# VARIOUS

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# Various
# The Atlantic Monthly, Volume 14, No. 83, September, 1864 / A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics

## THE CADMEAN MADNESS

An old English divine fancied that all the world might go mad and nobody know it. The conception suggests a query whether the standard of sanity, as of fashions and prices, be not a purely artificial one, an accident of convention, a law of society, an arbitrary institute, and therefore a possible mistake. A sage and a maniac each thinks the other mad. The decision is a matter of majorities. Should a whole community become insane, it would nevertheless vote itself wise; if the craze of Bedlam were uniform, its inmates could not distinguish it from a Pantheon; and though all human history seemed to the gods only as a continuous series of mediæval processions *des sots et des ânes*, yet the topsy-turvy intellect of the world would ever worship folly in the name of wisdom. Arts and sciences, ideas and institutions, laws and learning would still abound, transmogrified to suit the reigning madness. And as statistics reveal the late gradual and general increase of insanity, it becomes a provident people to consider what may be the ultimate results, if this increase should happen never to be checked. And if sanity be, indeed, a glory which we might all lose unawares, we may well betake ourselves to very solemn reflection as to whether we are, at the present moment, in our wits and senses, or not.

The peculiar proficiencies of great epochs are as astonishing as the exploits of individual frenzy. The era of the Greek rhapsodists, when a body of matchless epical literature was handed down by memory from generation to generation, and a recitation of the whole "Odyssey" was not too much for a dinner-party,—the era of Periclean culture, when the Athenian populace was wont to pass whole days in the theatre, attending with unfaltering intellectual keenness and æsthetic delight to three or four long dramas, either of which would exhaust a modern audience,—the wild and vast systems of imaginary abstractions, which the Neo-Platonists, as also the German transcendentalists, so strangely devised and became enamored of,—the grotesque views of men and things, the funny universe altogether, which made up both the popular and the learned thought of the Middle Ages, —the Buddhistic Orient, with its subtile metaphysical illusions, its unreal astronomical heavens, its habits of repose and its tornadoes of passion,—such are instances of great diversities of character, which would be hardly accountable to each other on the supposition of mutual sanity. They suggest a difference of ideas, moods, habits, and capacities, which in contemporaries and associates would amply justify either party that happened to be the majority in turning all the rest into insane asylums. It is the demoniac element, the raving of some particular demon, that creates greatness either in men or nations. Power is maniacal. A mysterious fury, a heavenly inspiration, an incomprehensible and irresistible impulse, goads humanity on to achievements. Every age, every person, and every art obeys the wand of the enchanter. History moves by indirections. The first historic tendency is likely to be slightly askew; there follows then an historic triumph, then an historic eccentricity, then an historic folly, then an explosion; and then the series begins again. In the grade of folly, hard upon an explosion, lies modern literature.

The characteristic mania of the last two centuries is reading and writing. Solomon discovered that much study is a weariness of the flesh; Aristophanes complained of the multitude and indignity of authors in his time; and the famed preacher, Geyler von Kaisersberg, in the age of prevalent monkery

and Benedictine plodding, mentioned erudition and madness, on equal footing, as the twin results of books: "*Libri quosdam ad scientiam, quosdam ad insaniam deduxere*." These were successive symptoms of the growing malady. But where there was one writer in the time of Geyler, there are a million now. He saw both health and disease, and could distinguish between them. We see only the latter. Skill in letters, half a decade of centuries ago, was a miraculous attainment, and placed its possessor in the rank of divines and diviners; now, inability to read and write is accounted, with pauperism and crime, a ground for civil disfranchisement. The old feudal merry and hearty ignorance has been everywhere corrupted by books and newspapers, learning and intelligence, the cabalistic words of modern life. Popular poetry and music, ballads and legends, wit and originality have disappeared before the barbaric intellectuality of our Cadmean idolatry. Even the arts of conversation and oratory are waning, and may soon be lost; we live only in second and silent thoughts: for who will waste fame and fortune by giving to his friends the gems which will delight mankind? and how can a statesman grapple eloquently with Fate, when the contest is not to be determined on the spot, but by quiet and remote people coolly reading his speech several hours or days later? Even if we were vagarying into imbecility, like the wildest Neo-Platonic hierophants, like the monkish chroniclers of the Middle Ages, like other romantic and fantastic theorists who have leaped out of human nature into a purely artificial realm, we should not know it, because we are all doing it uniformly.

The universe is a veiled Isis. The human mind from immemorial antiquity has ceased to regard it. A small cohort of alphabets has enrobed it with a wavy texture of letters, beyond which we cannot penetrate. The glamour is upon us, and when we would see the facts of Nature, we behold only tracts of print. The God of the heavens and earth has hidden Himself from us since we gave ourselves up to the worship of the false divinities of Phoenicia. No longer can we admire the *cosmos*; for the *cosmos* lies beyond a long perspective of theorems and propositions that cross our eyes, like countless bees, from the alcoves of philosophies and sciences. No longer do we bask in the beauty of things, as in the sunlight; for when we would melt in feeling, we hear nothing but the rattling of gems of verse. No longer does the mind, as sympathetic priest and interpreter, hover amid the phenomena of time and space; for the forms of Nature have given place to volumes, there are no objects but pages, and passions have been supplanted by paragraphs. We no longer see the whirling universe, or feel the pulsing of life. Thought itself has ceased to be a sprite, and flows through the mind only in the leaden shape of printed sentences. The symbolism of letters is over us all. An all-pervading nominalism has completely masked whatsoever there is that is real. More and more it is not the soul and Nature, but the eye and print, whose resultant is thought. Nature disappears and the mind withers. No other faculty has been developed in man but that of the reader, no other possibility but that of the writer. The old-fashioned arts which used to imply human nature, which used to blossom instinctively, which have given joy and beauty to society, are fading from the face of the earth. Where are the ancient and mediæval popular games, those charming vital symptoms? The people now read Dickens and Longfellow. Where are the old-fashioned instincts of worship and love, consolation and mourning? The people have since found an antidote for these experiences in Blair and Tupper, and other authors of renown. Where are those weird voices of the air and forest and stream, those symptoms of an enchanted Nature, which used to thrill and bless the soul of man? The duller ear of men has failed to hear them in this age of popular science.

Literature, using the word with a benevolent breadth of meaning which excludes no pretenders, is the result of the invasion of letters. It is the fort which they occupy, which with too hasty consideration has usually been regarded as friendly to the human race. Religions, laws, sciences, arts, theories, and histories, instead of passing Ariel-like into the elements when their task is done, are made perpetual prisoners in the alcoves of dreary libraries. They have a fossil immortality, surviving themselves in covers, as poems have survived minstrels. The memory of man is made omni-capacious; its burden increases with every generation; not even the ignorance and stolidity of the past are allowed the final grace of being forgotten; and omniscience is becoming at once more and more impossible

and more and more fashionable. Whoever reads only the books of his own time is superficial in proportion to the thickness of the ages. But neither the genius of man, nor his length of days, has had an increase corresponding to that of the realm of knowledge, the requirements of reading, and the conditions of intelligence. The multiplied attractions only crowd and obstruct the necessarily narrow line of duty, possibility, and destiny. Life threatens to be extinguished by its own shadow, by the *débris* kept in the current by countless tenacious records. Its essence escapes to heaven or into new forms, but its ghosts still walk the earth in print. Like that mythical serpent which advanced only as it grew in length, so knowledge spans the whole length of the ages. Some philosopher conceived of history as the migration and growth of reason throughout time, culminating in successive historical ideas. He, however, supposed that the idea of every age had nothing to do with any preceding age; it had passed through whatsoever previous stages, had been somewhat modified by them, contained in itself all that was best in them, was improved and elevated at every new epoch; but it had no memory, never looked backward, and was an ever rolling sphere, complete in itself, leaving no trail behind. Human life, under the discipline of letters and common schools, is not thus Hegelian, but advances under the boundless retrospection of literature. And yet this is probably divine philosophy. It is probable that the faculty of memory belongs to man only in an immature state of development, and that in some future and happier epoch the past will be known to us only as it lives in the present; and then for the first time will Realism in life take the place of Nominalism.

The largest library in the world, the Bibliothèque Impériale of Paris, (it has been successively, like the adventurous and versatile throne of France, Royale, Nationale, and Impériale,) contains very nearly one million of books, the collected fruits of all time. Consider an average book in that collection: how much human labor does it stand for? How much capital was invested originally in its production, and how much tribute of time and toil does it receive per annum? Regarding books as intellectual estate, how much does it cost mankind to procure and keep up an average specimen? What quantity of human resources has been originally and consecutively sunk in the Parisian library? How much of human time, which is but a span, and of human emotion and thought, which are sacred and not to be carelessly thrown away, lie latent therein?

The estimate must be highly speculative. Some books have cost a lifetime and a heartbreak; others have been written at leisure in a week, and without an emotion. Some are born from the martyrdom of a thinker to fire the genius of a populace; others are the coruscations of joy, and have a smile for their immortal heir. Some have made but the slightest momentary ripple in human affairs; others, first gathering eddies about themselves, have swept forward in grand currents, engrossing for centuries whole departments of human energy. Thousands publish and are forgotten before they die. Spinoza published after his death and is not yet understood.

We will begin with the destined bibliomacher at the time of his assumption of short clothes. The alphabet is his first professional torture, and that only ushers him upon the gigantic task of learning to read and write his own language. Experience shows that this miracle of memory and associative reason may be in the main accomplished by the time he is eight years old. Thus far in his progress towards book-making he has simply got his fingers hold of the pen. He has next to run the gauntlet of the languages, sciences, and arts, to pass through the epoch of the scholar, with satchel under his arm, with pale cheek, an eremite and ascetic in the religion of Cadmus. At length, at about twenty years of age, he leaves the university, not a master, but a bachelor of liberal studies. But thus far he has laid only the foundation, has acquired only rudiments and generalities, has only served his apprenticeship to letters. God gave mind and nature, but art has furnished him a new capacity and a new world,—the capacity to read, and the world of books. He has simply acquired a new nature, a psychological texture of letters, but the artificial *tabula rasa* has yet to be filled. Twenty obstetrical years have at last made him a literary animal, have furnished him the abstract conditions of authorship; but he has yet his life to save, and his fortune to make in literature. He is born into the mystic fraternity of readers and writers, but the special studies and experiences which fit him for anything, which make

a book possible, are still in the future. He will be fortunate, if he gets through with them, and gets his first volume off his hands by the age of thirty. Authors are the shortest-lived of men. Their average years are less than fifty. Our bibliomacher has therefore twenty years left to him. Taking all time together, since formerly authors wrote less abundantly than now, he will not produce more than one work in five years, that is, five works in his lifetime of fifty years. The conclusion to which this rather precarious investigation thus brings us is, that the original cost of an average book is ten years of a human life. And yet these ten years make but the mere suggestion of the book. The suggestion must be developed by an army of printers, sellers, and librarians. What other institution in the world is there but the Bibliothèque Impériale, to the mere suggestion of which ten millions of laborious years have been devoted?

