

San Francisco Examiner
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The Passing Show

A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent.

Certain very virtuous gentlemen of the press and other old ladies are experiencing a pain in the lap because of the twelve wives of our new compatriot, the Sultan of Sulu. "Is morality, then," one of them asks, "purely a question of latitude and longitude? Is plural marriage praiseworthy under the American flag in the South Seas, but abhorrent under the American flag upon this continent?" My fair but uneasy friend, it is. Plural marriage is praiseworthy—that is to say, it is not censurable—wherever it exists, and from time immemorial has existed, and is in line with the traditions, feeling and religion of the people. And, pardon me, madam, I am unable to understand your reference to "morality." May I ask what that has to do with it? Did the entire human race for thousands and doubtless millions of years live in public immorality? Do three-fourths of it so live today? And only twenty or thirty years ago—yesterday, as it were—was the great wise God of the monogamist nations immoral because he permitted plural marriages among his chosen people and approved them in his big book? What?—he has reformed? Very well, very well; let us hope that he will not backslide. But, dear me, do let us be charitable, too—perhaps the God of the Sultan of Sulu has not reformed.

Our fellow citizen, the Sultan of Sulu, is opportune: he cometh up as a flower that is on time. He is a Problem, and in the solution of him we may test our capacity as a nation for colonial dominion. Our good friends of the press—they of the intestinal pangs—would favour, I infer, his immediate and forcible divorcement from eleven of his wives—which would require an army and a war. To some of us it seems wiser to let the people of Sulu, their Sultan included, manage their domestic affairs in the way most satisfactory to their minds and hearts if they have any. Some of us think it impracticable to make the manners and customs and laws of our new dependencies conform to ours and their notions of morality fit a Procrustean bed made to the measure of our own, or rather to those of our women. If we are to have a working colonial policy it must be very elastic and take account of racial differences. We must learn to learn to tolerate, and even protect, polygamy, idolatry, slavery and a half-hundred other breeding-in-the-bone eccentricities of the Oriental American, "half devil and half child." This "Imperialism" is a business in which there is no place for the truly good, the sentimental, the consistent and other futilitarians. Their participation in the work of looting the Orient will wreck the whole scheme.

What an exceeding rest 'twill be
When I can leave off being Me!
--Col. Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

Ah, no for then whoe'er you are

You'll have, I fear, a faint and far
Sad memory of a day gone by
When some bad girl wrote "Me" for "I"
And some fierce Colonel of Reform
Neglected to blow up a storm
About it and demand, ere done,
That Tyrant Man give up his gun.

An esteemed contemporary takes the trouble to tell us when, how and where Mrs. Thorpe wrote "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-Night." Thanks immensely—now let us know why.

The Jews have been celebrating their New Year, which several of their Rabbis have kindly explained to us Gentiles is annum 5,660. My reading has led me to believe that the world is older than that—just how much older none of the geologers have undertaken to say: some put it as high as several millions of years. If our Jewish friends know better than that—if they are custodians of any secret or special evidence that the earth was created less than six thousand years ago I hope that some of them will set me right in the matter; and this I ask in good faith, with a serious purpose to learn what I do not now know. Will my good and learned friend Dr. Voorsanger say upon what evidence he believes the world so young as that? Will he even say that he really does believe so? I do not find that any of them have said that.

Mrs. Eliza A. Otis, the Sweet Singer of Los Angeles, whose heart strings are a banjo, is to the fore with a hymn to Yosemite. Here are the opening lines:

Amid the silence of thy wondrous height
Was God's own hand uplifted in that far
Distant Past when Time was young and earth lay
On the breast of Chaos, God spake and it
Was done, and thy sky-reaching mounts uprose—
The worlds' grand battlements—and the sleeping
Vales sprang into being, while the river leaped
Into the silver arms of motion and
Moved with ceaseless anthems onward to the
Waiting deep.

It will be observed that, like all this lady's work, the poem begins with great inevitableness. It is a pretty long work, yet from start to finish every line is characterized by a singularly high degree of sufficiency.

In the entire fortnight immediately preceding August 16 Mrs. Otis did not publish a single poem so howlingly precious as the hymn to Yosemite; or if she did she neglected to arrange it in lines of counted syllables and it was printed in her distinguished husband's paper from the original draft as an editorial article. It is now clear why General Otis (H.G.) scabbarded his tulwar and abandoned the island of Luzon. The censorship set up by his despotic namesake excluded Mrs. Otis's poems from that unhappy land. He had to come home in order to read them, and may the Lord sustain him! In view of the facts it is obviously unjust to describe him as a battle-scarred veteran. Nothing could scare a man like that.

A good deal of needless solicitude is manifest in London and elsewhere for the future of Miss Jewel, who clopped with Prince Lobengula of South Africa. I knew a beautiful and high-born young woman who made a runaway match with the happiest result. And the man was no Prince. He wasn't even a Nigger.

I hold the books of Kipling fit
For Sunday schools to read, though write
Of oaths and tippling:
But where'll you find (whate'er its creed)
The Sunday school that's fit to read
The books of Kipling?