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*Prattle*

*A Record of Individual Opinion*

Mr. John Dolan, a survivor of the Oakland mill explosion, testified at the inquest that as he was coming down through the air a smokestack passed him going up. Had John been mindful of the public interest he would have observed that smokestack more narrowly than he seems to have done. He should have recollected that in cases of boiler explosion all the testimony goes to prove that the boiler was faultless; by careful scrutiny of the smokestack as it passed him in its ascent he might have detected the fatal flaw in that. It looks as if Mr. Dolan were of the kind of man whom it is hardly worthwhile for boilermakers and engineers to present with opportunities. He might almost as well not have been blown up.

*My own family dates back to the Norman conquest, but that never troubles me; if I can't get glory for what I am myself I will go without glory,--Collis P. Huntington.*

Small matter, truly, if your line you trace  
Backward to this or that marauding race;  
Small matter if your thrifty fathers preyed  
By Norman conquest or by Saxon raid--  
Robbed the poor peasant of his harvest lead;  
Or robbed the robbers, drunken by the road;  
If, lance in rest, they spurred across the plain,  
Or lurked about the field to strip the slaim;  
If clad in metal, or in skins of ewes;  
Whate'er their fortunes and whate'er their views  
Of *meum* and of *tuum* (though 'tis known  
That these were not so mystic as your own)--  
They're mostly dead. They cannot even aver  
That business methods are not what they were,  
Nor swear they never cheated in their lives;  
Nor blush to see you training Mr. Ives;  
Nor weep to recollect the bank down which  
Your spade assisted Pickering and Fitch.

The *Chronicle's* ship-sharp gravely and with a touch of sadness informs us that "not a foreign bottom has been sighted since September 11"; but later reports "a British bottom off the heads, bound in." Following is an extract from *The Chronicle's Unabridged Dictionary*, now in course of preparation for the press:

BOTTOM, *n.* A ship. *River-bottom.* A ship for navigating inland waters.  
*Bottomless, adj.* Destitute of ships. *Bottomless Pit.* A pit without ships.

And the stately bottoms go on  
To their haven under the hill.  
--Tennyson

Thou too sail on, O Bottom of State.  
--Longfellow.

Bottoms, sailorless, lay rotting on the sea.  
--Byron.

As out-bound bottoms at home their voyage end.  
--Dryden.

“There was a bottom,” quoth he.  
--Coleridge

If the foregoing examples do not justify the gentleman in his way he can plead “commercial usage”--that is to say, the customary substitution of trade slang for good English. I once knew a man who lost an agency worth five thousand a year because he scorned “commercial usage” and wrote like a human being. I am bound to say he did seem greatly to care.

That man, for illustration, would not call another man’s letter to him an “esteemed favor”; nor, if it was written on the same day as his reply, would he say it was “of even date.” If his own letter enclosed something he would not write. “I *hand* you herewith.” Nothing would convince his “principals” that he was not a fool, and some of them even went so far as to doubt if he were a thief--for there are more kinds of commercial usage than one. The gentleman who calls a ship a “bottom” would probably observe them all.

Dave Neagle’s gone East with Stephanie Field,  
Who’d not for the world have stopped him,--  
So handy a land and so neatly heeled--  
Whose tricky finger  
So loves to linger  
Where trigger to tremor is taught to yield--  
That Stephanie means to adopt him.

The District Attorney who is a humane man has doubtless the best of reasons for absenting himself when the Commissioners of Insanity are examining persons suspected of hallucinations different from theirs. True, the law requires his presence, but the Legislature which enacted it had not a fair look at him. It could hardly have intended to subject the already mentally disturbed to the added disquietude of an Optical Illusion.

In Red Dog all the wells were low;  
You Bet with summer was aglow;  
And scarce a spigot's frugal flow  
Was Bloody Run's delivery.

Then Red Dog saw another sight,  
And round You Bet the fires were bright!  
The papers mentioned in affright  
Those classical localities.

To Pioneers it then was given  
To catch, through fogs of time, so riven.  
A glimpse of recollection's heaven,  
And burn in tender rivalry.

