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### ***The Writer Folk***

It is stated that ten thousand copies were sold of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's first book of "poetry." Naturally, he has published another. He is working his color for all that it is worth.

Far-and-away the best selling book during the month of May was "David Harum"; the returns for June are not complete as I write. Persons who believe that books, like eggs, are spoiled by time, the freshest being the best, will be able to understand why "David Harum" is more sought and read than "Henry Esmond." Even one who does not think that way might give a fairly close guess, though it would not agree with the other person's explanation, and the other person would not be pleased by it.

Observing the spirited controversy between Professor Harry Thurston Peck and Colonel Charlotte Perkins Stetson one is reminded of a contest between a crane and a frog. The frog fights far more earnestly than the crane, but has the disadvantage of position, being already in the bird's crow. The professor was first in the field, and is last, but the clank of the Colonel's saber is music in her ears, even in flight.

Mr. Oscar T. Shuck, a lawyer man who some twenty years ago used to beat the lyre with both fists, somewhat to the amusement of his prosaic environment, has of late years lifted his lay so seldom that he was remembered only to be thought dead. But he has now again burst into song and the Berkeley hills are telling of the sound. Mr. Shuck's ambition, though, is of a less exalted character than in the old days when he whacked up the lofty rhyme regardless; he is now content with the modest honors due to the laureate of the Sunday Schools. In "Immanuel," which was written for a churchly anniversary and is published in a convenient volume for the waistcoat pocket (so there's no excuse for being without it when awake and out of the bath) he utters his mind of babies' eyes. The poet's notion is that by looking into the eyes of a babe we can assure ourselves of the truth of the doctrine of Redemption. This is how he puts it:

Immanuel! Who our nature took,  
As in those solemn eyes we look  
Our vision deepens and we see  
A world's deliverance rest on thee!

That is important if true. It ought greatly to simplify and circumscribe religious controversy. A careful examination of Mr. Shuck's work seems to show that he is more useful to theology than to literature. His service to the former is, indeed, so great that one hardly finds it in one's heart to be sorry that he is still living.

Following are some lines by “C. C.” (of whose identity I am unaware) which lack but two lines and a better rhyme than “been” and “reigns” of being a sonnet. They are entitled:

*A Fragment*

To all things nature shows a favoring face;  
To man she grants a time for thoughts and deeds,  
To prove by nodding grain or noxious weeds  
The wisdom or the folly of his ways.  
A generation comes with dawning grace  
And like the day with wasting pride it speeds.  
Till waning, giving proof of what succeeds.  
With faltering light it fades. Let man retrace  
With deepened thought the annals of the past  
And tell to man what is that has not been:  
All matter is immutable and reigns:  
What has been is and will be to the last.

The great poets have shown that philosophy and poetry make an acceptable “blend”; the attempt to combine them here seems not altogether successful. If “C. C.” wishes to move his readers he would do well to avoid profundity of thought; if to instruct them he would find prose a more manageable medium.

One is alarmed to observe that in a recent review of a book by Rider Haggard Mrs. Katharine Pearson Wood has set afoot the portentous question whether knowledge of the fact that Mrs. Browning “called her husband Robert and did not call him Bob” is “a material help to the true and perfect understanding of the ‘Sonnets from the Portuguese.’ ” Mine own ambition soars not so high as to attempt the solution of so difficult a problem, but I do think I could read “Aurora Leigh” with a superior edification if sure that its author’s husband did not habitually address her as “Liz.” Poor Mr. Browning must have experienced a considerable difficulty in calling his wife by a name that she could not understand without study; for I am steadfast in my conviction that he willfully avoided clarity and that nothing is more opaque than Browning, except blacking.

By the by, now that the turmoil anent the publication of the Browning-Barrett love letters is almost subsided, I want to say that in no single instance that I have observed has an editor or reviewer who roundly denounced the rascality of their publication failed to give them added currency by copious quotation. There is apparently such a vice as hypocrisy—one would not have thought it.

The following verses come to me from Laytonville, a Mendocino county village that nobody, I’m sure, ever before heard of. They seem to me worthy of print, and to carry a promise of something even better when their author shall have acquired that precision of touch that comes of practice in writing:

*The Drowned Man’s Song*

The river wound me in its arms  
And held me strong and fast;  
Though he and I made a good fight  
He conquered me at last.  
O, the river held my breath from me  
Till I floated, a drowned man, merrily!

Away, away! This lifeless self  
With play is wild and free!  
The leaning hills, the drifting skies  
Whisper all day of me.  
The drowned man rides a level way  
And knows the things a drowned man may.

The dark fire whisper far ahead:  
“He comes who loved us so,-  
Who loved our breath and knew our ways  
Drifts on and on below.  
The ripples beat the hands that lay  
So softly in our greenery.”

O, gentle river, kindly tide,  
The ninth sun has gone low,  
O, let me rest and lightly drift  
Where friendly alders grow,  
The alders peer and nod and say;  
“Ho-ho!” the drowned man floats to-day!”

O, alders drooping full and low,  
Shut out the fretful sky;  
Droop over me that none may know  
Where at the last I lie –  
None but the early violets view  
The faded eyes that once were blue.  
Maggie Smith Greenwell

Another book by Dr. C. W. Doyle of Santa Cruz is announced for publication in October next. It is to be entitled “The Shadow of Quong Lung.” The scene of the narrative is our San Franciscan Chinatown and the characters are mostly Chinese. But Dr. Doyle’s Chinese are not all thieves, washer-men, highbinders and house servants. He has a knack at making them very human and commending them to our sympathetic interest. Nor does he make them speak “pidgin English” when conversing with one another, but translates their speech into ours, just as he would that of a Frenchman or German. But their speech has enough of Oriental imagery to make it distinctively and charmingly unfamiliar to us. That Dr. Doyle knows the people that he

writes about is, to those who know Dr. Doyle, sufficiently attested by the fact of his writing about them.

Dr. Doyle's other book, "The Taming of the Jungle," is going into a new edition, as it well merits. Probably California will some day consent to know that it is a great book—after being told so long enough by the East and Europe. And probably by that time its author will have shaken the inhospitable dust of the States from his feet forever. Meantime his fame is growing (elsewhere) and his mail is loaded with proposals from publishers desirous to know the taste of the sheathing of his bones. Criticism of literature in this country has not advanced beyond comparing one writer with another, and it is perhaps partly Dr. Doyle's apparently random choice of a title for his book that has subjected him to constant comparison with Mr. Kipling – between whom and himself there is no likeness. But he can very well endure this, for more often than not in enlightened publications the comparison is favorable to the later writer so far as concerns his stories of life in India: and to that view though the comparative method being valueless its results are hardly worth stating. I am myself on hand. My good friend, Mr. Clough from whom in a matter of this kind I differ, has uttered an adverse conviction and playfully backed his view with a picture representing Dr. Doyle as an ape.

The Markham boom appears to have suffered an abatement – probably a brief one. I attribute this to the fact that Mr. Markham and his river-firing protagonists are brandishing the incendiary tongue with a softened energy and a cooling fervor.