

## READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

## A NOVEL METHOD OF LAYING A TELEGRAPH WIRE.

As most people know, the main telegraph wire in London run through the subways in which the gas-pipes and sewers are placed. The principal arteries are so large that it is easy enough for men to work in them, but the pipes through which the side-wires branch off are much smaller, and great care has to be taken to preserve the connection between the main and the lateral wires. Some years ago men were repairing one of these latter, and carelessly omitted to attach it to a leading line by which it could be drawn to its place when mended. The blunder seemed likely to have serious consequences, for it was thought that the whole of the lateral pipe would have to be dug up in order to get at the broken wire. But one of the men came to the rescue with a happy thought, suggesting that a rat should be procured, and, with a fine piece of wire attached to it, sent through the pipe. This was done; but, to the dismay of the workmen, the new hand came to a stop after it had gone a few yards. The inventor of this idea was not yet, however, at the end of his resources, and by his advice a ferret was procured and started on the dilatory rat's track. There was a moment of suspense before it was settled whether the rat would show fight or run away, but this was soon ended by the paying-out of the wire, and in a short time the latest addition to the staff of the Post Office appeared at the other end of the pipe. It was caught, the wire detached, and then it was set free in recognition of the service it had rendered. By means of the wire the telegraph line was secured, and a long and laborious piece of work saved.—*Cornhill Magazine*.

## DICKENS' MANUSCRIPTS.

"A FRIEND of mine," says a writer in the *Boston Journal*, "has recently been making a study of some of the manuscripts of Charles Dickens' works. In one thing, at least, these manuscripts point a lesson to young writers, i. e., that even so great a writer as 'Boz' revised his work repeatedly and cut out not only many lines, but often large blocks of his text, and always to the advantage of the novel. It seems quite evident that a few, if any writers, can write with sufficient conciseness at the first draft. Novels have been written which have had little 'cutting' done to them, but it is a question whether the work of the traditional blue pencil would not have improved the text. These manuscripts of Dickens show that the work of the printer has been difficult enough, and exhibit among all the traceries of corrections a peculiarity of authors which all readers of such manuscripts must have observed. In substituting one word or line for another, the erased passage is always so thoroughly and carefully blotted out that it can be no longer read. A common characteristic of authors seems to be an unwillingness to show what minor mistakes existed before the correction was made. All who examined the manuscript of Brander Matthews remember him as a marked type of this sort of the revised author. Each word struck out is covered by a dense network of lines, forming a black square on the paper, more interesting, perhaps, than picturesque. Dickens accomplished the same end by a series of minute flourishes.

## ART IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

It is only about sixty years since Daguerre produced his wonderful sun pictures, which took the name of Daguerreotypes. They were taken on metal plates and could only be seen distinctly at a certain angle. In time these were succeeded by "ambrotypes," which were thought to be an improvement on the original process. The pictures were more distinct and could be seen at any angle of vision. Then came the photograph, which was a still more radical improvement on the earlier processes. The sensitized paper took clear impressions. Hardly a year has elapsed during the last half century in which some important improvements have not been made on the original process of Daguerre. The sun-picture has had a wonderful development and is, possibly, destined to a still greater evolution. There was a time when photography hardly ranked as an art. It was considered rather as a chemical and mechanical process. But of late photography is beginning to claim a place among the arts. The photograph and artotype are based on the photograph and are hardly more than variations of the original process. Yet by this means book illustrations have become cheap and often quite effective. It cannot be said that they are better than engravings. They are not so clear and strong, but they are the best substitute for wood-engravings that has yet been found. The steel-engraving was too costly. The wood-engraving finally came to have nearly all the distinctive excellence of the engraving on metal. The traveller, if he intends to publish a book, takes a camera with him. He chooses his own points of illustration. His pictures frequently add immensely to the interest of his written account. Stanley, it is said, on his last expedition in Africa, took the camera with him, and the pictures taken in that way will probably appear in his forthcoming book. There is always some lack of the best atmospheric effect in the photograph. But life, motion, mechanical proportion and perspective are secured. The instantaneous photograph now delineates all the motions of ships, men and horses. Even the turbulence of the ocean can only be better represented by the marine artist. The one thing lacking about the photograph is colour. For many years thousands of chemists

and artists have been searching for this secret. Daguerre was confident that this discovery would be made. Ten years ago discoveries were made in Germany which led many to suppose that in a short time there would be no more difficulty in taking a photograph in colours than without them. At frequent intervals accounts are published of some discovery in the same direction. But the sum of these, whatever it might be, falls short of the one which so many thousands are striving to obtain. At present, what purports to be the coloured photograph is only a variation of photogravure. The sun-picture which catches all the tints of the landscape by a single process has never been obtained. But experiments have been carried far enough in Germany to encourage the belief that such a result is not impossible. If the reports are to be accepted, one or two primary colours can be transferred to paper by processes that are not very complicated. This progress is the ground of prediction that finally every colour in nature will be caught in the camera. Such a process would revolutionize book illustration and a large part of the industry within the limits of graphic art.—*San Francisco Bulletin*.

