

OYSTERS AND INSANITY.

This is a startling title. Prof. Siegfritz, of Gorlitz, Germany, holds that both are allied. He says, among other things:

The American oyster, which has not been tamed like ours by centuries of cultivation, is still more violent in its effects. In New York, pursuing my studies about the wharves and the markets, I had frequent occasions to note the violent accession of frenzy which ensued upon the consumption of bivalves. Sailors, labourers, mechanics, grown men and mere lads, after indulging their appetites for bivalves and whiskey, would be almost sure to quarrel and fight. Then the pistol and the knife were suddenly called into requisition, and a murder almost inevitably ensued; sometimes of Saturday nights there would be three or four most brutal homicides in rapid succession. I blush to say that even the emigrants from our pacific

fatherland, when they have acquired this unhappy appetite for bivalves, are no longer to be relied on for a faithful observance of the laws and the peace of society, but frequently become infuriated and frenetic to the last degree. So thoroughly well understood are the morbid influences of this poisonous article of food in the metropolis of the United States, that moral insanity has not only come to be recognised in courts as a valid and sufficient plea in bar in all cases of homicide and ravishments and brutal assaults, and in some classes of robberies also (such as defalcations, thefts of bonds, bank robberies, and the like), but the victim of the disease, in spite of all the atrocities he commits in his frenzy, receives the greatest amount of sympathy and commiseration from large classes of the community. One may well conceive the humanity which gives rise to this sort of feeling; but is it legitimate to suppose that an abnormal state of society ensues in consequence, and that the effects are not conducive to what we are used to consider good government?

While I was in America I saw the excitements caused by immediate indulgence in shell-fish violently illustrated. They have there a sort of political assemblage called a clam bake, where speeches and music and songs are interspersed with profuse feasts upon a species of oyster called the clam. Vast crowds attend these celebrations, and no sooner are they gorged with the insidious comestible than they become full of excitement and furores; swear themselves away in fealty to the most worthless of demagogues; sing, fight, dance, gouge one another's eyes out, and conduct themselves like madmen in a conflagration. Now, it was a precisely similar madness that infected the Roman world and made so many tyrants, brutes, and suicides there. And it was from a similar cause. Far, from the time of Cæsar, the Roman passion for oysters was a passion simply without bounds. They became connoisseurs in shell-fish, ransacked every sea for them, from the Syrian gyres to Britain, planted them everywhere, and ate them without moderation. Hence, Apicius slew himself under Trajan. He had the art of preserving oysters, but could not preserve himself. The last fatal delirium of Lucullus, in which he passed away after many banquets, can only be explained upon the ground of moral insanity from ostreophagy.

That which made suicides made tyrants likewise. Tiberius went to Caprea for oysters as well as to indulge his sombre hatred of man. Nero, Caligula, and that great brute Vitellius were all pre-eminent ostreophagists. The latter, after eating a monstrous pie of peacock's brains garnished with oysters, would slaughter a thousand Romans, take a vomit, and turn to eating again. His morbid appetites for oysters and for blood were equally pronounced and equally remarkable. But instances are too numerous to mention here, especially as I have collated them very carefully in the appendices. I will simply refer to the case of Philoxenus the Solonist, a man who was perverted into a demagogue and a tyrant by the fact of his having in early life caught oysters for a livelihood. It is related by Phœnias the Erosian. He was first an humble and contented fisherman this Philoxenus, but was induced first to take oysters, then to taste them, and so turned from his honest pursuits to demagoguery and tyranny, and was finally fatally murdered. *Sic semper ostreogastriani!*

The ancients, though they had many mistaken ideas in regard to oysters—as, for instance, in supposing them to promote the peristaltic and glandular activities in a regular and wholesome way—yet seem to have dimly understood that they were dangerous as food, and especially that they provoked the temper and brought out into sharper relief the ruggedities of the natural disposition. Some sorts of shell-fish are styled by Epicharmus "the banishers of men," because, I suppose, they tend to make people unsociable. The sea-limpet is credited with relaxing the mind by Alcæus. The cockle is by all the Greek poets noted as rough and gaping, like fishwives. "Offspring of a rough dam" is the epithet Aristophanes applies to the oyster, and Menæchmus, a practical writer, long ago attacked the bivalves on account of the unwholesome salts they contained. This must refer to phosphorus. It cannot mean sea salt, since the Greeks were so persuaded of the salubrity of that that they invariably diluted even their finest wines with it.

