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Prattle

A Record of Individual Opinion

The San Francisco Cremation Company has again rattled its mouldy bones by turning over on its other side. It is the deadest body alive. It is so departed that you could not breathe the breath of life into its withered lung with a blacksmith's bellows, nor create a soul under its rotting ribs by an Act of Congress. The vitality of a doornail is, in comparison, obtrusive and irrepressible. The Siberian mastodon in his matrix of immemorial ice was not so gone before. For many and many a year this lamented corporation waited patiently in what it conceived to be the line of progress, hoping that the march of events would overtake it and give it a push forward. Lapped in a dream of avarice, it counted on getting rich enough to build a crematory by the rise in value of the ground upon which it was to stand. Hope deferred made its heart sick, and that ailing organ excused itself from work, to the unspeakable passing away of the whole concern. Once a year, during the nesting season of the grave-worm, this professional corpse wiggles its toes, turns over and sneezes. That is its way of manifesting a penitent desire for Christian burial and asking for an obolus to pay its passage across the Styx. If some kind soul will give the unhappy carcass a top-dressing of soil where it lies he may count upon such gratitude as it can express by mitigation of its fragrance. If not, let it at least have a headstone inscribed as follows:

Here lies Cremation in a long repose,
Dumb to the ear but noisy to the nose.
He groped about to find a key to close
The tomb, that nursery of human woes,
But turned up nothing except his toes.

Mr. Benjamin Davis, a luckless gentleman confined in the county jail for killing his wife, advertises in the newspapers for a woman to take care of his child. The choice of a nurse is a duty which so naturally devolves upon the mother that it seems rather a pity that Mrs. Davis is not living to perform it. Even Mr. Davis himself must feel that her judgment in this delicate matter would be of some value to him. He need not despair, however; whatever may be the shortcomings of the woman selected, she will have this important and gratifying superiority to the lady whose place she fills in his household: she will be alive.

The killing of the South Carolinian baseball umpire by a dissenting shortstop was a hasty and lawless act. Baseball umpires are, of course, responsible; but the proper method of making them realize their unworthiness is the reverse of that practiced against the early Christians in Rome.

Those erring persons were cast into the diamond field of the period to take their chances with the catchers. The baseball umpire should be thrown to the spectators.

It is to be regretted that on some of those many occasions when it has been observed that “strong men turned away their faces and wept” the reporters had not watched the weak ones and made a record of *their* demeanor. The exact nature of the relation between uncommon physical strength and a certain feebleness of the lachrymary glands is not understood. That it exists is seen not only in such instances as those mentioned but in the slogging matches which now form so picturesque a feature of American life. Invariably the defeated man weeps like an April cloud—not because he is the stronger of the two, though, but because he is not. Under circumstances similarly affecting, the victor would execute as dolorous a wail as he. Cynics there be who deem this weakness infantile, and point it out as proof that a brute (by which bad name they are pleased to denote a pugilist) is necessarily a baby—meaning thereby a person of nimble and copious tears. On reflection I am disposed to take that view of the matter myself, and to regard Mr. Jack Dempsey’s melting mood when thrashed by Mr. La Blanche as a most reprehensible frame of mind. Still, I would make it habitual with him and his kind if I could.

The elixir of life may not in all cases kill the patient eventually, but we cannot yet know that. I am looking for Mr. Reynolds to drop off pretty soon now, if he is spared; and Mr. Gamble can probably be saved only by assassination or some fatal accident. Maybe my alarm is groundless, but while the ultimate effect of the elixir is unknown common prudence suggests that no more valuable lives be imperiled; let future experiments be made upon only Mr. Fitch of the *Bulletin* and Mr. Pickering of the *Call*. If it be inferred from this that in my judgment the elixir is free from any element of immortality I will confess that I do think it possesses that unspeakably precious merit.

If Hayti’s chiefs were wrong or right,
Their names were bad, at any rate;
For Hippolyte was not polite,
Nor Legitime legitimate.

In the Powell murder trial Dr. Stambaugh, the prisoner’s brother-in-law, testified in that innocent’s behalf, that for twenty years he had been afflicted with aphasia. One symptom of that disorder, according to the learned physician, is an inability to identify objects by their proper names. Then Powell had no such disease. If you speak the words “brute” and “coward” in his presence he will identify himself as the thing meant. He will never have aphasia; through all his life, be it short or long, he will know that the word “assassin” means him. And when the trumpet of shame blares abroad across the land the sound of “Stambaugh” he will be able to point out as unerringly as the finger of scorn the particular unfortunate to whom that opprobrious name justly applies.

The Blythe case was on. Mr. Highton looked handsome exceedingly. Mr. Boalt, opposed to him in interest, had the consistency to forego his beauty. Miss Florence chewed gum in a way to soften the hardest heart.

“Do you remember being very ill in 1882?” Mr. Highton asked her in cross-examination. “I object,” said Mr. Boalt, sharply; “no foundation has been laid for that question.”