Startling considerations present themselves. If there were no other *argumentum ad absurdum* to demonstrate some fundamental perversity and absurdity in literature, it might be suspected from the fact that Nature herself gives so little encouragement to it. Nobody is born an author. The art of writing, common as it is, is not indigenous in man, but is acquired by a nearly universal martyrdom of youth. If it had been providentially designed that the function of any considerable portion of mankind should have been to write books, we cannot suppose that an economical Deity would have failed to create them with innate skill in language, general knowledge, and penmanship. These accomplishments have to be learned by every writer, yet writers are numberless. They are mysteries which must be painfully encountered by every one at the vestibule of the temple of literature, which nevertheless is thronged. Surely, had this importance and prevalence been attached to them in the Divine scheme, they would have been born in us like the senses, or would blossom spontaneously in us, like the corollal growths of Faith and Conscience. We should have been created in a condition of literary capacity, and thus have been spared the alphabetical torture of childhood, and the academic depths of philological despair. Twenty-five years of preliminaries might have been avoided by changing the peg in the scale of creation, and the studies of the boy might have begun where now they end. Twenty-five years in the span of life would thus have been saved, had what must be a universal acquirement been incorporated into the original programme of human nature.

Or had the Deity appreciated literature as we do, He would probably have written out the universe in some snug little volume, some miniature series, or some boundless Bodleian, instead of unfolding it through infinite space and time, as an actual, concrete, unwritten reality. Be creation a single act or an eternal process, it would have been all a thing of books. The Divine Mind would have revealed itself in a library, instead of in the universe. As for men, they would have existed only in treatises on the mammalia. There are some specimens which we hardly think are according to any anticipation of heavenly reason, and therefore they would not have existed at all. Nothing would have been but God and literature. Possibly a responsible creation like ours might have been formed, nevertheless, by making each letter a living, thinking, moral agent; and the alphabet might thus have written out the Divine ideas, as men now work them out. If the conception seem to any one chilly, if it have a dreary look, if it appear to leave only a frosty metallic base, instead of the grand oceanic effervescence of life, let him remember how often earthly authors have renounced living realities, all personal sympathies and pleasures, communing only with books, their minds dwelling apart from men. Remember Tasso and Southey; ay, if you have yourself written a book that commands admiration, remember what it cost you. Why hesitate to transfer to the skies a type of life which we admire here below? But God having wrought out instead of written out His thoughts, does it not appear that He designed for men to do likewise?

And thus a new consideration is presented. The exhibit of the original cost of the Bibliothèque Impériale was the smallest item in our budget. Mark the history of a book. How variously it engrosses the efforts of the world, from the time when it first rushes into the arena of life! The industry of printing embodies it, the energy of commerce disperses it, the army of critics announce it, the world of readers give their days and nights to it generation after generation, and its echoes uninterruptedly

repeat themselves along the infinite procession of writers. The process reverts with every new edition, and eddies mingle with eddies in the motley march of history. Its story may be traced in martyrdoms of the flesh, in weary hours, strange experiences, unhappy tempers, restless struggles, unrequited triumphs,—in the glare of midnight lamps, and of wild, haggard eyes,—in sorrow, want, desolation, despair, and madness. Born in sorrow, the book trails a pathway of sorrow through the ages. And each book in the Parisian library stands for all this,—some that were produced with tears having been always read for jest,—some that were lightly written being now severe tasks for historians, antiquaries, and source-mongers.

Suppose an old Egyptian, who in primæval Hierapolis incased his thought in papyrus, to be able now to take a stroll into the Bibliothèque, and to see what has become of his thought so far as there represented. He would find that it had haunted mankind ever since. An alcove would be filled with commentaries on it, and discussions as to where it came from and what it meant. He would find it modifying and modified by the Greeks, and reproduced by them with divers variations,—extinguished by Christianity,—revived, with a new face, among the theurgies and cabala of Alexandria; he would catch the merest glimpse of it amid the Christian legends and credulities of the Middle Ages,—but the Arabs would have kept a stronger hold on it; he would see it in the background after the revival of learning, till, gradually, as modern commerce opened the East, scholars, also, discovered that there were wonders behind the classic nations; and finally he would see how modern research, rushing back through comparison of language-roots, through geological data, through ethnological indications, through antiquarian discoveries, has rooted out of the layers of ages all the history attendant upon its original production. He would find the records of this long history in the library around him. In every age, the thought, born of pain, has been reproduced with travail. It did not do its mission at once, penetrate like a ray of light into the heart of the race, and leave a chemical effect which should last forever. No, the blood of man's spirit was not purified,—only an external application was made, and that application must be repeated with torture upon every generation. Was this designed to be the function of thought, the mission of heavenly ideas?

This is the history of his thought in books. But let us conceive what might have been its history but for the books;—how it might have been written in the fibres of the soul, and lived in eternal reason, instead of having been written on papyrus and involved in the realm of dead matter. His idea, thrilling his own soul, would have revealed itself in every particle and movement of his body; for "soul is form, and doth the body make." Its first product would have been his own quivering, animated, and animating personality. He would have impressed every one of his associates, every one of whom would in turn have impressed a new crowd, and thus the immortal array of influences would have gone on. Not impressions on parchment, but impressions on the soul, not letters, but thrills, would have been its result. Thus the magic of personal influence of all kinds would have radiated from it in omnipresent and colliding circlets forever, as the mighty imponderable agents are believed to radiate from some hidden focal force. He would trace his idea in the massive architecture and groping science of Egypt,—in the elegant forms of worship, thought, institutes, and life among the Greeks,—in the martial and systematizing genius of Rome,—and so on through the ecclesiastical life of the Middle Ages, and the political and scientific ambitions of modern times. Its operations have everywhere been chemical, not mechanical. It has lived, not in the letter, but in the spirit. Never dropping to the earth, it has been maintained as a shuttlecock in spiritual regions by the dynamics of the soul. It has wrought itself into the soul, the only living and immortal thing, and so the proper place for ideas. Its mode of transmission has been by the suffusion of the eye, the cheek, the lip, the manner, not by dead and unsymbolical letters. It has had life, and not merely duration. It has been perpetuated in cordate, not in dactylate characters. Its history must not be sought away from the circle of life, but may be seen in the current generation of men. The man whom you should meet on the street would be the product of all the ideas and influences from the foundation of the world, and his slightest act would reveal them all vital within him. The libraries, which form dead recesses in the river of life, would thus be

swept into and dissolved in the current, and the waters would have been deepened and colored by their dissolution. Libraries are a sort of *débris* of the world, but the spiritual substance of them would thus enter into the organism of history. All the last results of time would come to us, not through books, but through the impressions of daily life. Whatsoever was unworthy to be woven into the fibres of the soul would be overwhelmed by that oblivion which chases humanity; all the time wasted in the wrong-headedness of archæology would be saved; for there would be nothing of the past except its influence on the immediate present, and nothing but the pure human ingot would finally be left of the long whirlings in the crucible of history. Some one has said that all recent literature is one gigantic plagiarism from the past. Why plagiarize with toil the toils of the past, when all that is good in them lives, necessarily and of its own tendency, in the winged and growing spirit of man? The stream flows in a channel, and is colored by all the ores of its banks, but it would be absurd for it to attempt to take the channel up and carry it along with itself out into the sea. Why should the tinted water of life attempt to carry along with it not only the tint, but also the bank, ages back, from which the tint proceeds?

As the world goes on, the multitude of books increases. They grow as grows the human race,—but, unlike the human race, they have a material immortality here below. Fossil books, unlike fossil rocks, have a power of reproduction. Every new year leaves not only a new inheritance, but generally a larger one than ever before. What is to be the result? The ultimate prospect is portentous. If England has produced ten thousand volumes of fiction (about three thousand new novels) during the last forty years, how many books of all kinds has Christendom to answer for in the same period? If the British Museum makes it a point to preserve a copy of everything that is published, how long will it be before the whole world will not be sufficient to contain the multitude thereof? At present all the collections of the Museum, books, etc., occupy only forty acres on the soil, and an average of two hundred feet towards the sky. But even these outlines indicate a block of space which under geometrical increase would in the shortest of geological periods make a more complete conquest of the earth than has ever been made by fire or water. To say nothing of the sorrows of the composition of these new literary stores, how is man, whose years are threescore-and-ten, going to read them? Surely the green earth will be transformed into a wilderness of books, and man, reduced from the priest and interpreter of Nature to a bookworm, will be like the beasts which perish.

The eye of fancy lately witnessed in a dream the vision of an age far in the future. The surface of the earth was covered with lofty rectangles, built up coral-like from small rectangles. There was neither tree nor herb nor living creature. Walled paths, excavated ruts, alone broke the desert-like prospect, as the burrows of life. Penetrating into these, the eye saw men walking beneath the striated piles, with heads bent forward and nervous fingering of brow. There the whole world, such as we have known it, was buried beneath volumes, past all enumeration. There was neither fauna nor flora, neither wilderness, tempest, nor any familiar look of Nature, but only one boundless contiguity of books. There was only man and space and one unceasing library, and the men neither ate nor slept nor spoke. Nature was transformed into the processes and products of writing, and man was now no longer lover, friend, peasant, merchant, naturalist, traveller, gourmet, mechanic, warrior, worshipper, but only an author. All other faculties had been lost to him, and all resources for anything else had fled from his universe. Anon some wrinkled, fidgety, cogitative being in human form would add a new volume to some slope or tower of the monstrous omni-patulent mass, or some sharp-glancing youth, with teeth set unevenly on edge, would pull out a volume, look greedily and half-believingly for a few moments, return it, and slink away. "What is this world, and what means this life?" cried I, addressing an old man, who had just tossed a volume aloft. "Where are we, and what about this? Tell me, for I have not before seen and do not know." He glanced a moment, then spoke, like a shade in hell, as follows:—"This is the world, and here is human life. Man long enjoyed it, with wonderful fulness and freshness of being. But a madness seized him; everybody wrote books; the evil grew more and more; nought else was an object of pursuit; till at last the earth was covered with tomes, and for

long ages now it has been buried beyond the reach of mortal. All forms of life were exterminated. Man himself survives only as a literary shadow. Each one writes a book, or a few books, and dies, vanishing into thin air. Such is life,—a hecatomb!"

But even if it be supposed that mind could survive the toil, and the earth the quantity of our accumulating books, there are other difficulties. There are other imperative limitations, beyond which the art of writing cannot go. Letters themselves limit the possibilities of literature. For there is only a certain number of letters. These letters are capable of only a certain number of combinations into words. This limited number of possible words is capable only of a certain number of arrangements. Conceive the effect when all these capabilities shall be exhausted! It will no longer be possible for a new thing to be said or written. We shall have only to select and repeat from the past. Writing shall be reduced to the making of extracts, and speaking to the making of quotations. Yet the condition of things would certainly be improved. As there is now a great deal of writing without thinking, so then thinking could go on without writing. A man would be obliged to think out and up to his result, as we do now; but whether his processes and conclusions were wise or foolish, he would find them written out for him in advance. The process of selection would be all. The immense amount of writing would cease. Authors would be extinct. Thinkers could find their ideas stated in the best possible way, and the most effective arguments in their favor. If this event seems at all unlikely to any one, let him only reflect on the long geological ages, and on the innumerable writings, short and long, now published daily,—from Mr. Buckle to the newspapers. Estimate everything in type daily throughout Christendom. If so much is done in a day, how much in a few decades of centuries? Surely, at our present rate, in a very conceivable length of time, the resources of two alphabets would be exhausted. And this may be the reason and providence in the amount of writing now going on,—to get human language written up. The earth is as yet not half explored, and its cultivation and development, in comparison with what shall some time be, have scarcely begun. Will not the race be blessed, when its two mortal foes, Nature and the alphabet, have been finally and forever subdued?

This necessary finiteness of literature may be illustrated in another way. An English mathematician of the seventeenth century applied the resources of his art to an enumeration of human ideas. He believed that he could calculate with rigorous exactness the number of ideas of which the human mind is susceptible. This number, according to him, (and he has never been disputed,) was 3,155,760,000. Even if we allowed a million of words to one idea, according to our present practice,—instead of a single word to an idea, which would seem reasonable,—still, all the possible combinations of words and ideas would finally be exhausted. The ideas would give out, to be sure, a million of times before the words; but the latter would meet their doom at last. All possible ideas would then be served up in all possible ways for all men, who could order them according to their appetites, and we could dispense with cooks ever after. The written word would be the finished record of all possible worlds, in gross and in detail.

