

*The Wasp*  
May 22, 1886

*Prattle*

The socialists and anarchists of New York are arming for the fray: one night last week a reporter of the *World* counted twenty, “each of whom,” he declares, “entered the hall with a rifle in one hand, and some of them with an umbrella in the other.” The rifles—being, probably, of the antique back-action pattern so popular with the enemy when borne by the Federal troops during the early days of the Great Lukewarmness—do not disquiet us; indeed, these weapons are of so amiable disposition that their display by the anarchists may rightly be considered, if not an overture for reconciliation, at least an example of temporizing. But civilization pales and shudders at the thought of incurring the anarchical clubbed umbrella! Doubtless, too, these *hostes humani generis* carried pocket parasols.

They were sitting together in a car—Mr. Joel Russell, candidate for Governor on the Prohibition ticket, and Dr. Blach, the City Physician, who respects wine if it is good. Mr. Russell looked up from his newspaper. “Swift are the judgments of the Lord,” he said (there is piety in Mr. Russell’s family)—“His wrath follows hard upon sin, like a strong man pursuing his enemy.”

“What has occurred now?” inquired the doctor, quietly.

“A man went into a Dupont-street saloon yesterday,” replied the Grandmother of His Party, “took a drink of liquor and instantly fell dead upon the floor. ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the—’”

“Look here, my fanatical friend,” said the medico, hotly, “you are away off. I made an examination of that man’s body. Debility, sir, debility—he needed a stimulant. If he hadn’t taken that liquor he would have died an hour before.”

Healdsburg is in the enjoyment of a “religious awakening,” the local newspapers say. It has had the same thing before, for it is recorded of a certain rich man that “in Healdsburg he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.”

A provision of the constitution of the Knights of Honor prohibiting the payment of “endowments” in the cases of members who commit suicide has at last been replaced—a result of strenuous and persistent endeavour on the part of members interested. The right to commit suicide is naturally very dear to a man who has to pay the dues, fees and assessments of a “mutual benefit” society.

Because his wife would not consent to mortgage the homestead to raise money, a farmer of Michigan, 70 years of age, burned the house and barn, and blew away the right side of his head with an old musket. It does not appear how much money he raised in that way; even if the sum was twice as great as what he could have borrowed on the homestead if it had not been encumbered with a stubborn woman, one can hardly help regretting that he adopted so extreme a measure. If he could not bring himself up to the point of removing the wife, he ought at least to have spared the house and barn.

The Geary-street railroad people may or may not hold peculiar notions as to the jury system being a “bulwark of our liberties,” but if they do not manage to get a better grip on their cable they are likely to lose the one they have in their purse. The three persons injured on Saturday last by the slipping of a clutch will probably bring actions, which will be tried before three several juries. The company’s expense of State Senators to assist the jurors will necessarily be heavy. These remarks are made in no uncharitable spirit; the writer is a Christian gentleman with a disposition like a Sabbath morning in a church-yard, but on several occasions recently he has (himself unmoved) witnessed great consternation among his fellow passengers on the Geary-street line, caused by inefficiency of the grips and brakes. Such exhibitions of human weakness are painful to him. Besides, it is more godly to improve the machinery of a dummy than to tamper with that of a court.

Every fool who works at rhyming takes his pen and goes  
to griming all his fingers with an evidence of ink;  
And his weak ideas teeter in this irritating meter—which  
will drive his readers silly or provoke them into drink.

Then he prints the curst effusion, from beginning to  
conclusion, in the typographic manner of this ’ere:  
Three lines running all together, so you know not clearly whether they are  
verses you are reading or but proses taken queer.

All such awful tribulations are ambitious imitations of  
some clever idle verses by Bret Harte.  
Thus the zealous ape of letters tries to do things like his  
betters, and succeeds to satisfaction in all things but  
just—their art.

Once a bird was sweetly singing, and a jackass, proudly  
springing to his hoofs, began an imitative roar.  
Ah, unlucky emulation!—his imperfect intonation made  
of *him* a more conspicuouser donkey than before!

Grayly and glimmeringly it begins to dawn on the understandings of the members of the Shoe-Dealers’ Anti-Chinese Association that in boycotting the handiwork of the ungenerous Mongolian, their organization serves the wholesalers and jobbers of Eastern-made goods with significant fidelity. Some of them, indeed, aver with emotion that to these unworthy persons their association owes its origin, maintenance and activity. Well, well, this is a sad dog of a world, truly—a veritable, stump-tailed yellow cur of a world! And they do say that Mr. Martin Irons has long been a silent partner in the American Invulnerable Locomotive Company, which has patented and will manufacture a type of railway engine which can’t be “killed,” and that Herr Most holds one hundred shares of the stock of a concern which makes an improved handcuff and has a virtual monopoly of the ball-and-chain market.