At Colchester, in the English Essex, and at Pongateague, Choptauk, Maggoty, Annapessex, Accomac, and other places on the Chesapeake Bay, where I went to observe the process of planting oysters and the kinds of beds in which they thrive best, I noticed an apparent exception to the circumstances above noted, which puzzled me a great while. The people of these places live surrounded by oysters, and make them their principal diet, yet are the most pacific and mild-mannered folks. Their temperament is lymphatic, and they themselves are a cold, watery, flabby tribe, with sallow, soft flesh, pale bluish eyes, straight yellow dead hair, and speaking a dialect very different from and nearly unintelligible to the people around them.

At Philadelphia, however, mentioning the anomaly to some savans, it was quickly explained to me that the reason for the exemption of these people was the fact that they invariably ate their bivalves fresh from the water. Philadelphia, which is renowned for its medical schools, has the reputation of producing more medical experts than any other part of the globe. The business is pursued professionally in this city of furnishing professors who appear as witnesses in criminal trials and give suitable illustrations of infinitesimal or metaphysical distinctions such as are not apparent to the vulgar understanding. Hence, I have great pleasure in accepting the explanation which one of these ingenious gentlemen furnished me of the difference between oysters fresh and oysters in the state in which they usually come to the market. The oyster is a gross feeder, omnivorous and voracious. Deprived of water, he begins to assimilate air. But this induces quite a new activity in the phosphorus he secretes. A process of slow combustion begins in it, and this increases with each day the oyster is kept.

NEW BOOKS.

LANGUAGE LESSONS. An Introductory Grammar and Composition for Intermediate and Grammar Grades. By William Swinton, A. M. 18mo. Linen. pp. 168. Price 50 cents. New York: Harper & Bros. Montreal: Dawson Bros.

We have already had occasion to draw attention to one of the series of Professor Swinton's grammatical works. "Language Lessons" is the second of the series in which the "Progressive English Grammar" occupies the third place. It is an easy introductory work, in which the object aimed at is to familiarize children with the English Grammar while familiarizing them with the language. Every rule given is amply illustrated by plain exemplifications, though rules and definitions occupy a secondary place in the system to practice and habit. We believe the mode introduced by Professor Swinton to be far preferable to the old fashioned method still in vogue in many schools, and with this recommendation we bring it under the notice of teachers and school trustees.

FIVE YEARS IN AN ENGLISH UNIVERSITY. By Charles Astor Bristed, late Foundation Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge. Third Edition. New-York; G. P. Putnam's Sons. Montreal: Dawson Bros. Cloth. pp. 572.