But the problem whose solution has thus been attempted by desperate suggestions has, by changing its elements, nullified our calculation. We have been plotting to cast out the demon of books; and, lo! three other kindred demons of quarterlies, monthlies, and newspapers have joined fellowship with it, and our latter estate is worse than our first. Indeed, we may anticipate the speedy fossilization and extinction of books, while these younger broods alone shall occupy the earth. Our libraries are already hardly more than museums, they will soon be *mausoleums*, while all our reading is of the winged words of the hurried contributor. Some of the most intelligent and influential men in large cities do not read a book once a year. The Cadmean magic has passed from the hands of hierophants into those of the people. Literature has fallen from the domain of immortal thought to that of ephemeral speech, from the conditions of a fine to those of a mechanical art. The order of genius has been abolished by an all-prevailing popular opinion. The elegance and taste of patient culture have been vulgarized by forced contact with the unpresentable facts thrust upon us by the

ready writer. Everybody now sighs for the new periodical, while nobody has read the literature of any single age in any single country.

How like mountain-billows of barbarism do the morning journals, reeking with unkempt facts, roll in upon the peaceful thought of the soul! How like savage hordes from some remote star, some nebulous chaos, that has never yet been recognized in the cosmical world, do they trample upon the organic and divine growths of culture, laying waste the well-ordered and fairly adorned fields of the mind, demolishing the intellectual highways which great engineering thinkers have constructed within us, and reducing a domain in which poetry and philosophy, with their sacred broods, dwelt gloriously together, to an undistinguishable level of ruin! How helpless are we before a newspaper! We sit down to it a highly developed and highly civilized being; we leave it a barbarian. Step by step, blow by blow, has everything that was nobly formed within us been knocked down, and we are made illustrations of the atomic theory of the soul, every atom being a separate savage, after the social theory of Hobbes. We are crazed by a multitudinousness of details, till the eye sees no picture, the ear hears no music, the taste finds no beauty, and the reason grasps no system. The only wonder is that the diabolical invention of Faust or Gutenberg has not already transformed the growths of the mind into a fauna and flora of perdition.

It was a sad barbarism when men ran wild with their own impulses, unable to control the fierceness of instinct. It is a sadder barbarism when men yield to every impulse from without, with no imperial dignity in the soul, which closes the apartments against the violence of the world and frowns away unseemly intruders. We have no spontaneous enthusiasm, no spiritual independence, no inner being, obedient only to its own law. We do not plough the billows of time with true beak and steady weight, but float, a tossed cork, now one side up and now the other. We live the life of an insect accidentally caught within a drum. Every steamer that comes hits the drum a beat; every telegram taps it; it echoes with every representative's speech, reverberates with every senator's more portly effort, screams at every accident. Everything that is done in the universe seems to be done only to make a noise upon it. Every morning, whatsoever thing has been changed, and whatsoever thing has been unchanged, during the night, comes up to batter its report on the omni-audient tympanum of the universe, the drum-head of the press. And then we are inside of it. It may be music to the gods who dwell beyond the blue ether, but it is terrible confusion to us.

Virgil exhausted the resources of his genius in his portraiture of Fame:—

> "Fama, malum, quo non aliud velocius ullum:
> Mobilitate viget, viresque acquirit eundo:
> Parva metu primo; mox sese attollit in auras,
> Ingrediturque solo, et caput inter nubila condit.
>
> *** *** *** ***
>
> Tot linguæ, totidem ora sonant, tot subrigit aures.
> Nocte volat cœli medio terræque per umbram
> Stridens, nec dulci declinat lumina somno."

What would he have done, had he known our modern monster, the alphabet-tongued, steel-sinewed, kettle-lunged Rumor? It is a sevenfold horror. The Virgilian Fame was not a mechanical, but a living thing; it grew as it ran; it at least gave a poetical impression. Its story grew as legends grow, full to the brim of the instincts of the popular genius. It left its traces as it passed, and the minds of all who saw and heard rested in delightful wonder till something new happened. But the fact which printed Rumor throws through the atmosphere is coupled not with, the beauty of poetry, but with the madness of dissertation. Everybody is not only informed that the Jackats defeated the

Magnats on the banks of the Kaiger on the last day of last week, but this news is conveyed to them in connection with a series of revelations about the relations of said fact to the universe. The primordial germ is not poetical, but dissertational. It tends to no organic creation, but to any abnormal and multitudinous display of suggestions, hypotheses, and prophecies. The item is shaped as it passes, not by the hopes and fears of the soul, but grows by accumulation of the dull details of prose. We have neither the splendid bewilderments of the twelfth, nor the cold illumination of the eighteenth century, but bewilderments without splendor, and coldness without illumination. The world is too wide-awake for thought,—the atmosphere is too bright for intellectual achievements. We have the wonders and sensations of a day; but where are the fathomless profundities, the long contemplations, and the silent solemnities of life? The newspapers are marvels of mental industry. They show how much work can be done in a day, but they never last more than a day. Sad will it be when the genius of ephemerality has invaded all departments of human actions and human motives! Farewell then to deep thoughts, to sublime self-sacrifice, to heroic labors for lasting results! Time is turned into a day, the mind knows only momentary impressions, the weary way of art is made as short as a turnpike, and the products of genius last only about as long as any mood of the weather. Bleak and changeable March will rule the year in the intellectual heavens.

What symbol could represent this matchless embodiment of all the activities, this tremendous success, this frenzied public interest? A monster so large, and yet so quick,—so much bulk combined with so much readiness,—reaching so far, and yet striking so often! Who can conceive that productive state of mind in which some current fact is all the time whirling the universe about it? Who can understand the mania of the leader-writer, who never thinks of a subject without discovering the possibility of a column concerning it,—who never looks upon his plate of soup without mentally reviewing in elaborate periods the whole vegetable, animal, and mineral kingdoms?

But what is the advantage of newspapers? Forsooth, popular intelligence. The newspaper is, in the first place, the legitimate and improved successor of the fiery cross, beacon-light, signal-smoking summit, hieroglyphic mark, and bulletin-board. It is, in addition to this, a popular daily edition and application of the works of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Lord Bacon, Vattel, and Thomas Jefferson. On one page it records items, on the other it shows the relations between those items and the highest thought. Yet the whole circle is accomplished daily. The journal is thus the synopticized, personified, incarnate madness of the day,—for to-day is always mad, and becomes a thing of reason only when it becomes yesterday. A proper historical fact is one of the rarest shots in the journalist's bag, as time is sure to prove. If we had newspaper-accounts of the age of Augustus, the chances are that no other epoch in history would be so absolutely problematical, and Augustus himself would be lucky, if he were not resolved into a myth, and the journal into sibylline oracles. The dissertational department is equally faulty; for to first impressions everything on earth is chameleon-like. The Scandinavian Divinities, the Past, the Present, and the Future, could look upon each other, but neither of them upon herself. But in the journal the Present is trying to behold itself; the same priestess utters and explains the oracle. Thus the journal is the immortal reproduction of the *jour des dupes*. The editors are like the newsboys, shouting the news which they do not understand.

The public mind has given itself up to it. It claims the right to pronounce all the newspapers very bad, but has renounced the privilege of not reading them. Every one is made *particeps criminis* in the course of events. Nothing takes place in any quarter of the globe without our assistance. We have to connive at *omne scibile*. About everything natural and human, infernal and divine, there is a general consultation of mankind, and we are all made responsible for the result. Yet this constant interruption of our private intellectual habits and interests is both an impertinence and a nuisance. Why send us all the crudities? Why call upon us till you know what you want? Why speak till you have got your brain and your mouth clear? Why may we not take the universe for granted when we get up in the morning, instead of proceeding directly to measure it over again? Once a year is often enough for anybody but the government to hear anything about India, China, Patagonia, and the other flaps and

coat-tails of the world. Let the North Pole never be mentioned again till we can melt the icebergs by a burning mirror before we start. Don't report another asteroid till the number reaches a thousand; that will be time enough for us to change our peg. Let us hear nothing of the small speeches, but Congress may publish once a week a bulletin of what it has done. The President and Cabinet may publish a bulletin, not to exceed five lines, twice a week, or on rare occasions and in a public emergency once a day. The right, however, shall be reserved to the people to prohibit the Cabinet from saying anything more aloud on a particular public question, till they have settled it. Let no mail-steamer pass between here and Europe oftener than once a month,—let all other steamers be forbidden to bring news, and the utterance of news by passengers be treated either as a public libel or nuisance, or as high treason. Leave the awful accidents to the parties whom they concern, and don't trouble us, unless they have the merit of novelty as well as of horror. Tell us only the highest facts, the boldest strokes, the critical moments of daily chaos, and save us from multitudinous nonsense.

There are some things which we like to keep out of the newspapers,—whose dignity is rather increased by being saved from them. There are certain momentary and local interests which have become shy of the horn of the reporter. The leading movements in politics, the advanced guard of scientific and artistic achievement, the most interesting social phenomena rather increase than diminish their importance by currency in certain circles instead of in the press. The prestige of some events in metropolitan cities, a marriage or a party, depends on their social repute, and they are ambitiously kept out of the journalist's range. Moreover, in politics, a few leading men meet together for consultation, and–but the mysteries of political strategy are unknown here. Certainly the journalist has great influence in them, but the clubs are centres of information and discussions of a character and interest to which all that newspapers do is second-rate. Science has never been popularized directly by the newspapers, but the erudition of a *savant* reaches to the people by creating an atmospheric change, in which task the journals may have their influence. Rightly or wrongly, the administration in civil affairs at Washington has not listened to the press much, but it may be different when a new election approaches. The social, political, scientific, and military Dii Majores all depend on the journal for a part of their daily breakfast, but all soar above it.

A well-known and rather startling story describes a being, which seems to have been neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, which a man made out of the elements, by the use of his hands, and by the processes of chemistry, and which at the last galvanic touch rushed forth from the laboratory, and from the horrified eyes of its creator, an independent, scoffing, remorseless, and inevitable enemy of him to whose rash ingenuity it owed its origin.

Such a creature symbolizes some of our human arts and initiations. Once organized by genius and consecrated by precedent, they become mighty elements in history, revelling amid the wealthy energy of life, exhausting the forces of the intellect, clipping the tendrils of affection, becoming colossal in the architecture of society and dorsal in its traditions, and tyrannizing with the heedless power of an element, to the horror of the pious soul which called it into existence, over all departments of human activity. Such an art, having passed a period of tameless and extravagant dominance, at length becomes a fossil, and is regarded only as an evidence of social upheaving in a remote and unaccountable age.

To charge such a creature with monstrosity during the period of its power is simply to expose one's self to popular jeers. Having immense respect for majorities in this country, we only venture obscurely to hint, that, of all arts, none before has ever been so threatening, curious, and fascinating a monster as that of printing. We merely suggest the hypothesis, novel since some centuries, that old Faustus and Gutenberg were as much inspired by the Evil One as they have been fabled to be, when they carved out of a mountain of ore the instrument yclept type, to completely exhaust the possibilities of which is of late announced as the sum of human destiny. They lived under the hallucination of dawning literature, when printed books implied sacred and classical perfection; and they could by no means have foreseen the royal folios of the "New York Herald" and "Tribune," or the marvellous

inanities about the past, present, and future, which figure in an indescribable list of duodecimo fiction, theology, and popular science.