The *Chronicle* says Captain Hatfield “showed small knowledge of the Apache character in allowing the Indians to ambush him,” and explains that he “should not have ventured into a canyon without a careful reconnaissance.” There is some excuse for the unfortunate fellow: not having the advantage of a San Francisco newspaper writer’s

experience of Indian warfare, and lacking that person's minute and accurate knowledge of the ground and of the circumstances under which the engagement occurred, he could hardly be expected to do more than save such of his men as ran away. Suitably to commemorate their escape, and in general recognition of American military valor, I suggest that the *Chronicle* writer be called Colonel.

Judge Payson's bill to prohibit the acquisition of public lands meets with general favour in Congress, and will probably pass. The alien in this country is in the enjoyment of a pretty hard lot. If he buys land and grows cattle we call him a feudal baron; if he hasn't any cattle range we say he is a landless proletarian without any stake in the country. In the one case he is a scorner of the poor, in the other an enemy to property. The feudal baron is conceived as a bold marauder with a troop of rough riders at his heels, swooping down upon republican institutions and cracking their crowns right and left; the landless proletarian lies in wait at a street corner to fling a sputtering bomb at government by the people. If we can ever find a class of aliens who neither own property nor don't own it, we shall admire their moderation, believe in their assurances of good faith and lay upon them the whole burden of the national, state and municipal taxation.

On fame's eternal dumping-ground  
Jeff's crinoline is spread;  
But gory words, with solemn sound,  
Still issue from his head.

*This country is full of half-witted individuals who fancy that workmen are fools to be caught with chaff.*—Chronicle.

Such chaff, for example, as telling them they are not fools and can't be caught with chaff.

I observe in a report of Grand Army proceedings relative to Memorial Day that "Comrade Rockwell has consented to be the poet of the occasion." It is mighty obliging in Comrade Rockwell to consent to be a poet: there are so few men who are willing to make the sacrifice that the generosity of such men as Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, Tennyson and Rockwell is worthy of all praise. I have myself been "willin'" for more than twenty years.

The humorist of the recent grand jury is Mr. P. J. Flannigan, the illustrious author of the minority report. Some of this amusing creature's notions are as refreshing as "the shadow of a great rock in a lonely land," with a catarrh-cure advertisement on the rock, a rattlesnake in the shadow and a half-dozen gentlemen with shotguns quieting title to the land. Exceptionally pleasing is his defense of the late lamented School Board from the cruel epithet "tough." When a real good man like Mr. Flannigan comes forward with a brush and basin to wash the "stained escutcheons" of that lot, not even the hardest and most impenitent cynic can deny him an encouraging "Don't you wish you may get 'em clean?" Still, one can hardly help the reflection that the time required for complete purification might be more profitably spent in preparation for another and a better world. If Mr. Flannigan urges that this world is good enough for him, there is no more to be said.

Mr. Flannigan is inexpressibly delightful: he warms the soul and stimulates the sensibilities like wine—he is better than an apple. He is no less delicious when he thinks as you think yourself than when, haughty and cold and wrapped in the mantle of self, he stands apart in awful isolation, grinning through the horse-collar of dissent. I have myself a divinely

implanted conviction that the Free Library of this town is a weeping evil and the Free Librarian a person of supreme unworthy, but it never would have occurred to me to go bring his scalp in this way.

*The very chaining of the catalogues reminds one of a prison or at least some reformatory institution, and the solemn aspect of the Librarian himself does not help to undeceive the visitant.*

This, I believe, is the first time that hoary and reverend institution, the grand jury, has been made an instrument of terror to the unhandsome. If that is to be custom I wish to lodge a complaint against Nat. Brittan.

The “solemn aspect” which Mr. Flannigan finds insupportable in the Free Public Perkins, and which, whenever the sufferer looks out of the window, causes Professor Davidson to record an eclipse of the sun, is perhaps due to a desire to avoid the mistake of the undertaker’s mute in one of Congreve’s plays. Of that ungrateful menial his master complained that the better wages he got, the more cheerful he looked. Mr. Perkins has possibly had his salary raised and is trying to prove himself worthy of the advance by subduing his visage to what he conceives to be the spirit of his environment.

(Source: Archive.org, <https://archive.org/stream/waspjanjune188616unse#page/n173/mode/1up>)