

THE OLD MAN DREAMS.

O for one hour of youthful joy!
Give back my twentieth spring!
I'd rather laugh a bright-haired boy
Than reign a gray-beard king!

Off with the wrinkled spoils of age!
Away with learning's crown!
Tear out life's wisdom-written page,
And dash its trophies down!

One moment let my life-blood stream
From boyhood's fount of flame!
Give me one giddy, reeling dream
Of life all love and fame!

— My listening angel heard the prayer,
And calmly smiling, said,
“If I but touch thy silvered hair,
Thy hasty wish hath sped.

“But is there nothing in thy track
To bid thee fondly stay,
While the swift seasons hurry back
To find the wished-for day?”

— Ah, truest soul of womankind!
Without thee, what were life?
One bliss I cannot leave behind:
I'll take — my — precious — wife!

— The angel took a sapphire pen
And wrote in rainbow dew,
“The man would be a boy again,
And be a husband too!”

— “And is there nothing yet unsaid
Before the change appears?”

Remember, all their gifts have fled
With those dissolving years!”

Why, yes; for memory would recall
My fond paternal joys;
I could not bear to leave them all;
I'll take — my — girl — and — boys!

The smiling angel dropped his pen, —
“Why this will never do;
The man would be a boy again,
And be a father too!”

And so I laughed, — my laughter woke
The household with its noise, —
And wrote my dream, when morning broke
To please the gray-haired boys.

IV.

[I am so well pleased with my boarding-house that I intend to remain there, perhaps for years. Of course I shall have a great many conversations to report, and they will necessarily be of different tone and on different subjects. The talks are like the breakfasts, — sometimes dipped toast, and sometimes dry. You must take them as they come. How can I do what all these letters ask me to? No. 1. wants

“The letters received by authors from unknown correspondents form a curious and, I believe, almost unrecorded branch of literature. The most interesting fact connected with these letters is this. If a writer has a distinct personality of character, an intellectual flavor peculiarly his own, and his writings are somewhat widely spread abroad, he will meet with some, and it may be many, readers who are specially attracted to him by a certain singularly strong affinity. A writer need not be surprised when some simple-hearted creature, evidently perfectly

serious and earnest thought. No. 2. (letter smells of bad cigars) must have more jokes; wants me to tell a "good storey" which he has copied out for me. (I suppose two letters before the word "good" refer to some Doctor of Divinity who told the story.) No. 3. (in female hand) — more poetry. No. 4. wants something that would be of use to a practical man. (*Prahctical mahn* he probably pronounces it.) No. 5. (gilt-edged, sweet-scented) — "more sentiment," — "heart's outpourings." —

My dear friends, one and all, I can do nothing but sincere, with no poem or story in the back-ground for which he or she wants your critical offices, meaning too frequently your praise, and nothing else, — when this kind soul assures him or her that he or she, the correspondent, loves to read the productions of him or her, the writer, better than those of any other author living or dead. There is no need of accounting for their individual preferences. What if a reader prefer you to the classics, whose words are resounding through "the corridors of time!" You probably come much nearer to his intellectual level. The rose is the sweetest growth of the garden, but shall not your harmless, necessary cat prefer the aroma of that antiquesly odorous valerian, not unfamiliar to hysteric womanhood? "How can we stand the fine things that are said of us?" asked one of a bright New Englander, whom New York has borrowed from us. "Because we feel that they are *irue*," he answered. At any rate if they are true for those who say them, we need not quarrel with their superlatives.

But what revelations are to be read in these letters! From the lisp of vanity, commending itself to the attention of the object of its admiration, to the cry of despair, which means insanity or death, if a wise word of counsel or a helping hand does not stay it, what a gamut of human utterances! Each individual writer feels as if he or she were the only one to be listened to and succored, little remembering that merely to acknowledge the receipt of the letters that come by every post is no small part of every day's occupation to a good-natured and moderately popular writer.

report such remarks as I happen to have made at our breakfast-table. Their character will depend on many accidents, — a good deal on the particular persons in the company to whom they were addressed. It so happens that those which follow were mainly intended for the divinity-student and the schoolmistress; though others whom I need not mention saw fit to interfere, with more or less propriety, in the conversation. This is one of my privileges as a talker; and of course, when I was not talking for our whole company I don't expect all the readers of this periodical to be interested in my notes of what was said. Still, I think there may be a few that will rather like this vein, — possibly prefer it to a livelier one, — serious young men, and young women generally, in life's roseate parenthesis from — years of age to — inclusive.

