

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

OF MYSELF.

This only grant me, that my means may lie
Too low for envy, for contempt too high.
Some honour I would have,
Not from great deeds, but good alone;
The unknown are better than ill-known;
Rumour can ope the grave.
Acquaintance I would have, but when 't depends
Not on the number, but the choice, of friends.

Books should, not business, entertain the light,
And sleep, as undisturbed as death, the night.
My house a cottage more
Than palace; and should fitting be
For all my use, no luxury,
My garden painted o'er
With Nature's hand, not Art's; and pleasures yield,
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

Thus would I double my life's fading space;
For he that runs it well twice runs his race.
And in this true delight,
These unbought sports, this happy state,
I would not fear, nor wish, my fate;
But boldly say each night,
To-morrow let my sun his beams display,
Or in clouds hide them; I have lived to-day.

—Abraham Cowley (1650).

THE LITERARY BREADWINNER.

A POPULAR English "authoress" has thrown a bomb into the quiet life of the average English girl, by advising her to become a writer rather than a reader of fiction. She tells the young women of England that there is a great demand for fiction, and that one has only to please the public to "live with all the magnificence of a prince." The *Publishers' Circular*, in commenting upon this bad advice, says that a literary statistician has estimated that "in London alone there are twenty thousand persons trying to earn a living by the pen"; and asks, of these, "how many are sure even of a daily dinner?" It seems to me little less than a crime to urge those who have no special fitness for the profession to write novels or other books. There are already many hundreds—thousands, I may say—more books written than ever will be printed, and thousands more printed than find readers. The number that succeeds is very small compared with the host that fails, and it is cruel to lead people on to waste their time in writing stories and shedding their heart's blood in the disappointment that surely awaits them. "A man who has mastered a trade," says the *Publishers' Circular*, "can generally make a fair living, but the unsuccessful writer, unless he have other means, is sure of nothing but starvation."—*The Critic*.

THE HEROIC AGE OF PORTUGAL.

BUT, though the history of Portugal possesses its peculiar interest as showing how one small portion of the Iberian peninsula maintained a separate existence, it presents also many features of romantic incident, especially during the epoch when it was for a time the leading nation of Europe. The extraordinary vigour shown by the inhabitants of this small corner of Europe during the latter half of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth centuries is most remarkable. Not only were Portuguese navigators the first to creep down the west coast of Africa in small boats, in which modern sailors would hardly like to cross the English Channel, but they dared to double the Cape of Good Hope, and to sail across the Indian Ocean to India and Ceylon. Thence they ventured round the point of Singapore, and established themselves at Macao, from which centre they explored the coasts of China and Japan. In the other direction, to the west, they crossed the Atlantic, and discovered and colonized Brazil. Lisbon became the storehouse and centre of distribution for the products of the East, and attained to a height of wealth and luxury unrivalled since the days of ancient Rome. The history of the Portuguese "conquistadores" in India for the first hundred years after the discovery of the route round the Cape of Good Hope is one long romance; the vastness of their designs, the grandeur of their exploits, and the nobility of character of their noble captains, combine to make a story of surpassing interest. And when it is remembered that the soldiers and sailors of these great discoveries and conquerors were inhabitants of the smallest country of Europe, their success seems the more extraordinary, and the interest in the story of the nation which trained the Portuguese heroes becomes the more absorbing. As invariably happens during the heroic age of a nation's history, literature and arts flourished at a time distinguished by military and naval prowess, and as Spenser and Shakespeare illustrated the Elizabethan age in England as much as Drake and Raleigh, the age of Vasco da Gama and Albuquerque in Portugal could boast also of Gil Vicente, Sa de Miranda and Camoens. The abrupt fall of Portugal from the greatness and wealth of its heroic period to an insignificant place among the nations is as full of the great lessons which history teaches us as the story of its growth.—*The Story of the Nations: Portugal*, by H. Morse Stephens.

SKULLS OF GREAT COMPOSERS.

