

The Wasp
May 8, 1886

Prattle

The State Supreme Court has not decided the famous street assessment suits, but may be said to have “opined” them. Only three opinions were possible, but the seven justices divided themselves among these as nearly equally as they could under our faulty system of arithmetic. One of the views had, of course, to be embraced by three justices, but as three are not a majority of the court their Honors could make this uncommonly close approach to the awful brink of unanimity without actual peril to their reputation for individual independence of thought; for it is obvious that their agreement is a merely sportive and wanton harmony, like the identical gambolling of three colts in a pasture when tickled by the same fly. The last concurring member of the trio would have been in no better case by joining either of the other groups. If his alliance had been decisive he would have joined none—he would have been sick.

One of the questions upon which these learned justices preferred to disagree related to the validity of a constitutional amendment which was held by two of them to have been improperly passed by the Legislature: somebody neglected to enter it in the journal, as required by a constitutional mandate already in force. If I were a judge and a man came before me with such a plea as that, I should say: “Sir, it is the law; if any clerk of the Legislature disobeyed the constitution bring him here and I’ll see what power I have to ease your mind.” I do not say this in the hope of moving Justices QcKee and Stickton; nothing, I am conscious, can have any suasive efficacy to that end. Still, their own court’s previous decision against their view might have been thought as worthy of consideration as a crushed beetle’s remonstrance against the impact of two planets.

It is just as well that these gentlemen have directed public attention to oversights in amending the State constitution: it will make the next Legislature more careful in passing the amendment of 1887, abolishing the present Supreme Court—though doubtless its successor will rule upon any technical informalities in that edict in a spirit of enlightened liberality.

It is really surprising what a number of valid objections to the anti-Chinese boycott our city dailies have found on a closer examination of—public opinion outside the Sandlot. Since the farmers, fruitgrowers and vineyardists began to be heard from, some of our metropolitan editors are almost willing to spare the life of Judge Sawyer for deciding that the United States statutes secure to peaceable aliens the right to their property and lives, even when both are sincerely desired by American citizens. Even the *Chronicle* has partly recovered from its pained astonishment that it is not lawful to drive people out of their homes by threats of death. One day that fearless and independent journal was havocking the situation, red-handed and raucous; the next it had used its incendiary torch to rekindle the altar-fires of civil and religious liberty, and was loudly averring that “indiscriminate and unreflecting boycotting” would not be—“prudent.” This quick and unpremeditated “flop”

resembles the one once executed by Saul of Tarsus. It may be described as conversion without conviction.

The following pictures at the rooms of the Art Association have been highly and justly commended by the reporters:

“Pondering after the Ball,” Lizzie L. Schutze. The artist has represented a fair member of a female “picked nine,” with downcast eyes, searching the ground for what hit her, and pensively speculating on the probable effect of the contusion. The lower portion of the body is skilfully omitted, to indicate that she is “off her base.”

“Devotion,” William B. Gifford. A “stout-complected” Milesian serving lady in rapt contemplation of a decanter on a top shelf. The consummate art with which the nature of the object of devotion is shown by the devotee’s expression, without being actually put on the canvas, produces a feeling of mystery, and is the finest thing in three counties.

“Boston Harbor in Winter,” W. Halsell. The way in which the artist has indicated the season is unique in art. He has partly clothed the water of the harbour in wool, to keep the temperature too high for ice to form.

“Oranges,” Amanda P. Austin. The simplicity of this picture is admirable beyond the power of words to express. The artist must have been energetically tempted to show a number of kinds of oranges, but she sternly restrained herself and produced a noble unity of effect by depicting only the well-known Flame Tokay. And a nice warm picture it makes.

“Moorish Scene (after the bath)” E. Narjot. This is a literal transcript from nature in the dissecting room of a Moorish medical college. Several cadavers have been taken out of pickle in order to dry before going on the table. They have been disposed by the students in various attitudes to suggest life. The work of Mr. Narjot is conscientious, but that of the students appears to have been scamped.

If I am spared (by the artists already commended) I may possibly venture next week to point out some excellent work by others, and endeavour to assist in expounding its veritable interiority, or true inwardness, by my new system of autological interpretation—making the painting speak for itself. Many of them are loud enough to be heard at a considerable distance, and Mr. Norton Bush’s “Sunset on San Pablo Bay” would fill with great credit the position of brass band to a deaf mute asylum.