Another privilege of talking is to misquote. — Of course it was n't Proserpina that actually cut the yellow hair, — but *Iris*. (As I have since told you) it was the former lady's regular business, but Dido had used herself ungentlely, and Madame d'Enfer stood firm on the point of etiquette. So the bathycolpian Here, — Juno, in Latin, — sent down *Iris* instead. But I was mightily pleased to see that one of the gentlemen that do the heavy articles for the celebrated "Oceanic Miscellany" misquoted Campbell's line without any excuse. "Waft us *home the message*" of course it ought to be. Will he be duly grateful for the correction?]

— The more we study the body and the mind, the more we find both to be governed, not *by*, but *according to* laws, such as we observe in the larger universe. — You think you know all about *walking*, — don't

you, now? Well, how do you suppose your lower limbs are held to your body? They are sucked up by two cupping vessels ("cotyloid" — cup-like — cavities), and held there as long as you live, and longer. At any rate, you think you move them backward and forward at such a rate as your will determines, don't you? On the contrary, they swing just as any other pendulums swing, at a fixed rate, determined by their length. You can alter this by muscular power, as you can take hold of the pendulum of a clock and make it move faster or slower; but your ordinary gait is timed by the same mechanism as the movements of the solar system.

[My friend, the Professor, told me all this, referring me to certain German physiologists by the name of Weber for proof of the facts, which, however, he said he had often verified. I appropriated it to my own use; what can one do better than this, when one has a friend that tells him anything worth remembering?

The Professor seems to think that man and the general powers of the universe are in partnership. Some one was saying that it had cost nearly half a million to move the Leviathan^a only so far as they had got it already. — Why, — said the Professor, — they might have hired an EARTHQUAKE for less money!]

Just as we find a mathematical rule at the bottom

^a "The Leviathan" was the name first applied to the huge vessel afterwards known as the "Great Eastern." The trouble which rose from its being built out of its "native element," as the newspapers call it, was like the puzzle of the Primrose household after the great family picture, with "as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing," was finished.

of many of the bodily movements, just so thought may be supposed to have its regular cycles. Such or such a thought comes round periodically, in its turn. Accidental suggestions, however, so far interfere with the regular cycles, that we may find them practically beyond our power of recognition. Take all this for what it is worth, but at any rate you will agree that there are certain particular thoughts which do not come up once a day, nor once a week, but that a year would hardly go round without your having them pass through your mind. Here is one which comes up at intervals in this way. Some one speaks of it, and there is an instant and eager smile of assent in the listener or listeners. Yes, indeed; they have often been struck by it.

All at once a conviction flashes through us that we have been in the same precise circumstances as at the present instant, once or many times before.

O, dear, yes! — said one of the company, — everybody has had that feeling.

The landlady did n't know anything about such notions; it was an idee in folks' heads, she expected.

The schoolmistress said, in a hesitating sort of way, that she knew the feeling well, and did n't like to experience it; it made her think she was a ghost, sometimes.

The young fellow whom they call John said he knew all about it; he had just lighted a cheroot the other day, when a tremendous conviction all at once came over him that he had done just that same thing ever so many times before. I looked severely at him, and his countenance immediately fell — *on the side toward me*; I cannot answer for the other, for he can wink and laugh with either half of his face without the other half's knowing it.

— I have noticed — I went on to say — the following circumstances connected with these sudden impressions. First, that the condition which seems to be the duplicate of a former one is often very trivial, — one that might have presented itself a hundred times. Secondly, that the impression is very evanescent, and that it is rarely, if ever, recalled by any voluntary effort, at least after any time has elapsed. Thirdly, that there is a disinclination to record the circumstances, and a sense of incapacity to reproduce the state of mind in words. Fourthly, I have often felt that the duplicate condition had not only occurred once before, but that it was familiar and, as it seemed, habitual. Lastly, I have had the same convictions in my dreams.

How do I account for it? — Why, there are several ways that I can mention, and you may take your choice. The first is that which the young lady hinted at; — that these flashes are sudden recollections of a previous existence. I don't believe that; for I remember a poor student I used to know told me he had such a conviction one day when he was blacking his boots, and I can't think he had ever lived in another world where they use Day and Martin.