## TO THE CRICKET.

DIDST thou not tease and fret me to and fro,  
Sweet spirit of this summer-circled field,  
With that quiet voice of thine, that would not yield  
Its meaning, though I mused and sought it so?  
But now I am content to let it go,  
To lie at length and watch the swallows pass,  
As blithe and restful as the quiet grass;  
Content only to listen, and to know  
That years shall turn and summers yet shall shine,  
And I shall lie beneath these swaying trees,  
Still listening thus; haply at last to seize  
And render in some happier verse divine  
That friendly, homely, haunting speech of thine,  
That perfect utterance of content and ease.

—A. Lampton, in *July Scribner*.

## SCENE IN A LUNATIC ASYLUM.

AN extraordinary scene in a lunatic asylum is thus described by the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*, (London):—There is nothing, mad doctors say, more unusual than for lunatics who are together to act on a common impulse. Last Sunday, however, six inmates of the Bicêtre Asylum were so irritated and oppressed by the sultry weather preceding the hailstorm as to take an identical course in letting off their nervous excitement. The outbreak took place in the refectory, where a lunatic who has often had to be kept in a padded room complained that a new keeper had deprived him of a portion of food to which he was entitled. The complaint was well founded. As the dish was being fetched the madman lost patience and dashed the plate before him against the wall opposite. Five others followed his example, and then ran to pitch everything they could lay their hands upon out of the windows. M. Pinon, the Governor, was called, compulsion of a violent kind never being suffered unless by his order. As he entered the refectory a dish was broken on his head, and he and a keeper who was with him had difficulty in escaping with their lives. The mad people tore down the iron bars which formed a partition between their part of the hall and a section where other patients were dining. They then got to the keepers' rooms, and, seizing knives and razors, went to cut the throats of those who denied them their liberty. Troops were summoned from the fort, and arrived as the mutineers had got possession of the kitchens and courtyard. When twenty soldiers with fixed bayonets entered the latter there was a sudden collapse. The six ringleaders dropped their knives and razors, begged pardon, and submitted quietly to be taken to their cells. Nearly all the keepers were seriously injured. One, Fournier, was beaten with a chair and his arm broken in two places. A madman named Jolly rifled a desk of bank-notes, all of which he ate.

## THE DECLINE OF THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN.

AMID the universal grayness that has settled mistily down upon English fiction amid the delicate drab-coloured shadings and half-lights which require, we are told, so fine a skill in handling, the old-fashioned reader misses, now and then, the vivid colouring of his youth. He misses the slow unfolding of quite impossible plots, the thrilling incidents that were wont pleasantly to arouse his apprehension, and, most of all, two characters once deemed essential to every novel—the hero and the villain. The heroine is left us still, and her functions are far more complicated than in the simple days of yore, when little was required of her save to be beautiful as the stars. She faces now the most intricate problems of life; and she faces them with conscious self-importance, a dismal power of analysis, and a robust candour in discussing their equivocal aspects that would have sent her buried sister blushing to the wall. There was sometimes a lamentable lack of solid virtue in this fair, dead sister, a pitiful human weakness that led to her undoing; but she never talked so glibly about sin. As for the hero, he owes his banishment to the riotous manner in which his masters handled him. Bulwer strained our endurance and our credulity to the utmost; Disraeli took a step further, and Lothair, the last of his race, perished amid the cruel laughter of mankind. But the villain! Remember what we owe to him in the past. Think how dear he has become to every rightly constituted mind. And now we are told, soberly and coldly, by the thin-

blooded novelists of the day, that his absence is one of the crowning triumphs of modern genius, that we have all grown too discriminating to tolerate in fiction a character whom we feel does not exist in life. Man, we are reminded, is complex, subtle, unfathomable, made up of good and evil so dexterously intermingled that no one element predominates coarsely over the rest. He is to be studied warily and with misgivings, not classified with brutal ease into the virtuous and bad. It is useless to explain to these analysts that the pleasure we take in meeting a character in a book does not always depend on our having known him in the family circle, or encountered him in our morning paper; though judged even by this stringent law, the villain holds his own.—*Agnes Repplier in the Atlantic Monthly*.

## CANON LIDDON ON MISSIONS.

ACROSS the triumphs and the failures of well-nigh nineteen centuries, the spiritual ear still catches the accents of the charge on the mountain in Galilee; and, as we listen, we note that neither length of time nor change of circumstance has impaired their solemn and enduring force. It is a precept which, if it ever had binding virtue, must have it at this moment over all who believe in the Divine Speaker's power to impose it—it must bind us as distinctly as it was binding on the first disciples. We are ambassadors of a charity which knows no distinctions between the claimants on its bounty, and no frontiers save those of the races of man. A good Christian can not be other than eager for the extension of our Lord's Kingdom among men, not only from his sense of what is due to the Lord who bought him, but also from his natural sense of justice, his persuasion that he has no right to withhold from others those privileges and prospects which are the joy of his own inmost life. When he finds comfort in the power of prayer, when he looks forward in humble confidence to death, when he enjoys the blessed gift of inward peace—peace between the soul and its God, peace between the soul's various powers and faculties—he can not but ask the question: "Do I not owe it to the millions who have no part in these priceless blessings that I should do what I can myself, or through others, to extend to them a share in this smile of the Universal Father which is the joy and consolation of my life? Can I possibly neglect the command to make disciples of all nations?"—*Spirit of Missions*.

Do you know what duty is? It is what we exact from others.—A. Dumas, *filis*.

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