There is good reason to hope that the Panama canal will now be pushed to any early completion. The director of the work is dead.

Santa Rosa has three brass bands.

Cloverdale complains of sneak thieves.—*The Bulletin*.

With fortitude her three brass bands
The town of Santa Rosa stands;
But Cloverdale with groans receives
Her light calamity of thieves.

“Yes, sir,” said the foreman of the powder works at Point Pinole, replying to a question by the manager, “I have made the calculation. I have the exact date of every explosion at these works, and the average period between them, to a second. The next will occur at ten minutes past twelve today, by your watch, which of course governs all the operations here. We have still, I suppose,”—looking at his own watch, —“half an hour in which to warn most of the workmen and get away.”

“Great Scott!” cried the manager, turning ghastly white, “I set my watch twenty-seven minutes fast this morning to fool one of the children, and forgot to put it back!”

They absented themselves thence—they absented one another. The nimbleness of their recession baffled the capacities of the human eye and transcended thought. Three minutes later from the rear of a neighboring eminence, as they endeavoured to moderate the leaping of their hearts and subdue the insurgent lung, they heard the still small voice of seventy-two tons of nitro-glycerine, calling sinners to repentance; and they said: “Let us return to the spot.”

Vain was the attempt—the spot was no longer there. But two hours later, near the village of San Pablo, fell from the unthinkable heights of space a black braid of hair with a segment of skull attached.

Wanted—700 able-bodied Chinese to do light work at good wages in a factory at Point Pinole. Apply to C.F. McGlashan, Chairman Citizens’ Non-Partisan Anti-Chinese Association.

Munhall, to save my soul you bravely try,
Although, to save my soul, I can’t say why.
’Tis naught to you, to me however much—
Why, bless it! you might save a million such
Yet lose your own; for still the “means of grace”
That you employ to turn us from the place
By the arch-enemy of souls frequented
Are those which to ensnare us *he* invented!
I do not say you utter falsehoods—I
Would scorn to give a minister the lie:
They cannot fight—their calling has stopped it.
True, I did not persuade them to adopt it.
But, Munhall, when you say the Devil dwells
In all the breasts of all the infields—
Making a lot of individual Hells
In gentlemen instinctively who shrink
From thinking anything that you could think,
You talk as I would if some world I trod
Where lying is acceptable to God.
I don’t at all object—forbid it Heaven!—
That your discourse you temperately leaven
With airy reference to wicked souls
Cursing impenitent on glowing coals,
Nor quarrel with your fancy, blithe and fine,
Which represents the wickedest as mine.
Each ornament of style my spirit eases:
The subject saddens, but the manner pleases.
But when you “deal damnation round” ’twere sweet
To think hereafter that you did not cheat.
Deal, and let all accept what you allot ’em.
But, blast your eyes! you’re dealing from the bottom!

The great law of compensation is still unrepealed, and the grievous private calamity of the Bancroft fire is softened to the public by its disclosure of the fact that the thin wood-shavings used in packing certain kinds of goods are known to the commercial world as

“Excelsior.” This throws a flood of sweetened light upon Longfellow’s famous poem, shows us the golden fountain of his inspiration and make his memory doubly dear to us as that of our century’s foremost writer of puffs.

Urging a certain course of action upon a political body the other evening, a member explained, absurdly enough, that his plan was that by which Napoleon won battles; whereupon an *Examiner* reporter crops out, saying the member “compared himself to Napoleon.” This is the invariable retort of an ignorant and therefore dishonest critic whenever one ventures, with whatever reverence and humility, to cite the example of a mastermind. A poet accused of some monstrous crime against meter points out with gentle irony that Tennyson is a fellow criminal. “Compares himself with Tennyson!” yaulps the silly censor, baring every tooth in the unfurnished head of him. “That was Turner’s method,” protests some slated painter, conscious of his own mean ability and scuttling under the wing of his mighty master. “Compares himself to Turner,” gravely remarks the lofty blockhead, complacently turning to this brainless clientele. O the asses ineffable who do this thing!—must honest men forever incur their immedicable propinquity?

Then waft me from the harbour-mouth
Wild winds: I seek a warmer sky;
And I, for my relief, will try
The pestilences of the south.

(Source: Archive.org, <https://archive.org/stream/waspjanjune188616unse#page/n342/mode/1up>)