Some think that Dr. Wigan's doctrine of the brain's being a double organ, its hemispheres working together like the two eyes, accounts for it. One of the hemispheres hangs fire, they suppose, and the small interval between the perceptions of the nimble and the sluggish half seems an indefinitely long period, and therefore the second perception appears to be the copy of another, ever so old. But even allowing the centre of perception to be double, I can see no good reason for supposing this indefinite lengthening of the

time, nor any analogy that bears it out. It seems to me most likely that the coincidence of circumstances is very partial, but that we take this partial resemblance for identity, as we occasionally do resemblances of persons. A momentary posture of circumstances is so far like some preceding one that we accept it as exactly the same, just as we accost a stranger occasionally, mistaking him for a friend. The apparent similarity may be owing perhaps, quite as much to the mental state at the time, as to the outward circumstances.

— Here is another of these curiously recurring remarks. I have said it, and heard it many times, and occasionally met with something like it in books, — somewhere in Bulwer's novels, I think, and in one of the works of Mr. Olmsted, I know.

Memory, imagination, old sentiments and associations, are more readily reached through the sense of SMELL than by almost any other channel.

Of course the particular odors which act upon each person's susceptibilities differ. — O, yes! I will tell you some of mine. The smell of *phosphorus* is one of them. During a year or two of adolescence I used to be dabbling in chemistry a good deal, and as about that time I had my little aspirations and passions like another, some of these things got mixed up with each other: orange-colored fumes of nitrous acid, and visions as bright and transient; reddening litmus-paper, and blushing cheeks; — *cheu!*

“Soles occidere et redire possunt,”

but there is no reagent that will redden the faded roses of eighteen hundred and — spare them! But, as I was saying, phosphorus fires this train of associa-

tions in an instant; its luminous vapors with their penetrating odor throw me into a trance; it comes to me in a double sense "trailing clouds of glory." Only the confounded Vienna matches, *ohne phosphorge-ruch*, have worn my sensibilities a little.

Then there is the *marigold*. When I was of smallest dimensions, and went to ride impacted between the knees of fond parental pair, we would sometimes cross the bridge to the next village-town and stop opposite a low, brown, "gambrel-roofed" cottage. Out of it would come one Sally, sister of its swarthy tenant, swarthy herself, shady-lipped, sad-voiced, and, bending over her flower-bed, would gather a "posy," as she called it, for the little boy. Sally lies in the churchyard with a slab of blue slate at her head, lichen-crusting, and leaning a little within the last few years. Cottage, garden-beds, posies, grenadier-like rows of seedling onions, — stateliest of vegetables, — all are gone, but the breath of a marigold brings them all back to me.

Perhaps the herb *everlasting*, the fragrant *immortelle* of our autumn fields, has the most suggestive odor to me of all those that set me dreaming. I can hardly describe the strange thoughts and emotions which come to me as I inhale the aroma of its pale, dry, rustling flowers. A something it has of sepulchral spicery, as if it had been brought from the core of some great pyramid, where it had lain on the breast of a mummied Pharaoh. Something, too, of immortality in the sad, faint sweetness lingering so long in its lifeless petals. Yet this does not tell why it fills my eyes with tears and carries me in blissful thought to the banks of asphodel that border the River of Life.

— I should not have talked so much about these personal susceptibilities, if I had not a remark to make about them which I believe is a new one. It is this. There may be a physical reason for the strange connection between the sense of smell and the mind. The olfactory nerve, — so my friend, the Professor, tells me, — is the only one directly connected with the hemispheres of the brain, the parts in which, as we have every reason to believe, the intellectual processes are every performed. To speak more truly, the olfactory "nerve" is not a nerve at all, he says, but a part of the brain, in intimate connection with its anterior lobes. Whether this anatomical arrangement is at the bottom of the facts I have mentioned, I will not decide, but it is curious enough to be worth remembering. Contrast the sense of taste, as a source of suggestive impressions, with that of smell. Now the Professor assures me that you will find the nerve of taste has no immediate connection with the brain proper, but only with the prolongation of the spinal cord.