But there is nothing so useless as to protest against a universal fashion. Every epoch must work out its own problem in its own way; and it may be that it is appointed unto mankind to work through all possible mistakes as the condition of finally attaining the truth. The only way is, to encourage the spirit of every age, to hurry on the climax. The practical *reductio ad absurdum* and consequent explosion will soon accomplish themselves.

But a more palpable reason against protesting is, that literature in its different branches, now as ever, commands the services of the finest minds. It is the literary character, of which the elder Disraeli has written the natural history, which now as ever creates the books, the magazines, the newspapers. That sanctified bookworm was the first to codify the laws, customs, habits, and idiosyncrasies of literary men. He was the Justinian of the life of genius. He wandered in abstraction through the deserted alcoves of libraries, studying and creating the political economy of thought. What long diversities of character, what mysterious realms of experience, what wild waywardness of heavenly endowments, what heroism of inward struggle, what shyness towards society, what devotion to the beckoning ideal of art, what defeats and what triumphs, what sufferings and joys, both in excess, were revealed by him, the great political economist of genius! In his apostolic view, genius alone consecrated literature, and made a literary life sacred. Genius was to him that peculiar and spontaneous devotion to letters which made its possessor indifferent to everything else. For a man without this heavenly stamp to engage in literature was simply for him to rush upon his fate, and become a public nuisance. Literature in its very nature is precarious, and must be plucked from the brink of fate, from the mouth of the dragon. The literary man runs the risk of being destroyed in a thousand ways. He has no track laid, no instituted aids, no specified course of action. The machineries of life are not for him. He enters into no one of the departments of human routine. He has no relations with the course of the dull world; he is not quite a man, as the world goes, and not at all an angel, as the celestials see. He must be his own motive, path, and guide, his own priest, king, and law. The world may be his footstool, and may be his slough of despond, but is never his final end. His aims are transcendental, his realm is art, his interests ideal, his life divine, his destiny immortal. All the old theories of saintship are revived in him. He is in the world, but not of it. Shadows of infinitude are his realities. He sees only the starry universe, and the radiant depths of the soul. Martyrdom may desolate, but cannot terrify him. If he be a genius, if his soul crave only his idea, and his body fare unconsciously well on bread and water, then his lot is happy, and fortune can present no ills which will not shrink before his burning eye. But if he be less than this, he is lost, the sport of devouring elements. As he fights fate on the border of ruin, so much the more should he be animated by courage, ambition, pride, purpose, and faith. To him literature is a high adventure, and impossible as a profession. A profession is an instituted department of action, resting upon universal and constant needs, and paying regular dividends. But the fine arts must in their nature be lawless. Appointments cannot be made for them any more than for the thunder-storms which sweep the sky. They die when they cease to be wild. Literary life, at its best, is a desperate play, but it is with guineas, and not with coppers, to all who truly play it. Its elements would not be finer, were they the golden and potent stars of alchemistic and astrological dreams.

Such was genius, and such was literature, in the representation of their first great lawgiver. But the world has changed. The sad story of the calamities of authors need not be repeated. We live in the age of authors triumphant. By swiftly succeeding and countless publications they occupy the eye of the world, and achieve happiness before their death. The stratagems of literature mark no longer a struggle between genius and the bailiffs. What was once a desperate venture is now a lucrative business. What was once a martyrdom is now its own reward. What once had saintly unearthliness is now a powerful motor among worldly interests. What was once the fatality of genius is now the aspiration of fools. The people have turned to reading, and have become a more liberal patron than

even the Athenian State, monastic order, or noble lord. No longer does the literary class wander about the streets, gingerbread in its coat-pockets, and rhymes written on scraps of paper from the gutter in its waistcoat-pockets. No longer does it unequally compete with clowns and jockeys for lordly recognition. No longer are the poet and the fool court-rivals. No longer does it look forward to the jail as an occasional natural resting-place and paradise. No longer must the author renounce the rank and robe of a gentleman to fall from airy regions far below the mechanical artists to the level of clodhoppers, even whose leaden existence was a less precarious matter. The order of scholars has ceased to be mendicant, vagabond, and eremite. It no longer cultivates blossoms of the soul, but manufactures objects of barter. Now is the happy literary epoch, when to be intellectual and omniscient is the public and private duty of every man. To read newspapers by the billion and books by the million is now the common law. We can conceive of Disraeli moaning that the Titan interests of the earth have overthrown the celestial hierarchy,—that the realm of genius has been stormed by worldly workers,—that literature, like the angels, has fallen from its first estate,—and that authors, no longer the disinterested and suffering apostles, of art, have chosen rather to bear the wand of power and luxury than to be inspired. We can imagine his horror at the sacrilegious vulgarization of print, that people without taste rush into angelic metre, that dunces and sages thrive together on the public indiscrimination. How would he marvel to see literary reputations born, grow old, and die within a season, the owners thereof content to be damned or forgotten eternally for a moment's incense or an equally fugitive shilling. Nectar and ambrosia mean to them only meanness, larceny, sacrilege, and bread and butter.

And yet, notwithstanding the imaginary reproaches of our great literary church-father, the most preciously endowed minds are still toiling in letters. The sad and tortured devotion of genius still works itself out in them. Writing is now a marvellous craft and industry. The books which last, the books of a season, the quarterlies, monthlies, weeklies, dailies, and even the hourlies, are among the institutions of its fostering. Nor should that vehicle, partly of intelligence, but chiefly of sentiment, the postal system, be unmentioned, which men and women both patronize, each after their kind. Altogether, perhaps, in some way or other, seven-eighths of the life of man is taken up by the Cadmean Art. The whole fair domain of learning belongs to it; for nowhere now, in garden, grove, or Stoical Porch, with only the living voices of man and Nature, do students acquaint themselves with the joyous solemnities, the mysterious certainties of thought. The mind lives in a universe of type. There is no other art in which so desperate adventures are made. Indeed, the normal mental state of the abundant writer is a marvellous phenomenon. The literary faculty is born of the marriage of chronic desperation with chronic trust. This may account in part for that peculiar condition of mind which is both engendered and required by abundant writing. A bold abandon, a desperate guidance, a thoughtless ratiocination, a mechanical swaying of rhetoric, are the grounds of dissertation. A pause for a few days, a visit to the country, anything that would seem designed to restore the mind to its normal state, destroys the faculty. The weary penman, who wishes his chaotic head could be relieved by being transformed even as by Puck, knows that very whirling chaos is the condition of his multitudinous periods. It seems as if some special sluices of the soul must be opened to force the pen. One man, on returning to his desk from a four weeks' vacation, took up an unfinished article which he had left, and marvelled that such writing should ever have proceeded from him. He could hardly understand it, still less could he conceive of the mental process by which he had once created it. That process was a sort of madness, and the discipline of newspapers is inflicting it alike upon writers and readers. Demoralization is the result of a life-long devotion to the maddening rumors of the day. It takes many a day to recall that fierce caprice, as of an Oriental despot, with which he watches the tiger-fights of ideas, and strikes off periods, as the tyrant strikes off heads.

And while no other art commands so universal homage, no other is so purely artificial, so absolutely unsymbolical. The untutored mind sees nothing in a printed column. A library has no natural impressiveness. It is not in the shape of anything in this world of infinite beauty. The

barbarians of Omri destroyed one without a qualm. They have occupied apartments in seraglios, but the beauties have never feared them as rivals. Of all human employments, writing is the farthest removed from any touch of Nature. It is at most a symbolism twice dead and buried. The poetry in it lies back of a double hypothesis. Supposing the original sounds to have once been imitations of the voices of Nature, those sounds have now run completely away from what they once represented; and supposing that letters were once imitations of natural signs, they have long since lost the resemblance, and have become independent entities. Whatever else is done by human artifice has in it some relic of Nature, some touch of life. Painting copies to the eye, music charms the ear, and all the useful arts have something of the aboriginal way of doing things about them. Even speech has a living grace and power, by the play of the voice and eye, and by the billowy flushes of the countenance. Mental energy culminates in its modulations, while the finest physical features combine to make them a consummate work of art. But all the musical, ocular, and facial beauties are absent from writing. The savage knows, or could quickly guess, the use of the brush or chisel, the shuttle or locomotive, but not of the pen. Writing is the only dead art, the only institute of either gods or men so artificial that the natural mind can discover nothing significant in it.

For instance, take one of the disputed statements of the Nicene Creed, examine it by the nicest powers of the senses, study it upwards, downwards, and crosswise, experiment to learn if it has any mysterious chemical forces in it, consider its figures in relation to any astrological positions, to any natural signs of whirlwinds, tempests, plagues, famine, or earthquakes, try long to discover some hidden symbolism in it, and confess finally that no man unregenerate to letters, by any *a priori* or empirical knowledge, could have at all suspected that a bit of dirty parchment, with an ecclesiastical scrawl upon it, would have power to drive the currents of history, inspire great national passions, and impel the wars and direct the ideas of an epoch. The conflicts of the iconoclasts can be understood even by a child in its first meditations over a picture-book; hieroglyphics may represent or suggest their objects by some natural association; but the literary scrawl has a meaning only to the initiated. A book is the prince of witch-work. Everything is contained in it; but even a superior intelligence would have to go to school to get the key to its mysterious treasures.

And as the art is thus removed from Nature, so its devotees withdraw themselves from life. Of no other class so truly as of writers can it be said that they sacrifice the real to the ideal, life to fame. They conquer the world by renouncing it. Its fleeting pleasures, its enchantment of business or listlessness, its social enjoyments, the vexations and health-giving bliss of domestic life, and all wandering tastes, must be forsaken. A power which pierces, and an ambition which enjoys the future, accepts the martyrdom of the present. They feel loneliness in their own age, while with universal survey viewing the beacon-lights of history across the peaks of generations. Their seat of life is the literary faculty, and they prune and torture themselves only to maintain in this the highest intensity and capacity. They are in some sort rebels battling against time, not the humble well-doer content simply to live and bless God. Between them and living men there is the difference which exists between analytical and geometrical mathematics: the former has to do with signs, the latter with realities. The former contains the laws of the physical world, but a man may know and use them like an adept, and yet be ignorant of physics. He may know all there is of algebra, without seeing that the universe is masked in it. The signs would be not means, but ultimates to it. So a writer may never penetrate through the veil of language to the realities behind,—may know only the mechanism, and not the spirit of learning and literature. His mind is then skeleton-like,—his thought is the shadow of a shade.

And yet is not life greater than art? Why transform real ideas and sentiments into typographical fossils? Why have we forgotten the theory of human life as a divine vegetation? Why not make our hearts the focus of the lights which we strive to catch in books? Why should the wealthy passivity of the Oriental genius be so little known among us? Why conceive of success only as an outward fruit plucked by conscious struggle? Banish books, banish reading, and how much time and strength would be improvised in which to benefit each other! We might become ourselves embodiments of all

the truth and beauty and goodness now stagnant in libraries, and might spread their aroma through the social atmosphere. The dynamics would supplant the mechanics of the soul. In the volume of life the literary man knows only the indexes; but he would then be introduced to the radiant, fragrant, and buoyant contents, to the beauty and the mystery, to the great passions and long contemplations. The eternal spicy breeze would transform the leaden atmosphere of his thought. An outlaw of the universe for his sins, he would then be restored to the realities of the heart and mind. He would then for the first time discover the difference between skill and knowledge. Readers and writers would then be succeeded by human beings. The golden ante-Cadmean age would come again. Literary sanctity having become a tradition, there would be an end of its pretentious counterfeits. The alphabet, decrepit with its long and vast labors, would at last be released. The whole army of writers would take their place among the curiosities of history. The Alexandrian thaumaturgists, the Byzantine historians, the scholastic dialecticians, the serial novelists, and the daily dissertationists, strung together, would make a glittering chain of monomaniacs. Social life is a mutual joy; reading may be rarely indulged without danger to sanity; but writing, unless the man have genius, is but creating new rubbish, the nucleus of new deltas of obstruction, till the river of life shall lose its way to the ocean, and the Infinite be shut out altogether. The old bibliopole De Bury flattered himself that he admired wisdom because it purchaseth such vast delight. He had in mind the luxury of reading, and did not think that in this world wisdom always hides its head or goes to the stake. Even if literature were not to be abolished altogether, it is safe to think that the world would be better off, if there were less writing. There should be a division of labor; some should read and write, as some ordain laws, create philosophies, tend shops, make chairs,—but why should everybody dabble with literature?

