

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

MY HICKORY FIRE.

O, HELPLESS body of hickory tree
What do I do in burning thee?
Summers of sun, winters of snow,
Springs full of sap's resistless flow;
All past years' joys of garnered fruits,
All this year's purposed buds and shoots;
Secrets of fields of upper air,
Secrets which stars and planets share,
Light of such smiles as broad skies fling;
Sound of such tunes as wild birds sing,
Voices which told where gay birds dwelt,
Voices which told where lovers knelt;
O, strong white body of hickory tree,
How dare I burn all these in thee?

But I, too, bring as to a pyre,
Sweet things to feed thy funeral fire;
Memories waked by thy deep spell;
Faces of fears and hopes which fell,
Faces of darlings long since dead,
Smiles they smiled, and words they said,
Like living shapes, they come and go,
Lit by the morning flame's red glow.
But sacredest of all, O tree,
Thou hast the hour my love gave me.
Only thy rhythmic silence stirred,
While his low-whispered tones I heard;
By thy last gleam of flickering light
I saw his cheek turn red from white;
O, cold grey ashes, side by side
With yours, that hour's sweet pulses died!

But thou, brave tree, how do I know,
That through these fires thou dost not go
As in old days the martyrs went
Through fire which was a sacrament?
How do I know thou dost not wait
In longing for thy new estate?
Estate of higher, nobler place,
Whose shapes no man can use or trace.
How do I know, if I could reach
The secret meaning of thy speech,
But I thy song of praise should hear
Ringing triumphant, loud and clear—
The waiting angels could discern
And token of thy heaven learn?
Oh glad, freed soul of hickory tree,
Wherever thine eternity,
Bear thou with thee that hour's dear name
Made pure, like thee, by rites of flame!

—Helen Hunt Jackson

THE SPEAKER ON ATHLETICS.

THE Speaker of the House of Commons was present on Wednesday night at the opening of a gymnasium in the Pump Room Hall, Leamington. He said that he came into the gymnasium that night just as a pugilistic encounter was going on, and he witnessed the delivery of some very heavy blows, and the equally skilful warding off of them. He had no wish whatever to return to the base, bloody and brutal pastimes of the prize ring, but, at the same time, he confessed that he hoped the day was far distant when the English people would forget the noble art of self-defence. (Cheers.) He well recollected, many years ago, seeing Heenan and Sayers, and he should never forget the enthusiasm which was aroused when those two men, stripped to the waist, stretched out their arms and inhaled the morning breezes. All the papers in the land described their physical condition, how the muscles stood out on their backs, and their perfect health. They could all have the good effects of pugilistic encounters without having recourse to the bloody sequel of those fights; and so long as fighting with the gloves did not degenerate into a mere hot-headed tussle between two men who had lost their tempers, so long as it kept within the limits of skilful parry, and every now and then a good, hard hit, well delivered and good-humouredly taken, then, he said, let them praise the practice of self-defence. (Cheers.) He well recollected the enthusiasm with which a gentleman described a fight he was once witness of almost against his will. The gentleman was a curate of the Church, and this gentleman told him that he was witness of a famous encounter between two noted pugilists of those days, Cribb and Molyneux. His acquaintance was, at that time, curate to a rector who was a magistrate; and the constables of those days became aware that these two pugilists were to meet in a rope ring. They said that it was the duty of the rector to go and stop the combatants, and arrest all those who were breaking the peace. The curate accompanied his rector, but when they got near the prize ring a body of trained pugilists came up to the magistrate and said that if he advanced a step farther with the intention of stopping the fight, they would smash every bone in his body. (Laughter.) The rector turned to the curate and said: "I think it is impossible for me to do anything more than I have already done." The curate said he was perfectly satisfied. Then said the rector, "Let us stop and see the rest of the fight." (Laughter and cheers.) He supposed that forty or fifty years ago there was no such thing as athletics in the sense in which those now living knew them. It was a great loss to the men of those times who followed sedentary occupations—the scholar, the recluse,