And redder yet the soul shall glow  
Beneath each flowing beard of snow,  
And wetter, saltier shall flow  
The tear of sensibility.

The flame sweeps onward! Weep, ye brave:  
Pour out the lachrymary wave  
To quench it--'49ers, save  
No Slouch and Muleville, anyway!

The young woman who recently shot at one Wetherbee for the offense of being a married man has not got out a warrant for his arrest. It was inexpedient for her to shoot (and miss), for in order to avoid testifying against her, Mr. Wetherbee legged it hence with so nimble precipitancy that he cannot now be found for the warrant. There is a certain justice in that: whatever her wrongs, the young woman is not rightly entitled to two methods of redress. She might profitably apply the protest of the Lascar sailor who was undergoing at the hands and tongue of his serious superior the double admonition of lash and homily: "If you lickee, lickee; if you preachee, preachee; you no lickee and preachee too." But perhaps the lady considers each day's persistence in wedlock a fresh offense, punishable at her discretion by the dungeon or the grave.

War is. The Oakland *Times*, a serried rank, is gone up against by an embattled host of Sons of Veterans, who signify (with heat) their conviction that a lie is at large wearing that journal's collar. On Monday evening, it seems, one Fisher revealed his sense of things in a speech to the Sons of Veterans, his remarks being construed by a *Times* reporter as imperfectly respectful to another filial order, the Native Sons of the Golden West, whom (such is the impeached record) Mr Fisher declared himself reluctant to trust with the destinies of the country. In controversion of the reporter's understanding, eight Veteranlings stand forth and testify that they did not hear Mr. Fisher say any such thing. But the hardy editor man unflinchingly assures them upon his sacred honor that They Did. So stands the battle, expectant. Ere the leashed thunders are again let loose to desolate the field I crave leave to suggest, in pacification, that Mr. Fisher has no mandate to entrust the destinies of his country to anybody.

What parallel, Pixley, please to expound,  
'Twixt Portugal's King and you may be found?  
Why this: if the cable dispatches are true  
He lies on his deathbed--and so would you.

Mr. Joseph McAuliffe says that he will fight Mr. Peter Jackson and then retire from the ring. He would do better to retire first. He can fight Mr. Jackson at any time, as a private citizen, but if he fights him first he will never know the pleasure of a quiet life. There will not be enough of him left to retire.

SPIRIT OF SHARON.--I say, old man, did you instigate that Burling litigation?

SPIRIT OF BALSTON.--My son, it is a safe gamble that I did.

SPIRIT OF SHARON.--Isn't it pretty rough to bring up all these transactions at this late day? It can't profit you to prove me a swindler; there isn't a cent in it for you.

SPIRIT OF RALSTON.--Nor any privation for you. In the interest of justice it is desirable that the wicked be exposed. Without the fear of exposure there can be no honesty, without honesty no--

SPIRIT OF SHARON.--William, if I will consent to let the plaintiffs take every dollar that i left will you stop preaching and call it square?

SPIRIT OF RALSTON.--William, I will.

*(With tears in one another's eyes their necks are mutually fallen upon and wept. Curtain.)*

What is a technicality? One may be very sure that he knows, yet swift to blunder in the definition. Perhaps the word is best defined by example; and here is the neatest example that one may find in a month of Sundays. A suit against our excellent friends, Messrs. Fitch and Pickering, was dismissed the other day by Judge Lawler because it was brought by "Adolphe Flamant as guardian of the persons and estates of James Flamant and Adolphe Flamant Jr." instead of by "James Flamant and Adolphe Flamant, guardian of their persons and estates." That is what is called a technicality. What? The dismissal? No. Either of the foregoing formulae, or both? Clearly not. What, then, is the "technicality"? I really do not know--I think it is the Judge.

It will be observed that of the two formulae the one which was used, and by its erroneous nature brought the plaintiff to disaster, expresses with precision the fact of the situation; and the one which will have to be substituted for it does not. The action was, and will be, brought by Adolphe Falamant--James Flamant and Adolphe Flamant Jr. being minors and forbidden by law to bring an action. We seem now to be on a hot scent: the "technicality" is the truth which crept into the complaint by inadvertence, to wreck the fairy fabric of its author's hope.

