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The Passing Show

A Record of Individual Opinion.

I am of those who believe that we ought not to be in the Philippines, but not of those who believe that, being there, we ought to retire because beaten—and beaten we virtually are, so far. In this matter we may profitably study the case of Great Britain and the Transvaal Republic. When the British were defeated in the field in an attempt to subdue the Boers Gladstone and his government, who were making the war, discovered that it was unjust, as no doubt it was, and having “the courage of their opinion” they relinquished the enterprise—just frankly backed down and out, conceding everything. Wherefore the war must be made afresh and fought out, for the Boers believe themselves invincible. Ever since Majuba Hill they have been turkey-cocking with an insufferable presumption and now, with as light-hearted an alacrity as is consistent with a fit compassion for the vanquished, they are apparently about to undertake the conquest of the British Empire. Feeble nations and isolated races, like little men and recluses, are prone to insupportable conceit. It is not right to oppress them, but when in quarrel with them the duty of giving them a flawless flogging has all the imperiousness of a divine command.

Patriotic Americans who recall Professor Charles Eliot Norton’s intemperate utterance about the Spanish war will be joyed by the following “roast” of him, frankly suggesting Milton’s famous lines on Shakespeare. The author, content, doubtless, with a sense of his own exceeding cleverness, cares not to link his name to that of his victim lest he catch by contagion some of the obloquy that he confers:

AN EPITAPH

What need my Norton’s most disloyal bones
This chilly monument of stones?
Chill was his heart, more deaf his sluggish ear
To maiden sobbing o’er her lover’s bier,
To widow’s moan that God’s own heart doth rive,
Than this dead stone that keeps his shame alive!

“Stay home!” he cried when, fired with generous zeal,
The sons of Massachusetts, at the appeal
Of suffering Cuba and the sinking Maine.
Burned to avenge these wrongs on murderous Spain.
“Stay home and learn to cultivate repose;

Model yourselves on me, as one who knows.
Your country lacks a sense of honor fine—
Can scarce distinguish beer from good red wine.
A trifling optimism is all her creed.
Fatal to seriousness of thought and deed.
Honest, dishonest, are to her the same;
My country puts me to the blush of shame!
Unlearn, young men, your patriotic vice;
Learn well that all things have their market price.
Learn that Humanity's not worth two beans:
Learn that your country's blacker than she seems.
Ponder these matters (after you have dined)
And, before all things, learn to be refined!"

Deaf is the traitor now to orphan's sigh;
Deaf is he now to murdered sailor's cry;
Crumbled to ashes his disloyal bones;
Nothing remains to him but these chill stones.
Silent, they tongue the shame that shall survive,
And dead, they keep his infamy alive!

"Every sane understanding," says a contemporary unsupplied with one, "must approve Mr. Kipling's infrangible silence in the presence of reporters." Yes, it distinguishes him from the infeasible mob as a profitable subject for interviewing.

"More sweet than all my bosom knows, O thou
Whose 'lips are sealed' and will not disavow!"
So sang the blithe reporter man as grew
Beneath his hand the leg-long "interview."

Some of our newspapers—apparently a "syndicate" of them are suffering an eruption of "humor" by a long forgotten "funny man" named "M. Quad." He had a great vogue in his day, did Mr. "Quad." His articles in the Podunk *Skarpeezie* and the Kalamazoo *Sumdargum* were reprinted wherever the English language had been spoken to. After a lingering illness he died, I think, of a flux of words and was buried beneath his own work to keep him down. I cannot conjecture who, for our sins, has haled him out of his hole and back to its mansion called his fleeting breath, but assuredly his immoral part is again with us and on the grin. I dare say he is still funny, for I observe that in all the illustrations of his work Man the Contortionist is represented in violent action, mostly in mid-air, fighting, running, whirling and throwing an incalculable multitude of double-somersaults. It seems justly inferable from these works of art that his humor has not that repose which stamps the caste of Vera de Vere—a deficiency which, however, serves admirably to distinguish it from the despair of the damned. I should say (reluctantly) that in relating the adventures and delineating the characters of the dead Mr. "Quad" would shine with a faulty effulgence.

