

## ROUND THE TABLE.

The first instalment of Howells' new novel, "April Hopes," is mainly a description of Class Day at Harvard, very minute attention being devoted to the large setting of what little character study is as yet presented. Some time ago our bright exchange, the Harvard *Crimson*, remarked that from certain touches in these opening chapters, a Harvard man would be inclined to think that Mr. Howells had not been present at a Class Day for seven or eight years. This piece of criticism on the part of the *Crimson* has been rather widely noted and commented upon. *Life* ventures the assertion that the great realist is relying too much on his imagination.

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May not this attitude of criticism towards the realists be accounted significant, as an indication—to a certain degree, of course, and from only one side—of their limitations? It must be somewhat humiliating to Mr. Howells' artistic sense to be thus reminded that so large a portion of his work is regarded, sincerely and in good faith, as being distinctively journalistic,—not to say "reportorial."

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The history of criticism would afford many curious incidents. The Sultan, Mohammed II., is credited with a very realist criticism in art that may yield an idea of what criticism should not be. Being impressed by Venetian excellence in painting, that monarch requested the loan of one of their painters. The Council of Ten selected Gentile Bellini for the delicate mission. Bellini repaired to Constantinople to wait on his dangerous patron, and found favor in his sight. As a mark of respect, the Venetian presented the Sultan with a painting of the head of John the Baptist on a charger. It was much admired, but the Sultan, a natural realist in art, pointed out that the raw surface of the neck, with its shrunk nerves, was not true to life, or rather to death. Gentile failed to grasp the distinction, and the Sultan, waxing impatient, gave a practical demonstration by beheading, on the spot, a kneeling slave. Bellini as soon as possible revisited his family in Venice.

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At a certain stage in the development of art and art ideals, there seems to the public nothing incongruous in the queerest anachronisms. Disraeli, in his labourious 'Curiosities of Literature,' describes a painting that, in a Holland Church, pictured to the devout the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham is about to complete the sacrifice of the bound Isaac with the aid of a huge bell-mouthed blunderbuss. The consummation is prevented by an angel adopting an original method of flooding the pan of the clumsy weapon. To a modern eye the picture must have an irresistibly comic effect.

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The *Table* gave a slight notice of an interesting contribution to Shakespeariana, that was reviewed in the *Mail* and other papers. The *Table* rather values itself on its acumen, in reproving the literary great guns for taking Mr. Head's brochure on "Shakespeare's Insomnia" seriously. A valued exchange, "The Hamilton Literary Monthly," explains that Mr. Head's work was never intended to mislead anyone. It says:

"It will be remembered that the original was read before the Literary Club of Chicago, and made such a hit that the Maxwells issued a private edition, at the request of the club, for the use of its members. . . . Mr. Head first assumes from internal evidence in the plays that Shakespeare was troubled with insomnia, and then seeks to establish the causes. This he does in a series of letters purporting to have been written to the poet by his contemporaries, and contained in 'the recently discovered Southampton collection,' copies of which Mr. Head sets forth he secured from Mr. John Barnacle, tenth assistant sub-secretary of the British Museum. . . . Even so excellent a periodical as the *Literary World*, the recognized organ of culture and polite learning at the 'Hub,' hailed the discovery of these letters with acclamation, and was glad that they shed new light upon the plays, and added so largely to our scanty stock of information concerning Shakespeare. . . . The

new edition contains an additional letter, purporting to have been written by Lord Baron to Shakespeare, which will be certain to arrest the attention, if not to invite the wrath, of Ignatius Donnelly, as a scandal upon his cypher."

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The following from the matter-of-fact correspondence in a late number of the *American Druggist* is not intentionally funny:

The introduction of soap is doing much to civilize the inhabitants of the Holy land. A large soap factory has been established on the site of ancient Schechem, and the people are beginning to use it on their persons instead of trying to eat it as they did at first. Along with the introduction of soap other reforms are going on. Bethlehem has been rebuilt and its streets are now lighted with gas. Cesaræa is having a building boom. Nazareth is becoming the headquarters of big olive oil speculators. Corner lots in Joppa are going up with a rush, and real estate in Mount Carmel is largely held by speculators for an advance. All around Shechem there is a lively demand for good soap fat, and the sleepy inhabitants of Ramoth Gilead think of building a glue factory. Jerusalem is waking up also. It has a street cleaning bureau, big clocks on its public buildings, and its suburbs are being built up rapidly. Even in the Vale of Gehenna the price of land has gone up. The ladies of Jerusalem take all the Parisian fashion journals, and know all about the latest style of hair-dressing.

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Our valued exchange, the *Virginia University Magazine*, prints some reminiscences of Edgar Allan Poe, found among the papers of a former librarian of the University, who died five years ago. He had been a member of some of Poe's classes; and of his reminiscences of that strange being, "three-fifths genius and two-fifths sheer fudge," as Lowell characterized him, one or two paragraphs are interesting:

"After spending an evening together at a private house, he invited me, on our return, into his room. It was a cold night in December, and his fire having gone pretty nearly out, by the aid of some tallow candles and the fragments of a small table which he broke up for the purpose, he soon rekindled it, and by its comfortable blaze I spent a very pleasant hour with him. On this occasion he spoke with regret of the large amount of money he had wasted, and of the debts he had contracted during the session.

If my memory is not at fault, he estimated his indebtedness at \$2,000, and though they were gaming debts, he was earnest and emphatic in the declaration that he was bound by honor to pay, at the earliest opportunity, every cent of them.

"He certainly was not habitually intemperate, but he may occasionally have entered into a frolic. I often saw him in the lecture room and in the library, but never in the slightest degree under the influence of intoxicating liquors. Among the Professors he had the reputation of being a sober, quiet and orderly young man, and to them and the officers his deportment was uniformly that of an intelligent and polished gentleman. Although his practice of gaming did escape detection, the hardihood, intemperance and reckless wildness imputed to him by his biographers, had he been guilty of them, must inevitably have come to the knowledge of the faculty and met with merited punishment. The records of which I was then, and am still, the custodian, attest that at no time during the session did he fall under the censure of the faculty.

"At no period during the past history of the University has the faculty been more violent in ferreting out offenders and more severe in punishing them than during the session of 1826."

Poe attended lectures "during the session which commenced February 1st, 1826." The University was founded in 1825.

"Mr. Poe's connection with the University was dissolved by the termination of the session on the 15th of December, 1826. He then wanted little over a month of having attained the age of eighteen—the date of his birth was plainly entered, in his own handwriting, on the matriculation book. Were he now living, his age on the 19th of this month (January, 1869,) would be sixty. He never returned to the University, and I think it probable that the night I visited him was the last he spent here. I draw this inference not from memory, but from the fact that having no further use for his candles and table he made fuel of them."

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Now that the University and the *Week* have seen to it that the memory of the Jubilee shall not utterly perish, it is denied that the Queen feels the necessity of ordering the Laureate to write a triolet on the approaching celebration.

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