

It is possible, however, that we are taking too serious a view of the matter; and, indeed, the endorsement of the book by so extravagant a humourist as Mark Twain would incline one to treat the collection as a huge joke. But a joke, seemingly, it is not, unless we view ourselves as the victims, in paying for an expensive and elaborate education for our children which is only so much lumber in the mind, and which but too readily manifests itself in the thin disguise of a veneer of culture. In one respect—and this itself is a solace—the little book before us is not to be taken *au sérieux*, or to be considered as furnishing authentic illustrations of how “English is Taught.” For the consolation of the anxious parent we think it well to say, and we hasten to share with him this view of the matter, that the book is a mere collection—by no means, we consider, an exaggerated one—of those amusing misconceptions or half-conceptions of one’s meaning found in the minds of little ones when they are attentively bent on imitating the speech of their elders, or when endeavouring to grasp thoughts too mature for their minds. The mental discipline of the school should, of course, reduce to some order the chaotic mass of facts poured in such abundance into the youthful mind. But too much should not be expected of a school regimen which has no chance to do its work, and which is handicapped by congested courses of study and plethoric programmes. If such books as “English as She is Taught” will serve to abridge and simplify our school programmes, in view of the lamentable results of more ambitious educational efforts, the collection of such answers to examination questions as are here exhibited will not have been made in vain. We commend the work to the notice of the Hon. the Minister of Education, and append a few samples from its amusing pages for the delectation of our readers. Under “Etymology” here are a few choice definitions: Alias—a good man in the Bible; Conservative—a person interested in politics who does not like Mr. Gladstone; Egregious—feeding in flocks; Emolument—a headstone for a grave; Epicac—a man who likes a good dinner; Idolator—a very idol person; Interloper—one who runs away to get married; Matins—something to wear on the feet; Mendacious—what can be mended. Here is a nice discrimination between prose and poetry: “Prose tells things that are true right along just as they are, and poetry makes it up as you go along.” Equally good is the following: “The imports of a country are the things that are paid for; the exports are the things that are not.” Under “Geography” we have this tit-bit: “The two most famous volcanoes of Europe are Sodom and Gomorrah.” “Stock-*raison*” is said to be “the occupation of Canada,” and classed with this are the following:—“British America is overturned by queen Victorier;” and “The rapids of St. Lorence is caused by the canoes of the Indianes.” An extract from Tennyson is here delightfully analysed:—“I would that my tongue could utter”—means it’s too much trouble to write out his ideas.

The following choice morsels occur under “History”:—“Queen Isabella of Spain sold her watch and chain and other millinery so that Columbus could discover America;” “Kink Louis declared ware against Kink William who commanded the English sources;” “The Stamp Act was to make everybody stamp all materials so they should be null and void;” “England was named by the Angels;” “The Celts were driven out of England into Whales;” “Alfred the Great reigned 872 years. He was distinguished for letting some buckwheat cakes burn, and the lady scolded him;” “A night errant is a man who goes around in the night in search of adventures;” “The Middle Ages come in between antiquity and posterity;” “St. Bartholomew was massacred in 1492;” “Julius Caesar is noted for his famous telegram despatch I came I saw I conquered.” Under “Literature” we find these: “Holmes is a very profligate and amusing writer;” “Cotton Mather was a writer who invented the cotton gin and wrote histories;” “Fox wrote a very good book about Marters;” “Adam Bede a prominent writer of his time for he threw his soul and body into his writings;” “In the Canterbury Tale it gave account of King Alfred on his way to the shrine of Thomas Bucket;” “Macbeth was terrified by the ghost of Bancroft;” “Francis Bacon wrote under the name of Ovum Organum;” “Burn’s chief poem was called Tamoschanta.”

Here are a few gems under Philosophy, Physiology, etc.: “Drops of water are generally spherical for various reasons known only to the gracious Providence who has formed them;” “A body will go just as far in the first second as the body will go plus the force the gravity and that’s equal to twice what the body will go;” “Physillogigy is to study about your bones stummick and vertebry;” “Disease is more common to some people than to others;” “The organs of digestion are the stomach liver spleen and utensils;” “The gastric juice keeps the bones from creaking;” “Eating rapidly the food does not give the saliva time to get into the mouth;” “The bones need constant oiling. This oil is called cartilage and runs from all the glands in the body;” “The eyes are set in two sockets in a bone which turns up at the end and then becomes the nose;” “Vowel sounds are made by keeping the mouth wide open and consonent sounds by keeping it shut.”

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RECENT FICTION.