In all hypotheses as to the more remote destiny of literature, we can but be struck by the precariousness of its existence. It is art imperishable and ever-changing material. A fire once extinguished perhaps half the world's literature, and struck thousands from the list of authors. The forgetfulness of mankind in the mysterious mediæval age; diminished by more than half the world of books. There are many books which surely, and either rapidly or slowly, resolve themselves into the elements, but the process cannot be seen. A whole army of books perishes with every revolution of taste. And yet the amount of current writing surpasses the strength of man's intellect or the length of his years. Surely, the press is very much of a nuisance as well as a blessing. Its products are getting very much in the way, and the impulse of the world is too strong to allow itself to be clogged by them. Something must be done.

Among possibilities, let the following be suggested. The world may perhaps return from unsymbolical to symbolical writing. There is a science older than anything but shadowy traditions, and immemorially linked with religion, poetry, and art. It is the almost forgotten science of symbolism. Symbols, as compared with letters, are a higher and more potent style of expression. They are the earthly shadows of eternal truth. It is the language of the fine arts, of painting, sculpture, the stage, —it will be the language of life, when, rising in the scale of being, we shall return from the dead sea of literature to the more energetic algebra of symbolical meanings. In these, the forms of the reason and of Nature come into visible harmony; the hopes of man find their shadows in the struggles of the universe, and the lights of the spirit cluster myriad-fold around the objects of Nature. Let Phœnician language be vivified into the universal poetry of symbolism, and thought would then become life, instead of the ghost of life. Current literature would give way to a new and true mythology; authors and editors would suffer a transformation similar to that of type-setters into artists, and of newsboys into connoisseurs; and the figures of a noble humanity would fill the public mind, no longer confused and degraded by the perpetual vision of leaden and unsuggestive letters. From that time prose would be extinct, and poetry would be all in all. History would renew its youth,—would find, after the struggles, attainments, and developments of its manhood, that there is after all nothing wiser in thought, no truer law, than the instincts of childhood.

Or, again: improvements have already been made which promise as an ultimate result to transform the largest library into a miniature for the pocket. Stenography may yet reach to a degree that it will be able to write folios on the thumb-nail, and dispose all the literature of the world comfortably in a gentleman's pocket, before he sets out on his summer excursion. The contents of vast tomes, bodies of history and of science, may be so reduced that the eye can cover them at a glance, and the process of reading be as rapid as that of thought The mind, instead of wearying of slow perusal, would have to spur its lightning to keep pace with the eye. Many books are born of mere vagueness and cloudiness of thought. All such, when thus compressed into their reality, would go out in eternal night. There is something overpowering in the conception of the high pressure to which life in all its departments may some time be brought. The mechanism of reading and writing would be slight. The mental labor of comprehending would be immense. The mind, instead of being subdued, would be spurred, by what it works in. We are now cramped and checked by the overwhelming amount of linguistic red-tape in which we have to operate; but then men, freed from these bonds, the husks of thought almost all thrown away, would be purer, live faster, do greater, die younger. What magnificent physical improvements, we may suppose, will then aid the powers of the soul! The old world would then be subdued, nevermore to strike a blow at its lithe conqueror, man. The department of the newspaper, with inconceivable photographic and telegraphic resources, may then be extended to the solar or the stellar systems, and the turmoils of all creation would be reported at our breakfast-tables. Men would rise every morning to take an intelligible account of the aspects and the prospects of the universe.

Or, once more: shall we venture into the speculative domain of the philosophy of history, and give the rationale of our times? What is the divine mission of the great marvel of our age, namely, its periodical and fugitive literature? The intellectual and moral world of mankind reforms itself at the outset of new civilizations, as Nature reforms itself at every new geological epoch. The first step toward a reform, as toward a crystallization, is a solution. There was a solvent period between the unknown Orient and the greatness of Greece, between the Classic and the Middle Ages,—and now humanity is again solvent, in the transition from the traditions which issued out of feudalism to the novelty of democratic crystallization. But as the youth of all animals is prolonged in proportion to their dignity in the scale of being, so is it with the children of history. Destiny is the longest-lived of all things. We are not going to accomplish it all at once. We have got to fight for it, to endure the newspapers in behalf of it. We are in a place where gravitation changing goes the other way. For the first time, all reigning ideas now find their focus in the popular mind. The giant touches the earth to recover his strength. History returns to the people. After two thousand years, popular intelligence is again to be revived. And under what new conditions? We live in a telescopic, microscopic, telegraphic universe, all the elements of which are brought together under the combined operation of fire and water, as erst, in primitive Nature, vulcanic and plutonic forces struggled together in the face of heaven and hell to form the earth. The long ranges of history have left with us one definite idea: it is that of progress, the intellectual passion of our time. All our science demonstrates it, all our poetry sings it. Democracy is the last term of political progress. Popular intelligence and virtue are the conditions of democracy. To produce these is the mission of periodical literature. The vast complexities of the world, all knowledge and all purpose, are being reduced in the crucible of the popular mind to a common product. Knowledge lives neither in libraries nor in rare minds, but in the general heart. Great men are already mythical, and great ideas are admitted only so far as we, the people, can see something in them. By no great books or long treatises, but by a ceaseless flow of brevities and repetitions, is the pulverized thought of the world wrought into the soul. It is amazing how many significant passages in history and in literature are reproduced in the essays of magazines and the leaders of newspapers by allusion and illustration, and by constant iteration beaten into the heads of the people. The popular mind is now feeding upon and deriving tone from the best things that literary commerce can produce from the whole world, past and present. There is no finer example

of the popularization of science than Agassiz addressing the American people through the columns of a monthly magazine. Of the popular heart which used to rumble only about once in a century the newspapers are now the daily organs. They are creating an organic general mind, the soil for future grand ideas and institutes. As the soul reaches a higher stage in its destiny than ever before, the scaffolding by which it has risen is to be thrown aside. The quality of libraries is to be transferred to the soul. Spiritual life is now to exert its influence directly, without the mechanism of letters,—is going to exert itself through the social atmosphere,—and all history and thought are to be perpetuated and to grow, not in books, but in minds.

And yet, though we thus justify contemporary writing, we can but think, that, after long ages of piecemeal and *bon-mot* literature, we shall at length return to serious studies, vast syntheses, great works. The nebulous world of letters shall be again concentred into stars. The epoch of the printing-press has run itself nearly through; but a new epoch and a new art shall arise, by which the achievements and the succession of genius shall be perpetuated.

# THE BRIDGE OF CLOUD

Burn, O evening hearth, and waken
Pleasant visions, as of old!
Though the house by winds be shaken,
Safe I keep this room of gold!

Ah, no longer wizard Fancy
Builds its castles in the air,
Luring me by necromancy
Up the never-ending stair!

But, instead, it builds me bridges
Over many a dark ravine,
Where beneath the gusty ridges
Cataracts dash and roar unseen.

And I cross them, little heeding
Blast of wind or torrent's roar,
As I follow the receding
Footsteps that have gone before.

Nought avails the imploring gesture,
Nought avails the cry of pain!
When I touch the flying vesture,
'Tis the gray robe of the rain.

Baffled I return, and, leaning
O'er the parapets of cloud,
Watch the mist that intervening
Wraps the valley in its shroud.

And the sounds of life ascending
Faintly, vaguely, meet the ear,
Murmur of bells and voices blending
With the rush of waters near.

Well I know what there lies hidden,
Every tower and town and farm,
And again the land forbidden
Reassumes its vanished charm.

Well I know the secret places,
And the nests in hedge and tree;
At what doors are friendly faces,
In what hearts a thought of me.

Through the mist and darkness sinking,
Blown by wind and beaten by shower,
Down I fling the thought I'm thinking,
Down I toss this Alpine flower.

# THE ELECTRIC GIRL OF LA PERRIÈRE

Eighteen years ago there occurred in one of the provinces of France a case of an abnormal character, marked by extraordinary phenomena,—interesting to the scientific, and especially to the medical world. The authentic documents in this case are rare; and though the case itself is often alluded to, its details have never, so far as I know, been reproduced from these documents in an English dress, or presented in trustworthy form to the American public. It occurred in the Commune of La Perrière, situated in the Department of Orne, in January, 1846.

It was critically observed, at the time, by Dr. Verger, an intelligent physician of Bellesme, a neighboring town. He details the result of his observations in two letters addressed to the "Journal du Magnétisme,"—one dated January 29, the other February 2, 1846.[1] The editor of that journal, M. Hébert, (de Garny,) himself repaired to the spot, made the most minute researches into the matter, and gives us the result of his observations and inquiries in a report, also published in the "Journal du Magnétisme."[2] A neighboring proprietor, M. Jules de Farémont, followed up the case with care, from its very commencement, and has left on record a detailed report of his observations.[3] Finally, after the girl's arrival in Paris, Dr. Tanchon carefully studied the phenomena, and has given the results in a pamphlet published at the time.[4] He it was, also, who addressed to M. Arago a note on the subject, which was laid before the Academy by that distinguished man, at their session of February 16, 1846.[5] Arago himself had then seen the girl only a few minutes, but even in that brief time had verified a portion of the phenomena.

Dr. Tanchon's pamphlet contains fourteen letters, chiefly from medical men and persons holding official positions in Bellesme, Mortagne, and other neighboring towns, given at length and signed by the writers, all of whom examined the girl, while yet in the country. Their testimony is so circumstantial, so strictly concurrent in regard to all the main phenomena, and so clearly indicative of the care and discrimination with which the various observations were made, that there seems no good reason, unless we find such in the nature of the phenomena themselves, for refusing to give it credence. Several of the writers expressly affirm the accuracy of M. Hébert's narrative, and all of them, by the details they furnish, corroborate it. Mainly from that narrative, aided by some of the observations of M. de Farémont, I compile the following brief statement of the chief facts in this remarkable case.

Angélique Cottin, a peasant-girl fourteen years of age, robust and in good health, but very imperfectly educated and of limited intelligence, lived with her aunt, the widow Loisnard, in a cottage with an earthen floor, close to the Château of Monti-Mer, inhabited by its proprietor, already mentioned, M. de Farémont.

The weather, for eight days previous to the fifteenth of January, 1846, had been heavy and tempestuous, with constantly recurring storms of thunder and lightning. The atmosphere was charged with electricity.

On the evening of that fifteenth of January, at eight o'clock, while Angélique, in company with three other young girls, was at work, as usual, in her aunt's cottage, weaving ladies' silk-net gloves, the frame, made of rough oak and weighing about twenty-five pounds, to which was attached the end of the warp, was upset, and the candlestick on it thrown to the ground. The girls, blaming each other as having caused the accident, replaced the frame, relighted the candle, and went to work again.