the professional man—that they had no opportunity for athletic exercises as the men of the present day enjoyed; and he could conceive no better relaxation to mental strain than to indulge in moderation in some such sports as he had seen that night. He thought it was a mistake for the majority of people to suppose that they could equal the feats they had seen that night. It was a mistake for anybody to suppose that he could equal the great experts. They appeared to be all trying to beat the record, whether it was a great Atlantic liner or a cyclist riding from Land's End to John o' Groat's. Now, it all depended upon the physique of the individual whether he was capable of performing such feats. If any man wanted to indulge in gymnastic exercises, let him take the advice of some noted athlete, who would tell him what his bodily capacities were capable of, and who would take care that he did not overstep the limit which divided safety from danger. He hoped that the establishment of gymnasiums throughout the country would cause that disappearance of the class of lazy, loafing young man, who looked as if he could not command the faculties of his body or mind, and substitute for him men who, as they walked, gave one an idea of strength and independence, who looked as if they could leap over the next five-barred gate they met, or run their mile easily in five minutes. (Cheers.)—*The Times*.

HOW TO DESCRIBE EMOTION.

To go back, then, to the burden of our text, it does seem that there is much need of fresh forms in our pathetic nomenclature; and we have of late marked attempts to supply these. In fact, there are three classes of writers, as respects this general subject. First, the class of those who go on using the old, worn-out expressions, either not knowing that they are worn-out, or careless and unable to devise better ones. For the present, this class may be given up as hopeless. There is, secondly, the class of those who reject the old forms, substituting others that are worse. For example, in a work of one of this class, there was lately met with the expression of "tears besieging the eyes." This was certainly novel enough—the figure being drawn from the department of military operations. And then, thirdly, there is a class of those—Heaven be with them!—who steer clear of the old similes, while at the same time avoiding modern affectations. On the whole, they adopt one of two methods: either they use direct simplicity, or delicate suggestion. "Mary stood at the sepulchre weeping." That is a model of the first form—simple, direct, perfect. It is nature itself, and from nature alone comes pathos. "Jesus wept." Can you improve upon this portraiture of the Divine sorrow? The other method lies at the utmost remove from simplicity and directness. It will not so much as mention tears. As in nature, genuine emotion seeks to hide itself—as in nature, from the spectacle of emotion we ourselves turn away—so in art, keep from the reader the lineaments of sorrow. A hint, a gesture, the least circumstance, is enough: it is the atom of veiled allusion that makes pathos overwhelming. Stress, insistence and hyperbole weaken, fail. Between these two methods, choice is a question of the writer's genius. Each is in its way perfect; each most easy or most difficult. But ill-betide him or her who, in this age of the world, allows the heroine to cry herself sick, or the hero to weep like a child.—*James Lane Allen, in the Critic*.

HOW DID SHAKESPEARE DIE?

THE story told by Ward in his diary, still in the treasures of the library of the Medical Society of London, tells nothing about the poet's long conviviality, although the poet himself leaves much to be inferred in that line. But it does convey that just previous to his last natal day he joined some boon companions (Ben Jonson and Drayton, the player) in convivial pursuits, and that the result was his death from the "surfeit." This shows a rapid death after a convivial outbreak, and supports the suggestion that the cause of death was some respiratory mischief. Nothing is more probable than that the mischief was what would be called in his (Shakespeare's) day, a "peri-pneumonia, an inflammation or impostume of the lungs, with a shortness of breath." The description of the pneumonic cast of face after death is also true, and, taken in combination with the climatic conditions so faithfully noticed, adds strong and, as far as can be gathered from the facts coming down to us, all but conclusive evidence that the poet of England—some think of the world—died of that form of pneumonic disease lately named "pneumoparesis," a form apt to strike suddenly and fatally those in whom the nervous energy has become reduced.—*London Lancet*.

OFFICIAL information shows that during last year, as in the year before, there was a considerable decrease in the letters received and personal enquiries made at the Emigrants' Information Office. Thus, the number of letters received was 8,381, a decrease of 3,698; and the number of personal enquiries made was 5,065, a decrease of 753. This continuous decrease in the number of applications, corresponding with the diminution in the numbers of actual emigrants as shown in the Board of Trade returns, is considered satisfactory as an indication of prosperous times in the United Kingdom. The chief classes of callers during the year were mechanics, general labourers, clerks, and female servants, in the order given. The number of applications relating to South Africa was maintained, and the number relating to the tropical British Colonies and foreign countries was slightly increased.

