

The Wasp
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Prattle

That eminent Grecian and Latin scholar, the venerable Mr. Pickering, is “nevertheless” not opposed to cookery, and would have it taught in the Girls’ High School, even at the expense of those branches of learning in which himself is so distinguished. He declares that “by reading one or two books either during or after the school term is over” one may acquire “a sufficient knowledge of mythology for ordinary purposes.” Sufficient for cooking purposes, no doubt, but not enough for the laundry: the full intellectual equipment of the practical *blanchissense* includes so minute and exhaustive a knowledge of the deities that no fewer than *three* books are required to contain it.

I am smitten with a perfectly shocking compassion for Mr. Pickering; my heart goes out to him worse than an old man with a pick-handle to a boy throwing rocks. It is sadder than a funeral to reflect that a man in his position should share the stupid error that any degree of mythological knowledge can be got out of “one or two books.” A text-book on mythology has the same kind of value that the catalogue of a museum has. Apart from the ancient literatures in which mythology is incorporated, it is not worth knowing and cannot be known—not even well enough “for ordinary purposes,” such as shoeing horses and editing a San Francisco daily newspaper.

In passing sentence the other day on a convicted libeller, Judge Levy said:

Private family matters should never be allowed to be published to the world as news by insignificant papers. Personal journalism has wrecked many a home and broken many a heart and the verdict in this case should be a lesson to those who are to follow you.

He means well, the good Judge: his heart is as pure as a spring of dew, but he doesn’t quite hit the nail on the head, that is all. If “private family matters” are to be published at all as news it is better that it be done by “insignificant” papers than by important ones—the harm is less. Would not a libel be worse in *The Broadcast Enlightener* than in *The Snailhole Kioddle*? When the learned Judge—who does not appear to know very much of newspapers—speaks of “personal journalism” he appears as a wandering fire in a measureless night. Take the personal element from journalism and there is little left. There is not a newspaper published in the world that would live a month deprived of the right to mention men and women by name. What the learned, though somewhat confused, Judge means to condemn is not the “personal” element in journalism but the slanderous—which is another matter altogether. The judicial mind is a trifle awry herein, that is all—its various faculties, capacities and energies are concatenated without cohesion, and work together with about the same neighbourly cooperation as the dogs in a public pound making exposition of the principles of thorough-bass and counterpoint.

“Personal journalism,” quo’ he, the learned-as-aforsaid judge. “Personal journalism,” gabbles an applauding chorus of vacupated geese. Friends, this is Stuff—it compels to be sick. Every daily newspaper in the State—nearly every weekly—publishes a ghastly quantity of “private family matters” without rebuke and without dissent. Is it not “personal” to relate how that Miss Gumchu Macfiddlefaddle came down last Wednesday from Cow Canon to visit the O’Tumtums? Not “personal” to announce the betrothal of Downy McPuberty to Sweetie Mocump? Not “personal” to say who (and what) the Scronorriters had for dinner at a given date? Not “personal” to publish a list of bridal presents displayed at the Blacquemale-Saltaway “nuptials,” describe the bride’s body gear, the hue-and-cry of her eyes, the texture of her skin? If a woman’s skin is not a “private family matter” I should like to know, Your Honor, what is has the happiness to be.

It will occur to Your Honor that if public and printed discussion of such matters as these is right, reputable and within the law, there are few “private family matters” that a public journal may not rightly, reputably and legally discuss. It will likewise dawn upon your starry understanding that if it is proper to discuss these matters, it is proper to discuss them with conscience and discrimination. Critical comment that is confined to praise cannot be true, and those limitations of liberty which compel a lie are *contra bonos mores*. There are “enjoyable occasions” and disagreeable ones; “tasty mansions” and offensive; “elegant” costumes and dowdy; “charming” women and hideous; “refined” manners and crude. Be good enough, Your Honor, to resolve me these doubts: If it is my right to go to a private dwelling and relate in my newspaper what I see there, is it not my duty to relate it truly, as I see it? If I do so, do I become “personal” in a new and odious sense? Does not the right to praise imply the right to blame? Get your nose upon the trail of these suggestions, Judge, and pursue that organ with assiduity and fervor. So shall you profit. So shall you know more of journalism and not less of law. Your Honor is excused from further attendance.