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[1] *Journal du Magnétisme*, for 1846, pp. 80-84.

[2] Pp. 89-106.

[3] In Dr. Tanchon's pamphlet, pp. 46-53.

[4] *Enquête, sur l'Authenticité des Phénomènes Électriques d'Angélique Cottin*, par le Dr. Tanchon. Baillière, Paris, 1846.

[5] See Minutes of the Academy, Session of Monday, February 16, 1846.

A second time the frame was thrown down. Thereupon the children ran away, afraid of a thing so strange, and, with the superstition common to their class, dreaming of witchcraft. The neighbors, attracted by their cries, refused to credit their story. So, returning, but with fear and trembling, two of them at first, afterwards a third, resumed their occupation, without the recurrence of the alarming phenomenon. But as soon as the girl Cottin, imitating her companions, had touched her warp, the frame was agitated again, moved about, was upset, and then thrown violently back. The girl was drawn irresistibly after it; but as soon as she touched it, it moved still farther away.

Upon this the aunt, thinking, like the children, that there must be sorcery in the case, took her niece to the parsonage of La Perrière, demanding exorcism. The curate, an enlightened man, at first laughed at her story; but the girl had brought her glove with her, and fixing it to a kitchen-chair, the chair, like the frame, was repulsed and upset, without being touched by Angélique. The curate then sat down on the chair; but both chair and he were thrown to the ground in like manner. Thus practically convinced of the reality of a phenomenon which he could not explain, the good man reassured the terrified aunt by telling her it was some bodily disease, and, very sensibly, referred the matter to the physicians.

The next day the aunt related the above particulars to M. de Farémont; but for the time the effects had ceased. Three days later, at nine o'clock, that gentleman was summoned to the cottage, where he verified the fact that the frame was at intervals thrown back from Angélique with such force, that, when exerting his utmost strength and holding it with both hands, he was unable to prevent its motion. He observed that the motion was partly rotary, from left to right. He particularly noticed that the girl's feet did not touch the frame, and that, when it was repulsed, she seemed drawn irresistibly after it, stretching out her hands, as if instinctively, towards it. It was afterwards remarked, that, when a piece of furniture or other object, thus acted upon by Angélique, was too heavy to be moved, she herself was thrown back, as if by the reaction of the force upon her person.

By this time the cry of witchcraft was raised in the neighborhood, and public opinion had even designated by name the sorcerer who had cast the spell. On the twenty-first of January the phenomena increased in violence and in variety. A chair on which the girl attempted to sit down, though held by three strong men, was thrown off, in spite of their efforts, to several yards' distance. Shovels, tongs, lighted firewood, brushes, books, were all set in motion when the girl approached them. A pair of scissors fastened to her girdle was detached, and thrown into the air.

On the twenty-fourth of January, M. de Farémont took the child and her aunt in his carriage to the small neighboring town of Mamers. There, before two physicians and several ladies and gentlemen, articles of furniture moved about on her approach. And there, also, the following conclusive experiment was tried by M. de Farémont.

Into one end of a ponderous wooden block, weighing upwards of a hundred and fifty pounds, he caused a small hook to be driven. To this he made Angélique fix her silk. As soon as she sat down and her frock touched the block, the latter *was instantly raised three or four inches from the ground; and this was repeated as much as forty times in a minute*. Then, after suffering the girl to rest, M. de Farémont seated himself on the block, and was elevated in the same way. Then *three men placed themselves upon it, and were raised also*, only not quite so high. "It is certain," says M. de Farémont, "that I and one of the most athletic porters of the Halle could not have lifted that block with the three persons seated on it."[6]

Dr. Verger came to Mamers to see Angélique, whom, as well as her family, he had previously known. On the twenty-eighth of January, in the presence of the curate of Saint Martin and of the chaplain of the Bellesme hospital, the following incident occurred. As the child could not sew without pricking herself with the needle, nor use scissors without wounding her hands, they set her to shelling peas, placing a large basket before her. As soon as her dress touched the basket, and she reached her

[6] *Enquête*, etc., p. 49.

hand to begin work, the basket was violently repulsed, and the peas projected upwards and scattered over the room. This was twice repeated, under the same circumstances. Dr. Lemonnier, of Saint Maurice, testifies to the same phenomenon, as occurring in his presence and in that of the Procurator Royal of Mortagne;[7] he noticed that the left hand produced the greater effect. He adds, that, he and another, gentleman having endeavored, with all their strength, to hold a chair on which Angélique sat down, it was violently forced from them, and one of its legs broken.

On the thirtieth of January, M. de Farémont tried the effect of isolation. When, by means of dry glass, he isolated the child's feet and the chair on which she sat, the chair ceased to move, and she remained perfectly quiet. M. Olivier, government engineer, tried a similar experiment, with the same results.[8] A week later, M. Hébert, repeating this experiment, discovered that isolation of the chair was unnecessary; it sufficed to isolate the girl.[9] Dr. Beaumont, vicar of Pin-la-Garenne, noticed a fact, insignificant in appearance, yet quite as conclusive as were the more violent manifestations, as to the reality of the phenomena. Having moistened with saliva the scattered hairs on his own arm, so that they lay flattened, attached to the epidermis, when he approached his arm to the left arm of the girl, the hairs instantly erected themselves. M. Hébert repeated the same experiment several times, always with a similar result.[10]

M. Olivier also tried the following. With a stick of sealing-wax, which he had subjected to friction, he touched the girl's arm, and it gave her a considerable shock; but touching her with another similar stick, that had not been rubbed, she experienced no effect whatever.[11] Yet when M. de Farémont, on the nineteenth of January, tried the same experiment with a stick of sealing-wax and a glass tube, well prepared by rubbing, he obtained no effect whatever. So also a pendulum of light pith, brought into close proximity to her person at various points, was neither attracted nor repulsed, in the slightest degree.[12]

Towards the beginning of February, Angélique was obliged, for several days, to eat standing; she could not sit down on a chair. This fact Dr. Verger repeatedly verified. Holding her by the arm to prevent accident, the moment she touched the chair it was projected from under her, and she would have fallen but for his support. At such times, to take rest, she had to seat herself on the floor, or on a stone provided for the purpose.

On one such occasion, "she approached," says M. de Farémont, "one of those rough, heavy bedsteads used by the peasantry, weighing, with the coarse bedclothes, some three hundred pounds, and sought to lie down on it. The bed shook and oscillated in an incredible manner; no force that I know of is capable of communicating to it such a movement. Then she went to another bed, which was raised from the ground on wooden rollers, six inches in diameter; and it was immediately thrown off the rollers." All this M. de Farémont personally witnessed.[13]

On the evening of the second of February, Dr. Verger received Angélique into his house. On that day and the next, upwards of one thousand persons came to see her. The constant experiments, which on that occasion were continued into the night, so fatigued the poor girl that the effects were sensibly diminished. Yet even then a small table brought near to her was thrown down so violently that it broke to pieces. It was of cherry-wood and varnished.

"In a general way," says Dr. Beaumont-Chardon, "I think the effects were more marked with me than with others, because I never evinced suspicion, and spared her all suffering; and I thought I could observe, that, although her powers were not under the control of her will, yet they were greatest

[7] *Ibid.* p. 40.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 42.
[9] *Ibid.* p. 22.
[10] *Enquête*, etc., p. 22.
[11] *Ibid.* p. 43.
[12] *Ibid.* p. 47.
[13] *Ibid.* p. 49.

when her mind was at ease, and she was in good spirits."[14] It appeared, also, that on waxed, or even tiled floors, but more especially on carpets, the effects were much less than on an earthen floor like that of the cottage where they originally showed themselves.

At first wooden furniture seemed exclusively affected; but at a later period metal also, as tongs and shovels, though in a less degree, appeared to be subjected to this extraordinary influence. When the child's powers were the most active, actual contact was not necessary. Articles of furniture and other small objects moved, if she accidentally approached them.

Up to the sixth of February she had been visited by more than two thousand persons, including distinguished physicians from the towns of Bellesme and Mortagne, and from all the neighborhood, magistrates, lawyers, ecclesiastics, and others. Some gave her money.

Then, in an evil hour, listening to mercenary suggestion, the parents conceived the idea that the poor girl might be made a source of pecuniary gain; and notwithstanding the advice and remonstrance of her true friends, M. de Farémont, Dr. Verger, M. Hébert, and others, her father resolved to exhibit her in Paris and elsewhere.

On the road they were occasionally subjected to serious annoyances. The report of the marvels above narrated had spread far and wide; and the populace, by hundreds, followed the carriage, hooting and abusing the sorceress.

Arrived at the French metropolis, they put up at the Hôtel de Rennes, No. 23, Rue des Deux-Écus. There, on the evening of the twelfth of February, Dr. Tanchon saw Angélique for the first time.

This gentleman soon verified, among other phenomena, the following. A chair, which he held firmly with both hands, was forced back as soon as she attempted to sit down; a middle-sized dining-table was displaced and repulsed by the touch of her dress; a large sofa, on which Dr. Tanchon was sitting, was pushed violently to the wall, as soon as the child sat down beside him. The Doctor remarked, that, when a chair was thrown back from under her, her clothes seemed attracted by it, and adhered to it, until it was repulsed beyond their reach; that the power was greater from the left hand than from the right, and that the former was warmer than the latter, and often trembled, agitated by unusual contractions; that the influence emanating from the girl was intermittent, not permanent, being usually most powerful from seven till nine o'clock in the evening, possibly influenced by the principal meal of the day, dinner, taken at six o'clock; that, if the girl was cut off from contact with the earth, either by placing her feet on a non-conductor or merely by keeping them raised from the ground, the power ceased, and she could remain seated quietly; that, during the paroxysm, if her left hand touched any object, she threw it from her as if it burned her, complaining that it pricked her, especially on the wrist; that, happening one day to touch accidentally the nape of her neck, the girl ran from him, crying out with pain; and that repeated observation assured him of the fact that there was, in the region of the cerebellum, and at the point where the superior muscles of the neck are inserted in the cranium, a point so acutely sensitive that the child would not suffer there the lightest touch; and, finally, that the girl's pulse, often irregular, usually varied from one hundred and five to one hundred and twenty beats a minute.

A curious observation made by this physician was, that, at the moment of greatest action, a cool breeze, or gaseous current, seemed to flow from her person. This he felt on his hand, as distinctly as one feels the breath during an ordinary expiration.[15]

He remarked, also, that the intermittence of the child's power seemed to depend in a measure on her state of mind. She was often in fear lest some one should touch her from behind; the phenomena themselves agitated her; in spite of a month's experience, each time they occurred she drew back, as if alarmed. And all such agitations seemed to diminish her power. When she was careless, and her mind was diverted to something else, the demonstrations were always the most energetic.

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[14] *Enquête*, etc., p. 35. They were greater, also, after meals than before; so Hébert observed. p. 22.

[15] *Enquête*, etc., p. 5.

From the north pole of a magnet, if it touched her finger, she received a sharp shock; while the contact of the south pole produced upon her no effect whatever. This effect was uniform; and the girl could always tell which pole touched her.

Dr. Tanchon ascertained from the mother that no indications of puberty had yet manifested themselves in her daughter's case.

Such is a summary of the facts, embodied in a report drawn up by Dr. Tanchon on the fifteenth of February. He took it with him on the evening of the sixteenth to the Academy of Sciences, and asked M. Arago if he had seen the electric girl, and if he intended to bring her case that evening to the notice of the Academy. Arago replied to both questions in the affirmative, adding,—"If you have seen her, I shall receive from you with pleasure any communication you may have to make."