"O son of mine age, these eyes lose their fire.  
Be eyes, I pray, to thy dying sire."

"O, father, fear not, for mine eyes are bright--  
I read through a millstone at dead of night."

"My son, O tell me, who are those men  
Rushing like pigs to the feeding pen?"

“Welcomers they of a statesman grand.  
They’ll shake, and then they’ll pocket, his hand.”

“Sagacious youth with the wondrous eye,  
They seem to throw up their headgear. Why?”

“Because they’ve thrown up their hands until, O,  
They’re so tired!--and dinners they’ve none to throw.”

“My son, my son, though dull are mine ears.  
I hear a sound like the people’s cheers.”

“He’s thanking them, father, with tears in his eyes,  
For giving him lately that fine surprise.”

“My memory fails as I near mine end;  
How did they surprise their grateful friend?”

“By letting him buy, like apples or oats,  
With that which made him so good, the votes  
Which made him so wise and greed and great.  
Now, father, please die, for it’s growing late.”

*A.F.S., Shasta.*--You must excuse me. I cannot undertake to criticize the work of others at their request and for their instruction; I should have time for nothing else.

*B.R., San Jose.*--You ask what sense there is in the slang expression, “It is a daisy.” None whatever; sense is not commonly a constituent of slang. The origin of the expression I take to be this: “Daisy” is a corruption of “dazer,” and “dazer” was an improvement on “stunner.” I advance this view with diffidence and shall hold it by a precious tenure until it is confirmed by that distinguished philologist, Dr. Bartlett, who knows a thing if he learns it, though he will not learn anything if he knows it.

*F., San Francisco.*--I have returned your verses by mail, denying myself the advantage of reading them. Reading manuscript verses is not my duty, and I should not do it if it were.

*G.C., San Francisco.*--Many thanks; but for your civility I should not have seen the clumsy thing. The poor dear old man had not the heart, after all, to let me see what he had written of me. So he put it in his own paper.

*Decanus.*--It was not in these columns that you found the anti-missionary sentiments which you wish “explained,” though I entertain them. If China chooses to “retaliate” by denying to foreigners the privilege of disturbing her people’s minds and trying to unsettle a faith which her rulers hold to be true and necessary to the general good of the Empire her moral right to do so will not be questioned by any man free of an impediment in his mind. The American missionaries in China are men of such learning, zeal and devotion that if our own godless could have the advantage of their ministrations I could myself venture to abate my weekly preach. As

to the Chinese, i do not care a pin if their souls are saved or not. For that matter, it would never occur to me that any stranger's spiritual condition could possibly be any of my business. I could no more think of proffering advice about it than of interesting myself in the sanitary arrangements of his dwelling or the character of his diet. This may not be very good Christianity, but it seems a pretty fair quality of good breeding.

*A.J., Fresno.*--Whether the word "peninsular" is correct or not depends on how you use it; it is correct as an adjective, but the noun is "peninsula." Are there no dictionaries in Fresno? Has Mr. Fulton Berry consumed them all in defending his right to eat bird-shot with his knife?

*CYNIC, Santa Barbara.*--I cannot think Judge Sawyer would be made unhappy by anything that I could say if he is not by what he says himself.

When Pickering, distressed by an "attack,"  
Has the strange insolence to answer back  
He hides behind a name that is a lie,  
Misquotes a poet and calls *that* reply!  
God knows him, though, identified alike  
By hardihood to rise and fear to strike,  
And fitly to rebuke his nine decrees,  
That, hid from others with what care he please,  
Night sha'n't be black enough nor earth so wide  
That from himself himself can ever hide!  
Hard fate indeed to feel at every breath  
His burden of identity till death!--  
No moment's respite from the immortal lead,  
To think himself a serpent or a toad,  
Or dream, with a divine, ecstatic glow,  
He's long been dead and canonized a crow!