1849

Editor's Table

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EDITOR'S TABLE.

Write an editorial! Dear reader, how gloomily the announcement struck upon our ears, that the fatal lot had fallen upon us. And in vacation, too! Some may suppose this to be the best time, but we have found, since our residence in this sublunary sphere, that the more we have to do, the better we can do it. The thought rests upon us like a heavy incubus. That unfailing remedy for cares—a cigar—has proved entirely useless. Like Banquo's ghost it will not "down." Sometimes we feel the burning aspirations of genius. Sometimes we feel as if we could mount our Pegasus, and disdaining lower objects, soar far above the Parnassian heights, till we lose ourselves in the clouds, the garments of the muses, but awake from our pleasure-dreams to find ourselves enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke, and our ideas partaking of the same aeral nature, and evanescing most rapidly. Our thoughts are too rapid for our pen; so we shall have to walk the earth for a time, and leave the giant ideas to men of more giant intellects, and bodies too, than we possess.

The office of an editor is at once a useful and a difficult one. His supposed greater capabilities of knowing the subject on which he is immediately employed, give him an influence over the minds of others, and a position commanding and responsible; hence, men readily yield themselves to his guidance. His journal will always resemble the mind of the editor. As the stream partakes of the character of the fountain to which it owes its origin, so the journal, if conducted by a low, groveling mind will be low and groveling; if otherwise, dignified and refined. Hence a good editor should be clever, affable, and learned. His office is to teach and improve the minds of others. If his journal be a political one, he should try to convince men, not by forcing them, not by low, mean slander, but by persuading their judgments. He is not to be the organ of a party merely, but of the people. To descend to low, mean slander upon the reputation or personal character of an opponent, argues an inferiority in debating powers, or good arguments, and men will be apt to think so. The great political questions should be presented with both sides, his own arguments set forth in as forcible a manner as possible, and the opposite ones answered. To try to force men would now-a-days be considered absurd. Never was there a truer saying than that

"A man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still."

Should his journal be a literary one, his object should be to cultivate the taste and improve the mind. The mind, though formed after a model, the perfection of which cannot be comprehended, must, nevertheless be cultivated, before it can subserve those lofty purposes for which it was designed. It is man's most precious gift, and the proper exercise of it may confer upon him the choicest blessings. But, unfortunately for him, he is too often found ignorant of its worth, and before he is aware of its value, it is wasted amidst the dissipations of youth, or the indolence of maturer years.
Not conscious of its having been the very means by which he is enabled to enjoy life, he is but too often found deprecating its cultivation, or impeding the spread of its influence. Such men have their reward. They have it in that ignorance which disdains to emerge from darkness to light—that ignorance which shows itself in the actions of the bad citizen and incompetent magistrate—in short, in that ignorance which mystifies and darkens every idea of man, and renders him incapable of performing the ordinary duties of life. But happily a great change has taken place amongst us; society is becoming more and more intellectual in its structure, and he who would attain to eminence in any department of life, must be no mean child of the muses. In the first stages of a nation's existence, the physical wants and necessities must be attended to. After these have been satiated, men begin to feel the want of something else. There is a vacuum in the mind which must be filled. We appeal to history in proof of our assertion. Compare America now with America thirty or even twenty years ago. The difference is incalculable. We are now considered as a nation great, not only in political and liberal relations, but also in intellectual culture. The office of an editor is now considered an honorable and responsible one, and men of learning have taken the charge of our journals. Thus, then, is our course onward; our civilization progressive. To give additional stimulus to this desire for mental culture, this is the work to be done, and the leaders of it are the noble souls, the philanthropists of the age.

One reason why we do not make still further progress, is the desire which all men have for fame. Men have now, as ever, the same objection

"——— to go down
To the vile dust from whence they sprung
Unwept, unremembered, and unsung."