Dr. Tanchon then read to him the report; and at the session of that evening, Arago presented it, stated what he himself had seen, and proposed that a committee should be appointed to examine the case. His statement was received by his audience with many expressions of incredulity; but they acceded to his suggestion by naming, from the members of the Academy, a committee of six.

It appears that Arago had had but a single opportunity, and for the brief space of less than half an hour, of witnessing the phenomena to which he referred. M. Cholet, the speculator who advanced to her parents the money necessary to bring Angélique to Paris, had taken the girl and her parents to the Observatory, where Arago then was, who, at the earnest instance of Cholet, agreed to test the child's powers at once. There were present on this occasion, besides Arago, MM. Mathieu and Laugier, and an astronomer of the Observatory, named M. Goujon.

The experiment of the chair perfectly succeeded. It was projected with great violence against the wall, while the girl was thrown on the other side. This experiment was repeated several times by Arago himself, and each time with the same result. He could not, with all his force, hinder the chair from being thrown back. Then MM. Goujon and Laugier attempted to hold it, but with as little success. Finally, M. Goujon seated himself first on half the chair, and at the moment when Angélique was taking her seat beside him the chair was thrown down.

When Angélique approached a small table, at the instant that her apron touched it, it was repulsed.

These particulars were given in all the medical journals of the day,[16] as well as in the "Journal des Débats" of February 18, and the "Courrier Français" of February 19, 1846.

The minutes of the session of the Academy touch upon them in the most studiously brief and guarded manner. They say, the sitting lasted only some minutes. They admit, however, the main fact, namely, that the movements of the chair, occurring as soon as Angélique seated herself upon it, were most violent ("*d'une extrême violence*"). But as to the other experiment, they allege that M. Arago did not clearly perceive the movement of the table by the mere intervention of the girl's apron, though the other observers did.[17] It is added, that the girl produced no effect on the magnetic needle.

Some accounts represent Arago as expressing himself much more decidedly. He may have done so, in addressing the Academy; but I find no official record of his remarks.

He did not assist at the sittings of the committee that had been appointed at his suggestion; but he signed their report, having confidence, as he declared, in their judgment, and sharing their mistrust.

That report, made on the ninth of March, is to the effect, that they witnessed no repulsive agency on a table or similar object; that they saw no effect produced by the girl's arm on a magnetic needle; that the girl did not possess the power to distinguish between the two poles of a magnet; and, finally, that the only result they obtained was sudden and violent movements of chairs on which the child was seated. They add, "Serious suspicions having arisen as to the manner in which these movements

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[16] I extract them from the "Journal des Connaissances Médico-Chirurgicales," No. 3.

[17] The words are,—"M. Arago n'a pas aperçu nettement les agitations annoncées comme étant engendrées à distance, par l'intermédiaire d'un tablier, sur un guéridon en bois: d'autres observateurs ont trouvé que les agitations étaient sensibles."

were produced, the committee decided to submit them to a strict examination, declaring, in plain terms, that they would endeavor to discover what part certain adroit and concealed manœuvres of the hands and feet had in their production. From that moment we were informed that the young girl had lost her attractive and repulsive powers, and that we should be notified when they reappeared. Many days have elapsed; no notice has been sent us; yet we learn that Mademoiselle Cottin daily exhibits her experiments in private circles." And they conclude by recommending "that the communications addressed to them in her case be considered *as not received*" ("*comme non avenues*"). In a word, they officially branded the poor girl as an impostor.

That, without any inquiry into the antecedents of the patient, without the slightest attempt to obtain from those medical men who had followed up the case from its commencement what they had observed, and that, in advance of the strict examination which it was their duty to make, they should insult the unfortunate girl by declaring that they intended to find out the tricks with which she had been attempting to deceive them,—all this is not the less lamentable because it is common among those, who sit in the high places of science.

If these Academicians had been moved by a simple love of truth, not urged by a self-complacent eagerness to display their own sagacity, they might have found a more probable explanation of the cessation, after their first session, of some of Angelique's chief powers.

Such an explanation is furnished to us by Dr. Tanchon, who was present, by invitation, at the sittings of the committee.

He informs us that, at their first sitting, held at the Jardin des Plantes, on the seventeenth of February, after the committee had witnessed, twice repeated, the violent displacement of a chair held with all his strength by one of their number, (M. Rayet,) instead of following up similar experiments and patiently waiting to observe the phenomena as they presented themselves, they proceeded at once to satisfy their own preconceptions. They brought Angélique into contact with a voltaic battery. Then they placed on the bare arm of the child a dead frog, anatomically prepared after the manner of Matteucci, that is, the skin removed, and the animal dissected so as to expose the lumbar nerves. By a galvanic current, they caused this frog to move, apparently to revive, on the girl's arm. The effect upon her may be imagined. The ignorant child, terrified out of her senses, spoke of nothing else the rest of the day, dreamed of dead frogs coming to life all night, and began to talk eagerly about it again the first thing the next morning.[18] From that time her attractive and repulsive powers gradually declined.

In addition to the privilege of much accumulated learning, in addition to the advantages of varied scientific research, we must have something else, if we would advance yet farther in true knowledge. We must be imbued with a simple, faithful spirit, not presuming, not preoccupied. We must be willing to sit down at the feet of Truth, humble, patient, docile, single-hearted. We must not be wise in our own conceit; else the fool's chance is better than ours, to avoid error, and distinguish truth.

M. Cohu, a medical man of Mortagne, writing, in March, 1846, in reply to some inquiries of Dr. Tanchon, after stating that the phenomenon of the chair, repeatedly observed by himself, had been witnessed also by more than a thousand persons, adds,—"It matters not what name we may give to this; the important point is, to verify the reality of a repulsive agency, and of one that is distinctly marked; the effects it is impossible to deny. We may assign to this agency what seat we please, in the cerebellum, in the pelvis, or elsewhere; the *fact* is material, visible, incontestable. Here in the Province, Sir, we are not very learned, but we are often very mistrustful. In the present case we have examined, reëxamined, taken every possible precaution against deception; and the more we have seen, the deeper has been our conviction of the reality of the phenomenon. Let the Academy decide as it will. *We have seen*; it has not seen. We are, therefore, in a condition to decide better than it can,

[18] *Enquête*, etc., p. 25.

I do not say what cause was operating, but what effects presented themselves, under circumstances that remove even the shadow of a doubt."[19]

M. Hébert, too, states a truth of great practical value, when he remarks, that, in the examination of phenomena of so fugitive and seemingly capricious a character, involving the element of vitality, and the production of which at any given moment depends not upon us, we "ought to accommodate ourselves to the nature of the fact, not insist that it should accommodate itself to us."

For myself, I do not pretend to offer any positive opinion as to what was ultimately the real state of the case. I do not assume to determine whether the attractive and repulsive phenomena, after continuing for upwards of a month, happened to be about to cease at the very time the committee began to observe them,—or whether the harsh suspicious and terror-inspiring tests of these gentlemen so wrought on the nervous system of an easily daunted and superstitious girl, that some of her abnormal powers, already on the wane, presently disappeared,—or whether the poor child, it may be at the instigation of her parents, left without the means of support,[20] really did at last simulate phenomena that once were real, manufacture a counterfeit of what was originally genuine. I do not take upon myself to decide between these various hypotheses. I but express my conviction, that, for the first few weeks at least, the phenomena actually occurred,—and that, had not the gentlemen of the Academy been very unfortunate or very injudicious, they could not have failed to perceive their reality. And I seek in vain some apology for the conduct of these learned Academicians, called upon to deal with a case so fraught with interest to science, when I find them, merely because they do not at once succeed in personally verifying sufficient to convince them of the existence of certain novel phenomena, not only neglecting to seek evidence elsewhere, but even rejecting that which a candid observer had placed within their reach.

This appears to have been the judgment of the medical public of Paris. The "Gazette des Hôpitaux," in its issue of March 17, 1846, protests against the committee's mode of ignoring the matter, declaring that it satisfied nobody. "Not received!" said the editor (alluding to the words of the report); "that would be very convenient, if it were only possible!"[21]

And the "Gazette Médicale" very justly remarks,—"The non-appearance of the phenomena at such or such a given moment proves nothing in itself. It is but a negative fact, and, as such, cannot disprove the positive fact of their appearance at another moment, if that be otherwise satisfactorily attested." And the "Gazette" goes on to argue, from the nature of the facts, that it is in the highest degree improbable that they should have been the result of premeditated imposture.

The course adopted by the Academy's committee is the less defensible, because, though the attractive and repulsive phenomena ceased after their first session, other phenomena, sufficiently remarkable, still continued. As late as the tenth of March, the day after the committee made their report, Angélique being then at Dr. Tanchon's house, a table touched by her apron, while her hands were behind her and her feet fifteen inches distant from it, *was raised entirely from the ground*, though no part of her body touched it. This was witnessed, besides Dr. Tanchon, by Dr. Charpentier-Méricourt, who had stationed himself so as to observe it from the side. He distinctly saw the table rise, with all four legs, from the floor, and he noticed that the two legs of the table farthest from the girl rose first. He declares, that, during the whole time, he perceived not the slightest movement either of her hands or her feet; and he regarded deception, under the circumstances, to be utterly impossible.[22]

On the twelfth of March, in presence of five physicians, Drs. Amédée Latour, Lachaise, Deleau, Pichard, and Soulé, the same phenomenon occurred twice.

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[19] *Enquête*, etc., p. 36.

[20] M. Cholet, the individual who, in the hope of gain, furnished the funds to bring Angélique to Paris for exhibition, as soon as he perceived that the speculation was a failure, left the girl and her parents in that city, dependent on the charity of strangers for daily support, and for the means of returning to their humble home.—*Enquête*, etc., p. 24.

[21] "Non avenues! ce serait commode, si c'était possible!"

[22] *Enquête*, etc., p. 30.

And yet again on the fourteenth, four physicians being present, the table was raised a single time, but with startling force. It was of mahogany, with two drawers, and was four feet long by two feet and a half wide. We may suppose it to have weighed some fifty or sixty pounds; so that the girl's power, in this particular, appears to have much decreased since that day, about the end of January, when M. de Farémont saw repeatedly raised from the ground a block of one hundred and fifty pounds' weight, with three men seated on it,—in all, not less than five to six hundred pounds.

By the end of March the whole of the phenomena had almost totally ceased; and it does not appear that they have ever shown themselves since that time.

Dr. Tanchon considered them electrical. M. de Farémont seems to have doubted that they were strictly so. In a letter, dated Monti-Mer, November 1, 1846, and addressed to the Marquis de Mirville, that gentleman says,—"The electrical effects I have seen produced in this case varied so much,—since under certain circumstances good conductors operated, and then again, in others, no effect was observable,—that, if one follows the ordinary laws of electrical phenomena, one finds evidence both for and against. I am well convinced, that, in the case of this child, there is some power other than electricity."[23]

But as my object is to state facts, rather than to moot theories, I leave this debatable ground to others, and here close a narrative, compiled with much care, of this interesting and instructive case. I was the rather disposed to examine it critically and report it in detail, because it seems to suggest valuable hints, if it does not afford some clue, as to the character of subsequent manifestations in the United States and elsewhere.

This case is not an isolated one. My limits however, prevent me from here reproducing, as I might, sundry other recent narratives more or less analogous to that of the girl Cottin. To one only shall I briefly advert: a case related in the Paris newspaper, the "Siècle," of March 4, 1846, published when all Paris was talking of Arago's statement in regard to the electric girl.