HEAVEN HERE AND NOW.

WE know nothing of life—of God's life or of our own—and we have no real life but His, except by living it. The foundations of heaven are laid in human character. The precious stones upon which the Holy City is built are the lives which, according to their own distinctive nature, receive and transmit the light of the Divine Life, each with a different lustre. The glory of God and of the Lamb, of the Father and the Son, is that city's perfect illumination. The celestial glory is the glory of love and truth and holiness. Without these there were no heavenly life, and therefore no heaven. Holiness, truth, love—these are the realities which are unseen and eternal. But they cannot be held as mere abstractions. They have no meaning to us except in personal attributes. Only a person can be righteous and loving and pure. In loving God we love the One in whom these qualities are perfectly revealed. In seeking heaven we seek the region where they are recognized and welcomed as the supreme law. So God makes and abides in his own heaven, the heaven that He Himself is. And so is He, through all generations, the true and only dwelling-place of His children. To live unlovingly, untruthfully, unrighteously is to live outside of heaven, even though one should build a home for himself in the full dazzle of the Great White Throne; while the darkest corner of earth is heaven to him who is living the life of God therein, though he may be unaware of the glory that surrounds him. Heaven is. Already its atmosphere touches this lower firmament; already the heavenly-minded breathe its air. The same love throbs in their hearts that stirs in the souls of those who have passed on beyond all mortal hindrances. A little while, and the realities in which they both live will be fully unveiled. Surprises doubtless await us all across the boundaries of this earthly existence. But none, perhaps, will be more surprised than those humble, faithful, self-sacrificing souls, who have often almost dreaded the strange splendours that might open upon them beyond the gates of pearl when they find that it is the same familiar sunshine in which they have been walking all their days, only clearer and serener.—*From "As it is in Heaven," by Lucy Larcom*.

No man, said one who knew him, loved the poor like Dr. Johnson. His own personal expenses did not reach £100 a year, but his house in Bolt Court, after the receipt of the pension, became a home for as many helpless ones as he could support and aid. In the garret was Robert Levet, who had been a waiter in a French coffee-house, and had become a poor surgeon to the poor. He was unable to help himself, when Johnson became his friend, and gave him a share of his home, with freedom to exercise his art freely in aid of the poor. Levet was Johnson's companion at breakfast, lived with him for thirty years, and died under his sheltering care, never so regarded to think of himself as a poor dependent, never so regarded by true-hearted Samuel Johnson. When Johnson took his walk in Fleet Street he found his way into sad homes of distress, which had been made known to him by Levet, or found by his own kind eyes. He visited the sick and the sad, helped them, and interceded for them with his friends. He always had small change in his pocket for the beggars. When he was himself sometimes in want of a dinner, after his first coming to London, he would slip pennies into the hand of ragged children asleep at night on the door-sills, that when they awoke in the morning they might find the possibility of break-fast. One night he found a wretched and lost woman so lying, worn by sickness; he carried her on his back to his own home, had her cared for until health was restored, and then found her an honest place in life.

So many travellers pass through Calais every year that a few words concerning the remarkable corporation of "rouleurs" by whom all the luggage is taken from and to the steamers will certainly be of interest. The association consists of a hundred men who do their work with a degree of speed, of accuracy and care altogether unsurpassed. Each man on election, in which all the members take part, must deposit a sum of \$200. They select a head man each year who has an allowance for office expenses, but otherwise receives the same pay as the ordinary members; four brigadiers or foremen, each of whom wears a star on his cap, are likewise selected. Discipline is well maintained; no "rouleur" shirks his work. They are always civil and obliging and carry invalids on shore with a gentleness that does them infinite credit. They are paid by the French and English Governments when they land mails, by the French and English railroad companies for the baggage, and they receive considerable tips from the passengers. All the money goes into a common fund, every man reporting to a special "rouleur" chosen for the purpose every franc and centime he receives; all share alike at the end of each week, and the daily average of each man's share amounts to about \$3—a large sum according to the European standard of wages.

WHAT we do determine, oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth, but poor validity.

—Shakespeare.