THE phrenologists will find themselves put upon their mettle by the discovery of the fact that the skull of Mozart, now in the possession of an Austrian anatomist, does not exhibit those peculiarities which the disciples of Gall and Spurzheim allege to be inseparable from musical genius of the highest order. When Beethoven's cranium came under the examination of the phrenologists it was found that the protuberances which, according to the laws of phrenology, ought to have existed, were not at all observable. The skull of the mighty composer, in fact, was rather small, and might have been supposed to belong to a person of only ordinary intellect. Measurements of the skulls of Haydn and Schubert also showed that the skulls of those composers were not much more capacious than those of men who had never written, said, or done anything to mark them among the great. An attempt is being made to show that Mozart's skull does not belong to him, but to some other person who has paid the debt to nature without conferring any particularly high services on humanity. But the evidence as to authenticity in the case of Mozart appears to be incontrovertible. The great master was interred in the cemetery of St. Marx, south of Vienna, as an entry in the register of the parish conclusively shows. The entry is dated December 6, 1781, and states that the gifted composer died on the previous day, at the age of thirty-six, and that his remains were accorded a "third-class burial," at a total cost of "eleven florins and fifty-six kreutzers." A wily grave-digger, with more prescience than distinguished the rest of his countrymen, took note of the spot where the composer was laid, and, ten years later when the grave was re-opened, the grave-digger appropriated the skull which now so grievously upsets the calculations of the phrenologist. Another grave-digger, who is charmingly described by a correspondent of the *Standard* as "an enthusiastic lover of music," kept the skull in a cupboard for several years, after which it passed into the hands of the Viennese professor. It is to be hoped that after the indignity of a "third-class burial" this remnant of the great composer will be allowed to rest in some more fitting receptacle than a cupboard.—*Piano Organ and Music Trades Journal*.

CREATURES OF THE FIELDS AND WOODS.

WE are by the covert side, and a strange churring comes from the glades. Waiting silently beneath the bushes, it approaches nearer and nearer, until a loud flapping is heard among the nutbush tops. The object approaches quite closely, and we can see that the noise is produced by a large bird striking its wings together as they meet behind. Even in the dark we detect that each wing is crossed by a definite white bar. Had we the bird in our hand, we should see that it seemed a connecting link between the owls and the swallows, having the soft plumage and noiseless flight of the one, and the wide mouth of the other. The noise it produces among the trees is probably to disturb from off the bushes the large-winged moths upon which it feeds. This is the nightjar or goat-sucker. The latter name it has from a superstitious notion that it sucks goats and cows, founded probably upon the fact of its wide gape. It is certain that these birds are often seen flitting about the bellies of cattle as they stand knee-deep in summer pastures. The reason of this is obvious, as there insect food is always abundant. Coming from out the woods the short, sharp bark of a fox is heard, and this is answered at intervals by the vixen. Rabbits rush across our path, or rustle through the dead leaves, their white scuts showing as vanishing points in the darkness. The many-tongued hedge-bird which tells her tale to all the reeds by day, prolongs it under the night. Singing ceaselessly from the bushes, she chatters garrulously or imitates the songs of other birds; until my old angler friends call her the "fisherman's nightingale." When by the covert side, one of the calls which one constantly hears is the crowing of cock pheasants; this is indulged in the densest darkness, as is sometimes the soft cooing of the wood-pigeons. Both pheasants and cushats sleep on the low lateral branches of tall trees, and from beneath these the poacher often shoots them. He comes when there is some moon, and with a short-barrelled gun and a half charge of powder drops the birds dead from below. One of the greatest night helps to the game-keeper in staying the depredations of the poachers is the lapwing. The bird is one of the lightest sleepers of the field, starting up from the fallows and screaming upon the slightest alarm. Poachers dread the detection of this bird, and the keeper closely follows its cry. A hare rushing past will put the plover away from its roost, and when hares act thus there is generally some good cause for it. . . . One of the most piteous sounds that is borne on the night is the hare's scream when it finds itself in the poacher's nets. It resembles nothing so nearly as the cry of a child, and when it suddenly ceases we know the wire snare has tightened round its throat. All night long crake answers crake from the meadows, appearing now at our feet, now far out yonder. Like the cuckoo, the cornrail is a bird oftener heard than seen; it is of hiding habits, and finds a secure and snug retreat in lush summer grass. Beneath the oaks bats encircle after night-flying insects, and there by the stream side are clouds of gaudy ephemerae. The wild whistle of a curlew comes from high overhead as the bird flies through the night to its far-off feeding ground. In the fall of the year multitudes of migratory birds pass over; we "hear the beat of their pinions fleet," but their forms we cannot see. If

only, however, we hear the cry of their voices falling dreamily through the sky, the species is easy of identification. If we approach the reedbeds silently we may hear the hoarse croak of the frogs; or springing wild ducks as they beat the air with their strong wings. Emerging from the waterside to a belt of coppice, we are again reminded how lightly the creatures of the field and woods sleep. The faintest rustle brings chirping from the bushes, and in the densest darkness even some of the delicate wood-birds sing—not only the sedge and grasshopper-warblers, but from the willows come the lute-like mellow-ness and wild sweetness of the blackcap, another night singer.—"Nature and Woodcraft," by John Watson.