It is there given on the authority of a principal professor in one of the Royal Colleges of Paris. The case, very similar to that of Angélique Cottin, occurred in the month of December previous, in the person of a young girl, not quite fourteen years old, apprenticed to a colorist, in the Rue Descartes. The occurrences were quite as marked as those in the Cottin case. The professor, seated one day near the girl, was raised from the floor, along with the chair on which he sat. There were occasional knockings. The phenomena commenced December 2, 1845; and lasted twelve days.

[23] *Des Esprits et de leurs Manifestations Fluidiques*, par le Marquis de Mirville, pp. 379, 380.

# LITERARY LIFE IN PARIS

## THE DRAWING-ROOM. PART II

It was at this same period of time I made the acquaintance of Monsieur Edmond About. When I met him he had just appeared as an author, and his friends everywhere declared that Voltaire's mantle had fallen on his shoulders. He had, like Voltaire, discovered instantly that mankind were divided into hammers and anvils, and he determined to be one of the hammers. He began his career by ridiculing a poetical country, Greece, whose guest he had been, and whose sovereign and ministers had received him with confidence,—repaying three years of hospitality by a satire of three hundred pages. "Greece and the Greeks" was translated into several languages. This edifying publication, which put the laughers on his side, was followed by a different sort of work, which came near producing on this budding reputation the effect of an April frost upon an almond-tree in blossom. Voltaire's heir had found no better mode of writing natural and true novels (so the scandalous chronicle said) than to copy an original correspondence, and indiscreet "detectives" of letters menaced him with publishing the whole Italian work from which he "conveyed" the best part of "Tolla." All the literary world cried, Havoc! upon the sprightly fellow laden with Italian relics. It was a critical moment in his life.

Monsieur Edmond About was introduced to me by a fascinating lady;—who can resist the charms of the other sex? I saw before me a man some eight-and-twenty years old, of a slender figure; his features were irregular, but intellectual, and he looked at people like an excessively near-sighted person who abused the advantages of being near-sighted. He wore no spectacles. His eyes were small, cold, bright, and were well wadded with such thick eyebrows and eyelashes it seemed these must absorb them. I subsequently found, in a strange American book,[24] some descriptions which may be applied to his odd expression of eye. Monsieur Edmond About's mouth was sneering and sensual, and even then affected Voltaire's sarcastic grimace. His bitter and equivocal smile put you in mind of the grinding of an epigram-mill. One could detect in his attitude, his physiognomy, and his language, that obsequious malice, that familiarity, at the same time flattering and jeering, which Voltaire turned to such good account in his commerce with the great people of his day, and which his disciple was learning to practise in his intercourse with the powerful of these times,—the *parvenus* and the wealthy. I was struck by the face of this college Macchiavelli: on it were written the desire of success and the longing to enjoy; the calculations of the ambitious man were allied with the maliciousness of the giddy child. Of course he overwhelmed me with compliments and flattery. He had, or thought he had, use for me. I benevolently became the defender of the poor calumniated fellow in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," just as one undertakes out of pure kindness of heart to protect the widow and the orphan. Monsieur Edmond About thanked me *orally* with a flood of extraordinary gratitude; but he took good care to avoid writing a word upon the subject. A letter might have laid him under engagements, and might have embarrassed him one day or another. Whereas he aimed to be both a diplomatist and a literary man. He practised the art of good writing, and the art of turning it to the best advantage.

Some months after this he brought out a piece called "Guillery," at the French Comedy. The first night it was played, there was a hail-storm of hisses. No *claqueur* ever remembered to have heard the like before. The charitable dramatic critics—delicate fellows, who cannot bear to see people possess talents without their permission and despite them—attacked the piece as blood-hounds the

[24] *Elsie Venner*, by Oliver Œendell (*sic*) Holmes.

fugitive murderer. It seemed as if Monsieur Edmond About was a ruined man, who could never dare hold up his head again. He resisted the death-warrant. He had friends in influential houses. He soon found lint enough for his wounds. The next winter the town heard that Monsieur Edmond About's wounds had been well dressed and were cured, and that he was going to write in "Figaro." The amateurs of scandal began at once to reckon upon the gratification of their tastes. They were not mistaken. The moment his second contribution to "Figaro" appeared, it became evident to all that he had taken this warlike position at the advanced posts of light literature solely to shoot at those persons who had wounded his vanity. For three months he kept up such a sharp fire that every week numbered its dead. Such carnage had never been seen. Everybody was severely wounded: Jules Janin, Paulin Limayrac, Champfleury, Barbey d'Aurevilly, and a host of others. Everybody said, (a thrill of terror ran through them as they spoke,)—There is going to be one of these mornings a terrible butchery: that imprudent Edmond About will have at least ten duels on his hands. Not a bit of it! Not a bit of it! There were negotiations, embassies, explanations exchanged which explained nothing, and reparations made which repaired nothing. But there was not a shot fired. There was not a drop of blood drawn. O Lord! no! Third parties intervened, and demonstrated to the offended parties, that, when Monsieur Edmond About called them stupid boobies, humbugs, tumblers, he had no intention whatever of offending them. Good gracious! far otherwise! In fine, one day the farce was played, the curtain fell upon the well-spanked critics, and all this little company (so full of talents and chivalry!) went arm-in-arm, the insulter and the insulted, to breakfast together at Monsieur About's rooms, where, between a dozen oysters and a bottle of Sauterne, he asked his victims what they thought of some Titians he had just discovered, and which he wished to sell to the Louvre for a small fortune,—Titians which were not painted even by Mignard. The insulter and the insulted fell into each other's arms before these daubs, and they parted, each delighted with the other. These pseudo-Titians were for Monsieur About his Alcibiades's dog's-tail. He spent one every month. Literary, picturesque, romanesque, historical, agricultural, Greek, and Roman questions were never subjects to him: he considered them merely advertisements to puff the transcendent merits of Edmond About. Before he left "Figaro" he determined to show me what a grateful fellow he was. He made me the mark for all his epigrams, and I paid the price of peace with the others. I have heard, since then, that Monsieur Edmond About has made his way rapidly in the world. He is rich. He has the ribbon of the Legion of Honor. He excels in writing pamphlets. He is not afraid of the most startling truths. He writes about the Pope like a man who is not afraid of the spiritual powers, and he has demonstrated that Prince Napoleon won the Battle of the Alma and organized Algeria.

Among the numerous details of my grandeur and my decline, none exhibit in a clearer light our literary manners and customs than the history of my relations with Monsieur Louis Ulbach, the virtuous author, *now*, of "L'Homme aux Cinq Louis d'Or," "Suzanne Duchemin," "Monsieur et Madame Fernel," and other tales, which he hopes to see crowned by the French Academy. Monsieur Louis Ulbach at first belonged to a triumvirate which pretended to stand above the mob of democratic writers; and of a truth Monsieur Maxime du Camp and Monsieur Laurent Pichat, his two leaders, had none of those smoking-*café* vulgarities which have procured so many subscribers to the "Siècle" newspaper. Both poets, Laurent Pichat with remarkable loftiness, Maxime du Camp with *bizarre* energy, intent upon an ideal which democracy has a right to pursue, since it has not yet found it, men of the world, capable of discussing in full dress the most perplexed questions of Socialism, they accept none of those party-chains which so often bow down the noblest minds before idols made of plaster or of clay. Besides, both of them were known by admirable acts of generosity. There were in this triumvirate such dashes of aristocracy and of revolution that they were called "the Poles of literature."

Of course, when the storm burst which I had raised by my irreverent attacks on De Béranger, these gentlemen separated from their political friends, and complimented me. One of them even addressed me a letter, in which I read these words, which assuredly I would not have written: "That stupid De Béranger." There was a sort of alliance between us. Monsieur Louis Ulbach celebrated it

by publishing in his magazine, "La Revue de Paris," an article in my honor, in which, after the usual reserves, and after declaring war upon my doctrines, he vowed my prose to be "fascinating," and complained of being so bewitched as to believe, at times, that he was converted to the cause of the throne and of the altar. This epithet, "fascinating," in turn fascinated me; and I thought that my prose was, like some serpent, about to fascinate all the butcher-birds and ducks of the democratic marsh. A year passed away; these fine friendships cooled: 't is the fate of these factitious tendernesses. With winter my second volume appeared, and Monsieur Louis Ulbach set to work again; but this time he found me merely "ingenious." It was a good deal more than I merited, and I would willingly have contented myself with this phrase. Unfortunately, I could not forget the austere counsel of Monsieur Louis Veuillot, and at this very epoch, Monsieur Louis Ulbach, who as a novelist could merit a great deal of praise, took it into his head to publish a thick volume of transcendental criticism, in which he attacked everything I admired and lauded everything I detested. I confess that I felt extremely embarrassed: those nice little words "fascinating" and "ingenious" stuck in my mind. Monsieur Louis Ulbach himself extricated me from my perplexity. I had insufficiently praised his last novel. He wrote a third article on my third work. Alas! the honeymoon had set. The "fascinating" prose of 1855, the "ingenious" prose of 1856, had become in 1857, in the opinion of the same judge, and in the language of the same pen, "pretentious and tiresome." This sudden change of things and epithets restored me to liberty. I walked abroad in all my strength and independence, and I dissected Monsieur Louis Ulbach's thick volume with a severity which was still tempered by the courteous forms and the dimensions of my few newspaper-columns. A year passed away. My fourth work appeared. Note that these several volumes were not different works, but a series of volumes expressing the same opinions in the very same style; in fine, they were but one work. Note, too, that Monsieur Ulbach's "Revue de Paris" and "L'Assemblée Nationale," in which I wrote, were both suppressed by the government on the same day, which established between us a fraternity of martyrdom. All this was as nothing. Louis Ulbach, this very same Louis Ulbach, was employed by a newspaper where he was sure to please by insulting me, and the very first thing he did was to give me a kick, such a kick as twenty horses covered with sleigh-bells could not give. He called me "ignoramus," and wondered what "this fellow" meant by his literary drivelling. The most curious part of the whole business is, that he did not write the article, all he did was to sign it! Four years, and a scratch given his vanity, had proved enough to produce this change!

Shall I speak to you now of Henry Murger? I wrote this chapter of my Memoirs during his life. I should have suppressed it, did I feel the least drop of bitterness mingled with the recollection of the acts of petty ingratitude of this charming writer. But my object in writing this work is less to satisfy sterile revenge than to exhibit to you a corner of literary life in Paris in the nineteenth century.

In 1850 Henry Murger published a book in which the manners and customs of people who live by their wits were painted in colors scarcely likely to fascinate healthy imaginations. He declared to the world that the novitiate of our future great authors was nothing but one incessant hunt after a half-dollar and a mutton-chop. The world was told by others that Henry Murger had learned to paint this existence by actual experience. There were, however, in his book some excellent flashes of fancy and youth; besides, the public then had grown tired of interminable adventures and novels in fifty volumes. So Henry Murger's first work, "La Vie de Bohême," was very popular; but it did not swell his purse or improve his wardrobe. He was introduced to me, and I shall never forget the low bow he made me. I was afraid for one moment that his bald head would fall between his legs. This precocious baldness gave to his delicate and sad face a singular physiognomy. He looked not so much like a young old man as like an old young man. Henry Murger's warmest desire was to write in the celebrated and influential "Revue des Deux Mondes," which we all abuse so violently when we have reason to complain of it, and which has but to make a sign to us and we instantly fall into its arms. I was then on the best terms with the "Revue des Deux Mondes." Monsieur Castil-Blaze, being from the same neighborhood with me, had obtained a place for me in the "Revue," which belonged to his

son-in-law, Monsieur Buloz. I promised Henry Murger to speak a good word for him. A favorable opportunity of doing so occurred a few days afterwards.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.