, the figures are multiplied by four only, which produces a total of 262 tons. The binders' cloth used for England amounts to 4,500 yards, in America 9,000, and in other countries to 1,000 (they have paper covers in many cases.) That makes over eight miles! It is estimated that 268 printing presses have been in use to print the book.

RUNNING WATER AND EVENING DEW.

SO CALLED were the most delicate textures for ladies' evening dresses ever woven. They were manufactured only in the city of Dacca, Bengal, and were regarded as the very finest fabric that could be made. In the latter part of the last century and the earlier years of the present over forty styles of these "Dacca muslins" were in market, all manufactured from a peculiar kind of English thread twist. A piece of the precious goods sufficient for a dress, "fifteen feet in length and a yard in width," weighed but nine hundred grains. This exquisite "gossamer cloth" was valued at forty pounds. In the native dialect, it was called "ab rawan," signifying "running water." In later years this remarkable skill of handicraft must have greatly degenerated, for in 1840 the finest that could be made of dimensions above mentioned weighed sixteen hundred grains, and could be purchased for ten pounds.—*From Harper's Bazar*.

BICYCLING.

THE latest thing in English bicycles is the application of the pneumatic tire. At present the invention is somewhat handicapped by several imperfections, but when these difficulties are surmounted it will prove to be a great invention, a perfect godsend to riders. The existing objections are the pumping of the air into the tire, the increased weight, the escaping of the air, and the danger of puncturing the rubber when the air is out. A prominent bicycling authority writes that it has been proved by experiment that the tire is superior over a grass course and mud, and that it certainly grapples the problem of vibration and makes riding a luxury never before dreamed of. The pneumatic adds four and one-half pounds to the weight of a safety, and this, with the addition of the broader crown piece at the top of the fork, broader spoon brake, and mud guard, makes a total additional weight of six to seven pounds. But the main point is that it does away with the vibration, and the improvements are only a question of time.

THE AUTOMATIC PHOTOGRAPH COMPANY.

ON account of an improvement in prices on the Stock Exchange comes a rush of new companies, the most noticeable of which is, perhaps, the Automatic Photograph Company. This company is formed to develop the latest phase of automatism, viz., put a penny in the slot, and wait forty-five seconds to be presented with your photograph. It hardly seems possible such a machine could work, but Mr. Isaac Joel, the inventor, says it will, and wishes to sell the patents thereof to the company for £60,000 of which £39,700 is to be in cash. If the machine will do perfectly all that is affirmed (on this we can offer no opinion) the company should be a great success owing to the novelty and cheapness of the new style of photograph. The cost of production of each photograph is half-pence, so that the profit, added to the gain in selling frames and receiving advertisements on the photographs and machines, is estimated to give a return of over thirty per cent. on the capital.

MR. ADAMETZ has just made some microscopic researches upon the microscopic organisms that inhabit cheese. From an examination of Emmenthal, a soft variety of Gruyere cheese, he has obtained the following results: In each gramme of the cheese, when fresh, from 90,000 to 140,000 microbes are found. The number increases with time. Thus, a cheese 71 days old contains 800,000 bacteria per gramme. The population of a soft cheese 25 days old and much denser than the preceding is 1,200,000, and that of a cheese 45 days old is 2,000,000 microbes per gramme.—*La Nature*.

A RECENT communication to the Académie de Médecine respecting Dr. Mesnet's investigations as to stigmata, or *clichés*, as they are now often called, shows that if pressure on the skin of susceptible subjects is made in the form of letters, such letters are clearly distinguishable when nervous derangement causes the skin to change colour. In one experiment the words "La Nature" were traced out on a patient's neck, and the letters in a few minutes developed in colour. It is observed that people susceptible to stigmata are hysterical or epileptic, and frequently experience local want of sensation.—*English Mechanic*.