It may perhaps be objected by some persons that the subject of Mr. Bristed's book is one which has been thoroughly overdone, and been thrust upon the public *ad nauseam*. This is certainly very true. University life has been dragged so frequently into novels of all classes and kinds that it is no wonder that the reading public is, as a rule, heartily tired of it—the more so as for their delineations of life at the great English centres of education, the authors of the books in question more frequently drew upon their imagination than not, producing a result which is better capable of being imagined than adequately described. We must, however, claim an exception in the case of Mr. Bristed, who in the work before us describes merely his own experiences at Cambridge, which he supplements with some very valuable observations, contrasting the good and bad points of the English and American University systems. As an outsider he was, of course, more than usually on the look-out for fresh traits and new customs, while from the fact that he already at the time of his arrival at Cambridge owed allegiance to an American Alma Mater, we may fairly acquit him of any desire to laud the educational institutions of Great Britain at the expense of those of the United States. On the other hand we have the best of evidence that he was by no means prejudiced in favour of his own country. On his return he commenced publishing a set of sketches which formed the groundwork of the present volume. Two different magazines at different times began to publish these papers, "but were very soon afraid to go on, because I did not pretend to conceal our inferiority to the English in certain branches of liberal education." This was over twenty-five years ago. Later on, in 1851, the author published the result of his observations in book-form, and now after a lapse of nearly a quarter of a century his work has once more been placed before the public in a third edition, revised and corrected up to the present date. The greater part of the book is taken up with the author's relation of his experience during his five years' stay at Cambridge. On this portion we need dwell but briefly, for the story has been so frequently told that it will scarcely bear repeating. We are bound, however, to admit that the writer has in this matter an advantage over the majority of those who have treated the subject, inasmuch as writing for those who had but little acquaintance with the manners and customs of English Universities, he was compelled not only to give his relations at some length, but also to supplement them with continual explanations. In this he has been extremely successful. His account is lucid throughout without once declining into the wearisome, and he has endued the whole with an interest which cannot fail to attract. In the twenty-five chapters which contain his narration of University life he gives a thorough description of everything worthy of note. The daily routine, the various examinations and triposes, the text-books and subjects for reading, out-door sports and amusements, Commencement, Commemoration, private tuition, the credit system, clubs, reading parties, all are described and explained—and, where necessary, illustrated—in a manner which for clearness and thoroughness we have never seen surpassed. And all this, it must be borne in mind, is not the result of a system of evolution from the inner consciousness—now too frequently practised—nor is it a compilation. Throughout it is merely a description of what the author saw and actually passed through. But it is not this portion of the book that will possess the greatest attraction for the thinking reader. The last couple of hundred pages the writer devoted to a very masterly comparison of the advantages offered by the English and American University systems. Our space will not allow of our following him at length, so we content ourselves with giving a brief résumé of his deductions. In the first place he is loud in his praises of the English system, which turns out thorough, accurate scholars, who never forget their learning in after-life, though it is to be admitted that such men, owing to their very accuracy of habit, are too exclusively consumers, and not sufficiently producers of learning. Owing to the same cause, and their habit of weighing things carefully and exactly, English University men are less fitted to be writers than speakers. The physical results of the English system he contrasts most favourably with the ill effects of the American, as witnessed in the large mortality returns among students in the States. While he renders a high tribute to the gentlemanly behaviour of the Cambridge undergraduates, he is compelled—well, to say as little as possible about their morality. There is an admirable chapter on the Oxford movement of 1842, with a somewhat curious statement to the effect that Puseyism has diminished in power. The book closes with a chapter on proposed reforms in American colleges, and is completed by an appendix containing specimens of Classical and Senate-House examination papers. We may congratulate Mr. Bristed on his having perfected his work *ad unguem*, and on the success with which it has met, as exemplified in the demand for a new edition which has recently been published in England.

NOTES BY THE WAYSIDE.

There is worse fun in the world than can be got out of the sanitary magazines. These lively periodicals are so charmingly innocent, so intensely goody-goody, that they make very much better reading than many so-called comic papers. How Molière would have roared if it had been his lot to read them. How he would have scathed the editors and their prosy talk about nicotine, alcohol, pure air in bedrooms, sewage, *et hoc genus omne*. How he would have shown up, perhaps in a supplementary *Malade Imaginaire*, "La Santé, Journal Hygiénique et Salubre," in which a second Argan put his whole trust for health and immunity from the ills that flesh is heir to. Do not imagine that this is a puff for "La Santé," Journal &c.—like that infamous but very amusing paper George Augustus Sala had in *Belgravia* the other day. Outside of my own imagination, I am not aware of the existence of such a periodical. By the way, who are the Argans who take their rule of life from these sanitary magazines? Young men and misses, I presume, nearly all. I cannot imagine a hale, hearty old gentleman wasting his time in endeavouring to reform his habits and way of living upon the dicta of a pack of sages who differ on the very subjects on which they are striving to build their reputations. Yes, it must be the young men and misses who are prematurely afflicted with asthma, who wear respirators and huge comforters of a bright frosty day, who are particularly nervous about draughts, and hold in holy horror King James's "devil's own weed." What a pass must these unhappy mortals be reduced to when their authorities, their guides, comforters, and friends, the sanitary journals, differ. For differ they do, as I have already hinted. Talk about doctors' differing! It is great fun, I admit, (for all but the patient) to hear a lot of medicos belabouring each other with hard terms out of the Pathological Dictionary. But it is better fun even than that, and less dangerous fun withal, to get a couple of our journals of health squabbling over a point of hygiene. I beg their pardon, squabbling is too harsh a word. These paragons are too virtuous, too high-minded in their disputes, to admit of squabbling. Each insists, with the peculiar gravity, the *mens conacia recti* that are characteristic of the class, upon the correctness of its theory, and the fatal effects of their opponents' system. A battle-royal in this polished style is just going on between two recognized authorities in the hygienic world on the question of leaving bed-room windows open at night. But this subtle disquisition has no charms for us. We leave it to "La Santé," to discuss in its usual virtuous and happy manner. Bah! because it is virtuous shall there be no more cakes and ale—no more beer and tobacco. *Allons, m'jeu-ra canamus.*