On Tuesday last the world learned that the nations of antiquity each in turn succumbed to the inevitable. On Tuesday last the world learned that the thraldom of the beauty of Grecian and Roman architecture fetters today the imagination of half the civilized world. On Tuesday last the world learned that though moments may come when states are at a standstill and the life-blood in their veins beats with but a feeble stroke—nay, moments when nations seem almost to retrograde—yet, beheld in their entirety, their motion is ever upward and onward toward that lofty ideal that is ever present to the human heart. On Tuesday last (in short) the anniversary exercises of the University of California were planned without compassion and performed without remorse.

Hearst when he ran was beaten in the race,
But stooped so low lamenting the disgrace
That Fortune, tempted by a mark so droll,
Arose and kicked him to the winning-pole.

Some pardon-broker is petitioning the Governor to turn loose Skipper Goodell, who was recently sentenced to four month’s imprisonment for shooting at sailors in the rigging. No doubt the Governor will accede to this prayer; not, perhaps, on the ground of compassion, but because sailors are not specifically mentioned in the game law. The Governor is a good man: he will protect the people in the enjoyment of every right and privilege not definitively annulled by legislation. Yes, he is a good, good man; and whenever it shall please Heaven to remove him I mean to cut the following inscription on his headstone with the first thing I can lay my hands on:

Stoneman at last is made to dwell
Where pardons do not come.
O Father, thou dost all things well,
Though rather late with some.

The he-native, astride the ridge-pole of his ear, inveighs shrilly at his female, who nakes herself of neckwear to unnamableness. For the good mate hath addiction to the showing of that which she hath—wherefore he affirms his intent to be condemned. Unable to achieve a result commensurate with the devotion of his immortal part to endless discomfort, he flies to the newspaper and deburdens himself of cold-drawn sarcasm anent “the modesty of woman”; but she, conscious of a trick of double value to the whatesty of whom, remains in silent performance of her own will, regardless. And whereas this is so, be it resolved that the male American, having to his tooth a dish of dressed crow, should eat thereof and be filled—that it may be fulfilled as it is written: O that mine enemy would bite a rook! The viand hath her faults in the matter of texture, being somewhat coarse therein, and of eminent flavour; but she is the best the continent affords. Come, now, hearties, three of ye bear a hand at her devouring—one to eat and be thankful and two to keep his courage up.

More than five hundred Americans are said to be living in London.—Ex.
On whom?

That insoluble lizard has been taken out of another woman’s stomach, alive and kicking. The preference of this reptile for the female stomach is no doubt well grounded in reason: he is a prohibition lizard, loving a congenial environment of cold water, a condition of existence infrequently recurrent and imperfectly permanent in the male of our species. The relation of total abstinence to longevity is seen in the instance of this lizard in a signal and conspicuous way: the tough little beast is now some hundreds of years old, having outlasted a numberless multitude of women. These come and go—the sound of their hurrying feet is never stilled in the corridors of time. They rise like exhalations, and the steep sunbeams dispel them. But the gastric lizard they have always with them, now in one, now in another. Vainly, at the death of the fair one, the vengeful surgeon drags him into the glare of publicity and holds him up to the execration of man; the newspaper man tenderly transfers him to another female stomach and sets him going again to baffle medical science for another generation and astonish the future sawbones. The flagrant falsehood concerning its early days—the woodland pool, the thirsty child, clandestine egg, is rehearsed. I want that lizard to go, along with the Chinese. He was never invited here by treaty, he hasn’t a stake in the country and Heaven knows he don’t assimilate. Go, monster, go!

The bladder-headed sky-pilot calling himself Munhall, and apparently not ashamed of the name, is a daisy with the dew on. If the wretch is correctly reported in the daily newspapers he utters more lies in an hour than he can expiate in a month of eternities. He is none of your light-draught, flat-bottomed liars for inland navigation; he is a clipper-built, square-rigged, deep-water liar. He never enters the bights and roadsteds of prevarication, with their contiguous coastage of truth, but holds his course straight away from continental fact, with a free-running and joyant farewellity beautiful to behold. In the time required by a coastwise liar to ship his anchor this sovereign of the sea of mendacity is hull-down on the horizon. In addition to his accomplishments as an assassin of the truth, he appears to cherish a knack at scurrile speech which would precipitate an O’Donnell into serpentine contortions of cataleptic envy: he is a blackguard of genuine inspiration, gifted with the congenital garrulity

and vocabulary volubility of a Brazilian ape. Now, therefore, may Satan seize upon the soul of him, split it like a fish and keep it to grease the grills of all the victims of revivals, world without end, amen.

(Source: Arcive.org, <https://archive.org/stream/waspjanjune188616unse#page/n234/mode/1up>)