After nearly twenty years the French people begin to manifest signs of recovery from defeat by the German army. They are already willing to go to see German plays in the Parisian theatres. Nothing but a great convulsion of nature is now needed to draw these mighty nations into a political alliance and cement it with Limburger cheese.

In ringing up the British Government and pointing attention to the indiscreet utterances of Lieutenant-Commander St. John concerning the age and sex of General Otis, the administration will be well within the lines of diplomatic precedent. It was unquestionably wicked of the British officer to call General Otis an old woman; such language sometimes brings about war and the horrors thereof. How would Great Britain like to see all the respectable grandmothers in this country, the Senate and Supreme Court included, moving against her mangy lion with a great brandishing of broomsticks? In her haste to save her cat by swift apology she would fall over her own tongue. Language offensive to the elderly females of a friendly power is contrary to the laws of the diplomatic game; and although Britannia rules the waves she cannot waive the rules.

Denis Kearney with gloves! Denis Kearney topped with a shiny hat and booted to match! Denis Kearney lounging gracefully in the office of the Palace Hotel, uttering smooth nothings in unailing English! Denis Kearney cherishing in his breast pocket papers attesting his purchase of three thousand tons of wheat!

Land of the West, what great events
Upon thy record shine:
Stupendous works of Providence
And gifts of Grace Divine!

If I were in my anecdotage and addicted to reminiscences I could hold any wedding guest with my glittering eye and fill him topful of entertaining yarns about Mr. Kearney and the olden, golden days of the Sandlot. I could tell him (for one example) of a Saturday afternoon when Kearney and the late Frank Pixley entered the editorial rooms of the Argonaut conducting an animated difference of opinion. I was the editor and being present was appealed to to settle the question agitating their ungentle souls—which was, whether in that day's issue, just out, Mr. Kearney had or had not been described as "a dirty-shirted tonguester." Mr. Pixley, the principal owner of the paper, had over-confidently taken the negative side and backed his faith with a wager. My decision—given with becoming modesty, albeit I glowed with pride—was against him: I was myself the author of that noble description, which I pointed out. Mr. Pixley was greatly dejected: he solemnly explained that if ever again he put faith in the decency of that scurrilous sheet he would be damned.

As to Mr. Kearney, he was, I thought, unduly (and inconsiderately) elated; it was apparently the proudest moment of his life! But gratification of his pride was all that he got out of the incident, for the bet was not paid.

Apropos of nothing herein, I may relate that several years afterwards Pixley and I had the bad taste to disagree as to one another's worth and virtues, and warm words passed between us. These, on his part, took the form of a wish for my early removal from this vale of tears; on

mine, of a threat to survive him and spit on his grave. I am not proud of that; it is not here pointed out to American youth as an example of controversial propriety. To the day of Pixley's death we were unreconciled; and then—he had himself cremated and is without a grave! That was his indubitable right, and heaven knows I feel no bitterness about it, for I'm sure I never really entertained the reprehensible intention signified by my hasty words; but at the time his forethought seemed to me very ungenerous and the precaution not altogether fair. Ah, well, living or dead we are all poor worms o' the dust: and sometimes I almost doubt the expedience of quarrelling at all.

That misgiving was a veritable haunting presence the other day as I stood in the great cemetery beyond Oakland and counted the tombs of no fewer than six men upon whom I had written ungracious "epitaphs" while yet they lived. Carved above and about them now is literary matter of another sort: but my censorious work also is still in evidence elsewhere. Of course they do not mind; and that perhaps helps to make up the doubt whether it was worth while.

Enough, enough: beneath a smiling sky
Let Retrospection close her backward eye.
Let Memory, intent on days afar,
Expire unheeded in the days that are,
While Hope waits, joyous, with a pen of light
Thine epitaph, Greek Harrison, to write.

If it is true that the death of the Rev. Dr. Barrows was caused by remorse for having married Mr. Perry Belmont to Mrs. Sloan he had a tender conscience, for he was not the only one in fault. The lady and the gentleman themselves were guilty of contributory negligence.