“Your Honor,” said Mr. Highton, addressing the Bench, “we propose to show that Florence Blythe died in 1882, and this young woman was trained to personate her. My question is relevant, competent and material.”

“Question allowed,” said the judge, winking and pretending to have heard it. Mr. Boalt noted an exception by lifting both shoulders and curling his superior lip. The question was repeated.

“I was not ill in 1882,” answered the witness.

“Do you not,” continued Mr. Highton, “remember a man—an oldish person with more spectacles than hair—standing at your bedside with his fingers on your wrist and holding a big gold watch?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you not remember that he shook his head, put away his watch, removed his fingers and pitched his tent—I mean spread his ear—on your breast?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you not remember that when again he stood erect he turned to a number of people who were weeping and said that all was over?”

“No, sir.”

“Have you no recollection of being afterward taken away in a narrow box and—”

“Your Honor,” interrupted Mr. Boalt, springing to his feet. “I do most consummately, austere and irrevocably object!”

“Ah, well,” said Mr. Highton to the court, fashioning his visage into a significant smile. “I will not press this delicate matter; I know how to feel for the learned counsel. I once came within an ace of being unmasked myself.”

In the Neagle case I have formed two opinions, which it will require testimony to remove. 1. Deputy-Marshall Neagle did not exceed his duty in killing Mr. Terry to protect Justice Field. 2. Justice Field did exceed *his* duty in swearing (a) that it was against his wish and protest that Neagle attended him on the Los Angeles journey, and (b) that he paid Neagle’s fare both ways. Neither statute nor tradition requires that a justice of the United States Supreme Court should make inconsistent and contradictory statements under oath.

“The shoes of Bill Higgins should ever
Be vacant,” says Pixley. Agreed:
Get into them, friend if you’re clever
At climbing, and then they’ll indeed
Be vacant until you are freed.

Mr. Harry D. Harrigan, of this city, is reported in arrest in New York for killing a man named Reedy. A considerable curiosity is manifested here as to Mr. Harrigan’s history and antecedents. As Mr. Reedy was a barkeeper, I venture to suggest that inquiries about Mr. Harrigan might profitably be made in prohibitionist circles.

The most melancholy feature of Mrs. Maybrick’s fate is that she should have thrown herself away on so poor a specimen of a man as Brierly, the Liverpool merchant—Austere Contemporary.

How differently people estimate the comparative sadness of things, according to their own viewpoint. The lady herself thinks the most melancholy feature of her fate is her inability to get out. She would like to have more Brierly and less penal servitude for life. But then she was born without the iron morality which distinguishes a newspaper man from people who poison their husbands with fly-paper.

Telegrams from France intimate that the republic is menaced by a formidable combination of Royalists, Imperialists, and Boulangists. This movement has but one element of weakness: each political unit of the alliance wishes to overthrow republican institutions so far as itself is concerned and maintain them so far as concerns its allies.

Attorney Knight, it happens so sometimes
That lawyers justifying cutthroats' crimes
For hire—calumniating, too for gold.
The dead, dumb victims cruelly unsouled
Speak, through the press, to a tribunal far
More honorable than their Honors are—
A court that sits not with assenting smile
While living rogues dead gentlemen revile—
One where the scoundrel ethics of your trade
Confuse no judgment and no cheating aid—
The Court of Honest Souls, where you in vain
May plead your right to vilify for gain,
Sternly reminded if a man engage
To serve assassins for the liar's wage,
His mouth with merchantable falsehoods crammed,
He's twice detestable and doubly damned!

Attorney Knight, defending Powell, you,
To earn your fee, so energetic grew
(So like a hound, the pride of all the pack,
Clapping your nose upon the dead man's track
To run his faults to earth—at least proclaim
At vacant holes the overtaken game)
That men who marked you flourishing the tongue
And saw your arms so vigorously swung
All marveled how so light a breeze could stir
So great windmill to so great a whirr.
Little they knew, or surely they had grinned,
The mill was laboring to raise the wind.

Ralph Smith a "shoulder striker"! God, O hear
This hardy man's description of thy dear
Dead child, the gentlest soul, save only One
E'er born in any land beneath the sun.
All silent benefactions still he wrought:

High deed and gracious speech and noble thought,
Kept all thy law and, seeking still the right,
Upon his blameless breast received the light.

“Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,” he cried
Whose wrath was bitter as his love was wide—
Milton, thy servant. Nay, thy will be done:
To smite or spare—to me it all is one.
Can vengeance bring my sorrow to an end,
Or justice give me back my buried friend?
But if some Milton vainly now implore,
And Powell prosper as he did before,
Yet ’twere too much that, making no ado.
Thy saints be slaughtered and be slandered too.
So, Lord, make Knight his weapon keep in sheath,
Or, faith, I’ll wrest it from between his teeth!