These plaguey hygienists are assailing us in another and a tender point. Oysters! Professor Anton Siegfritz, of Gorlitz, has come out with the following astounding statement: "In the case of all those who do more bodily than mental labour, and in proportion as the physical exceeds the mental exercise, I have observed a distinct and positive tendency in the oyster, when eaten, to produce emotional insanity, or that sudden, transitory, unheralded, yet terrible phrenesis which so fatally disturbs the peace of society." Shade of Dando, Professor, what next? You tell us that beer is injurious, that spirits are fatal, that tea cannot be drunk with impunity, that coffee is even worse in its effects, and that water as a rule is sufficiently impure to cause disease. And now it is the oyster's turn, the "succulent bivalve" that the rural reporter delighted in. "A distinct and positive tendency to cause emotional insanity!" *Donnerwetter!* Professor, be careful in your statements. Are you aware, sir, that if the murder list in New York is swelled within the next few years you, and you alone, are to blame. When emotional insanity can be superinduced at the price of a dozen of East Rivers, we may look out for murders galore and pardoned murderers by the bushel. Aristophanes calls the oyster the "offspring of a rough dam." Hm! I might alter the phrase if I liked, but on second thoughts perhaps better not.

This sectarian school question has, like most things in this "wale," its humorous points, which serve to lighten the somewhat dreary monotony of the dispute. They have just been at it at St. Louis, and, as not unfrequently happens, the separatists got the worst of it. A certain Father Phelan has been publicly expressing his opinion that the pupils in the public schools graduate to become horse-thieves and blasphemous scoundrels generally. This is pretty strong language, especially from a minister of the Gospel, but as Father Phelan himself was in part educated at a St. Louis public school, as one of the St. Louis papers very gleefully points out, we presume he knows what he is talking about. If I had a son, and wished, as I naturally should wish, to bring him up a gentleman, I think, after the specimen of St. Louis educational manufacture exhibited in the Rev. Mr. Phelan, I should be particularly careful to avoid the Mound City.

"Say, what d'ye think of my pahnts?" asked a youth of me the other day. I confessed that I had bestowed no mental labour whatever on his nether garments, and was consequently not in a position to offer an opinion. In a word, I declined to constitute myself a judge of the young man's raiment, inasmuch as it is a matter in which I do not feel the least interest. I can understand, or at least I am content not to understand, how a lot of ladies can get together and discourse about their frills and flounces and furbelows, envy Miss Einesen's lovely polonaise, and criticize Miss Anderesen's new head of hair. But I am utterly unable to fathom the motive which impels a pack of men to talk—and some can talk of nothing else—about "pahnts" and "vosts" and "hahnts," like a parcel of fledgling tailors. If it takes nine tailors to make a man, in the name of goodness how many of these tailor's dummies does it take to make the resemblance of a man? I like to see a man well dressed if I do not dress well myself. When I was a youth, and was courting my adored Amelia—Ai, ai, she is Mrs. Mohur now, has a yellow skin and a bad digestion, and bullies old Mohur like a Fury—no one was more careful than I about the fitness and fitting of my apparel; but I am certain I never stooped to ask another man's opinion of my "pahnts."