Of notable English publications, several that have recently appeared are from the well-known house of Ward and Downey, London. “Louisa,” by Mrs. Katharine Macquoid, is in many respects a very superior novel. The story is simple, but singularly attractive, and recalls in plot and action a certain remarkable novel of last year—“Col. Enderby’s Wife”—by the daughter of Charles Kingsley. There is the same middle-aged husband, grave, honest, straightforward, and adoring; the same pretty little *ingénue* in the person of the husband’s niece; the same languorous Italian background of olive-groves and statuary, ruined palaces and handkerchief stalls,

and much of the same calm and gentle wisdom shown with regard to the things of this world as well as of the next. The situation is not novel; in fact it is only one phase of the miserable old story which takes for granted in these modern days that no marriage is happy, and that most marriages are mistakes. Francis Hobart, the artist, upon whom the author has lingered with evidently jealous care, is, after all, a lay-figure, and it is with the unhappy and self-tortured Guiseppe Monalli and his misguided wife that the reader will feel most sympathy. Altogether, Mrs. Macquoid has given us, in “Louisa,” some very careful analyses of certain dangerous and familiar human symptoms, and if the book nowhere rises to greatness, it is far above mediocrity, and presupposes a high order of culture and intimate knowledge of human nature in its authoress.

“THE LADY DRUSILLA” is a psychological romance, a kind of publication much in vogue at present. In this case there is very little attempt at romance, but plenty of psychology; indeed, whole chapters are devoted to introspective analyses of peculiar and mostly very distressing propensities, both mental and bodily, on the part of the narrator. This unfortunate gentleman belongs to the “counters,” to the weakly superstitious and the strongly imaginative, and a severe nervous shock so affects his entire system afterwards that he becomes a prey to the most painful and alarming sensations. He cannot open a book without lighting on some thought or anecdote bearing upon the world of spirits, hallucinations, dreams, warnings, presentiments. Every clock becomes, to his distorted vision, an instrument of vengeance for some unknown crime; especially when the hour of noon or midnight arrives does he experience the most distressing paroxysms of acute fear. Finally he is haunted by the number thirty-three, forgets some words altogether, and how to spell and read a great many others, and, in fact, discovers gradually that he is in manifest danger of becoming permanently mentally unsound. The author, Thomas Purnell, has distinctly written or compiled in this book much that is valuable regarding mental states, and while he lives in an age where there are too many workers in the same field to allow of his making such a name as did De Quincey, yet in some respects his book much resembles the curious “Confessions” of the notable opium-eater. There are traces of carelessness, however, in the English that proclaim it long after De Quincey, and here and there traces of haste and of an inaccuracy which leads to confusing results. The hair which nervous prostration had on page 101 “blanched,” is on page 251 described as “black, slightly tinged with gray.” The book is, in fact, a kind of mixture of Gaboriau, Louis Stevenson, and Bain on the Human Mind, but it is none the worse reading for such divers ingredients.

“THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES,” by George Manville Fenn (also from Ward and Downey), is a novel of the good old kind. It appears almost strange that such a novel can still be written, though, once written and published, it need not appear strange if anybody taking it up refuse to put it down till finished. That is the prevailing characteristic of these novels. A few may despise them, very few may openly admire them, but everybody reads them. George Eliot and her imitators have lived and died, Henry James is still with us, the despiser of incident, the creator of important nothings; even Howells writes on, unscathed (publicly) by the comments of the *Saturday Review*, than which, by the way, nothing could be more perfectly annihilating anent his most recent novel, and, yet, in spite of all these reigning ideals of fiction, a book like the “Master of the Ceremonies” can be written! It is delicious, so consistent, so thorough, showing such unity, such directness of purpose, such consecration to one fixed ideal! With eighty-seven chapters, and some of them with such headings as these: The Flickering Flame; Clouds; A Night to be Remembered; After the Storm; A Night Bird Trapped; “Impossible;” “Too Late;” “Surrender!” After the Storm (2); Dick catches—Shrimps; A Stormy Scene (possibly No. 3); The Stormy Cloud Bursts; After the Storm (3).

Here we have the genuine old melodrama, dear to the old English heart: Duels, snuff-boxes, murder, debt, and rapacity, love that couldn’t possibly run smooth, crime that is fastened successively on three people, but belongs naturally to a fourth much moustached person, military, civilian, and scapegrace types in just the correct admixture, and a grand spectacle at the close of loving hearts re-united, virtue triumphant, and vice properly punished, make up the material out of which these eighty-seven chapters are constructed. Perhaps the best of these chapters is the opening one, containing, as it does, such a charming and unaffected description of the quaint old house by the sea:

“Early morning at Saltinville, with the tide down, and the calm sea shimmering like damasked and deadened silver in the sunshine.”

This house, belonging to the M. C., or Master of the Ceremonies, is presided over by Claire, his sweet and flower-loving daughter. How pretty is this picture:

“Above the screen of flowers, a something ivory white and tinged with peachy pink kept darting in and out. Now it touched a rose, and a shower of petals fell softly down; now a geranium leaf that was turning yellow disappeared; now, again, a twig that had borne roses was taken away. After a sound that resembled a steely click, then the little crimson and purple blossoms of a fuchsia were touched and shivered and twinkled in the light at the soft movements among the graceful stems as dying flowers were swept away.”

This graceful writing is about all vouchsafed to us in the present book by its author. Directly the plot commences, his love of intrigue and action sweep him on from one event to another without cessation, and, we believe, Mr. Fenn has sacrificed to incident his undoubted talent for descriptive writing. We humbly submit that there is enough material in the “Master of the Ceremonies” for three or four six-shilling novels.

As an example of what Mr. Fenn is capable of when he chooses to