To too many in this world, self is the only idol; not that we mean to condemn all selfishness. All men should be somewhat selfish; unless we claim our rights, unless we look to our advancement, nobody will do it for us; modest men never get along well. But we now refer to those who make self the guiding principle of their lives. How many bled and died in Mexico, that bled and died but for their country's good! Could the bloody fields of Resaca, Buena Vista, and Chapultepec be interrogated on this point, their answer would be

"Infandum jubes renovare dolorem."

The dying soldier might imagine so, and there is so much of high-souled chivalry about it, that we ourselves might be deceived; but were his feelings carefully analyzed a desire that his name might rank upon the pages of his country's history as one of its heroes, would be found to predominate. Do not misunderstand us to confound ambition with selfishness. Ambition is noble, selfishness degrading. Napoleon was selfish, Washington ambitious; Richelieu and Aaron Burr were selfish, Wilberforce and Patrick Henry ambitious. The one principle we should condemn, the other, cherish.

And so it is in literary pursuits. Men write more for fame than for improvement and instruction. Taking advantage of the "omne ignotum pro magnifico," they disdain to bring down their knowledge to the comprehension of those inferior to themselves in learning. Such is not our object. To improve the taste, and to excite a love for intellectual culture, this is our highest aim, this our ambition. Should our journal be of service to but one of our readers, should it improve the taste of but one, should it add to the stock of knowledge, and induce one idea into the mind of any, our highest object will have been attained, and we will retire from our office with the consciousness that we have done a noble work.
New York in Slices.—We read these "Slices" as they appeared in the New York Tribune, and have gladly enjoyed a perusal of the same in the neat form in which they now appear. These slices are certainly graphic, and, as far as we can judge, accurate and truthful; the cut that accompanies "Broadway" seems to have been put there merely to show how much stronger is the impression produced by the "Slice" than by the picture. Though this is perhaps the best sketch in the book, yet the author sustains himself well through every one, and rarely or never becomes tedious. The style is so terse and natural, that we find ourselves involuntarily carried along with the author—carving our way with him, until his very thoughts seem to be the offspring of our own brain; we feel with him the alternate emotions of indignation and pain, as we pry into the horrid mysteries of the "Tombs" and "Five Points;" then, sick and disgusted, turn like some moaning wind "hurrying swiftly away frightened at what it has seen and heard, and hastening to lose itself in the purifying sunshine of the upper world."

There are many things in the book to excite admiration—a pleasant sort of admiration we mean—but there are also many things to shock and disgust; if the man and the philanthropist have any right to be disgusted at the honest disclosures made by the Slicer. Though the book is evidently written under strong excitement, yet it is not without much wit and humor, and abounds in spirited description.

The character of the work deserves a more extensive notice than we are able to prepare at present. The book is to be found at Erb's, and we recommend it to all.

Lamartine's Confidences have lately been put forth to the world. It seems he has more confidence in the French public than they have in him. We shall probably have more on this production hereafter.

OUR EXCHANGES.

Godey's Magazine is the Lady's Book of this country. The April number, with which the publishers have kindly furnished us, abounds in the very best pieces from the very best writers, and presents a pleasing variety.

We have received the last number of the Nassau Monthly; it is an interesting periodical, and this number sustains its previous character for literary merit.

The Lancaster Farmer has been received. We will gladly continue the exchange.

Our friends of the University of Virginia will accept our thanks for the promptness with which they have sent us the first two numbers of their valuable Magazine. The contents are characterized by interest and ability. We feel a sort of sympathy with this youthful periodical; it is a literary experiment commenced probably under the same auspices with our own, and doubtless with the same attendant difficulties. We have begun together, and we trust that our attempts will be alike successful

"Te doctarum edem praemia frontium
Dis misereant superis."

Attention Company!—Now that the long and lazy days of spring are with us, why don't our college military turn out. We mean companies A, B, &c. (so called from their being in the rudiments of military study). In fact our mid-day summer naps are involuntarily associated with gray jackets and pinchbeck buttons. Let's at it again!