SEA TRIPS AS A CHANGE.

WHEN exhaustion has gone so far as to produce a condition of positive breakdown without any special organic lesion, a sea trip is in most cases to be preferred to any alternative. The patient has the advantages of perpetual carriage exercise without the irksomeness of restrained posture, and without its limitation to a few hours of sunshine. The chilling effects of night air and alternations of dryness and dampness of atmosphere are almost unknown at sea; and a recovery may in such cases usually be predicted as following almost certainly a few weeks on ship-board. But it is to the middle-aged man more than all others that a holiday at sea is to be recommended. In the great majority of cases the man who leads an active business or professional life selects his form of holiday as much for what he gets away from as to what he gets to. The desire to get out of harness and to escape from the weary treadmill of the recurring cares from which few active men are free is never better met than by a voyage. To such men exercise is a secondary consideration. Fresh air and the incidents that vary the monotony of sea life are sufficient to give all the benefits that any change can give, whilst the gentle exercise of walking the deck is sufficient to stimulate the appetite and promote digestion. The impossibility of doing anything more energetic than walking the deck is a safeguard to persons of this class; for, after the first flush of youth is over, the sudden transition from a sedentary life to severe exertion is more apt to be attended with risk than with benefit.—*London Medical Recorder*.

A NEW LETTER OF CARLYLE'S.

IN the current number of a contemporary appears a very characteristic letter from Carlyle, which has, we believe, never before been published. It runs as follows:—

5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, London,
April 13, 1840.

MY DEAR SIR,—I am about to employ you on rather a singular commission: which, however, I doubt not you will execute with your wonted good-nature. Close folded within this paper is a card containing a gold half-sovereign; I am in pressing want of tobacco pipes; this small gold coin is to procure me, through your kindness, tobacco pipes from Edinburgh. Down in the Canongate, not far from John Knox's House, there used to dwell and labour that eminent pipe maker, Thomas White. He, very probably, is no longer alive; but his representatives, his manufactory, must be still there, and pipes of the same eminent fabric. The kind of pipe I was wont to get there were his best and biggest, 3s. 6d. a gross. You now see clearly what it is that I solicit of you.

Having well fixed in your mind that "Thomas White" or the "late Thomas White" is the man, and "3s. 6d. per gross" the kind, there is nothing more to be added, except the propriety of straitly charging the people to be most careful in the packing; and then to ship by the first steamer—for my hurry is considerable. You must understand I had ordered from Glasgow no fewer than five gross of a still nobler sort of pipes than White's; but the wretched people having packed them in a deep box (instead of a broad shallow one) and with sawdust (in the place of hay), the whole concern arrived here in a state of dust and ruin, some forty-five pipes safe in all: this makes me anxious for speed; anxious too that the Whites may pack better—as, indeed, they were usually wont to do.

I write in such haste I hardly know what I have said; but it seems to me you will not fail to decipher what I mean; and I know well you will, in your old manner, set about doing it straightway. As many best pipes as 10s. will buy and pack; that is it.

We are pretty well here; I am to lecture in May—a thing that terrifies me somewhat. I ride diligently every day to get into clearer spirits at least!

We had your friend the Bishop lately, who seemed to be immensely refreshed by the smell of our smoke, by the sight and sound of our tumult. It is the way with men! To him the roaring Strand is medicine; to me here Minto Craig seems not unlike a kind of Heaven. God keep you always. My wife joins in kindest salutations. Yours very truly,

T. CARLYLE.

RECENTLY a vessel sailed from a Belgian port for West Africa, having on board fourteen missionaries, four hundred and sixty casks of gunpowder, eleven cases of gin, and ten thousand casks of rum.

A WOMAN's real worth is estimated by the goodness of her heart, the greatness of her soul and the purity of her character. Women who have these attributes make the best of wives and the truest of mothers.