[The old gentleman opposite did not pay much attention, I think, to this hypothesis of mine. But while I was speaking about the sense of smell he nestled about in his seat, and presently succeeded in getting out a large red bandanna handkerchief. Then he lurched a little to the other side, and after much tribulation at last extricated an ample round snuff-box. I looked as he opened it and felt for the wonted pugil. Moist rappee, and a Tonka-bean lying therein. I made the manual sign understood of all mankind that use the precious dust, and presently my brain, too, responded to the long unused stimulus. — O boys, — that were, — actual papas and possible grandpapas,

—some of you with crowns like billiard-balls, — some in locks of sable silvered, and some of silver sabled, — do you remember, as you doze over this, those after-dinners at the Trois Frères, when the Scotch-plaided snuff-box went round, and the dry Lundy-Foot tickled its way along into our happy sensoria? Then it was that the Chambertin or the Clos Vougeot came in, slumbering in its straw cradle. And one among you, — do you remember how he would sit dreaming over his Burgundy, and tinkle his fork against the sides of the bubble-like glass, saying that he was hearing the cow-bells as he used to hear them, when the deep-breathing kine came home at twilight from the huckleberry pasture, in the old home a thousand leagues towards the sunset?]

Ah me! what strains and strophes of unwritten verse pulsate through my soul when I open a certain closet in the ancient house where I was born! On its shelves used to lie bundles of sweet-marjoram and pennyroyal and lavender and mint and catnip; there apples were stored until their seeds should grow black, which happy period there were sharp little milk-teeth always ready to anticipate; there peaches lay in the dark, thinking of the sunshine they had lost, until, like the hearts of saints who dream of heaven in their sorrow, they grew fragrant as the breath of angels. The odorous echo of a score of dead summers lingers yet in those dim recesses.

— Do I remember Byron's line about "striking the electric chain"? — To be sure I do. I sometimes think the less the hint that stirs the automatic machinery of association, the more easily this moves us. What can be more trivial than that old story of opening the folio Shakespeare that used to lie in some an-

cient English hall and finding the flakes of Christmas pastry between its leaves, shut up in them perhaps a hundred years ago? And, lo! as one looks on these poor relics of a bygone generation, the universe changes in the twinkling of an eye; old George the Second is back again, and the elder Pitt is coming into power, and General Wolfe is a fine, promising young man, and over the Channel they are pulling the *Sieur Damiens* to pieces with wild horses, and across the Atlantic the Indians are tomahawking *Hirams* and *Jonathans* and *Jonases* at Fort William Henry; all the dead people who have been in the dust so long — even to the stout-armed cook that made the pastry — are alive again; the planet unwinds a hundred of its luminous coils, and the precession of the equinoxes is retraced on the dial of heaven! And all this for a bit of pie-crust!

— I will thank you for that pie, — said the provoking young fellow whom I have named repeatedly. He looked at it for a moment, and put his hands to his eyes as if moved. — I was thinking, — he said indistinctly —

— How? What is 't? — said our landlady.

— I was thinking — said he — who was king of England when this old pie was baked, — and it made me feel bad to think how long he must have been dead.

[Our landlady is a decent body, poor, and a widow of course; *cela va sans dire*. She told me her story once; it was as if a grain of corn that had been ground and bolted had tried to individualize itself by a special narrative. There was the wooing and the wedding, — the start in life, — the disappointment, — the children she had buried, — the struggle against

fate, — the dismantling of life, first of its small luxuries, and then of its comforts — the broken spirits, — the altered character of the one on whom she leaned, — and at last the death that came and drew the black curtain between her and all her earthly hopes.

I never laughed at my landlady after she had told me her story, but I often cried, — not those pattering tears that run off the eaves upon our neighbors' grounds, the *stillicidium* of self-conscious sentiment, but those which steal noiselessly through their conduits until they reach the cisterns lying round about the heart; those tears that we weep inwardly with unchanging features; — such I did shed for her often when the imps of the boarding-house Inferno tugged at her soul with their red-hot pincers.]

Young man, — I said — the pasty you speak lightly of is not old, but courtesy to those who labor to serve us, especially if they are of the weaker sex, is very old, and yet well worth retaining. May I recommend to you the following caution, as a guide, whenever you are dealing with a woman, or an artist, or a poet, — if you are handling an editor or politician, it is superfluous advice. I take it from the back of one of those little French toys which contain pasteboard figures moved by a small running stream of fine sand; Benjamin Franklin will translate it for you: "*Quoiqu'elle soit très solidement montée, il faut ne pas BRUTALISER la machine.*" — I will thank you for the pie, if you please.

[I took more of it than was good for me, — as much as 85°, I should think, — and had an indigestion in consequence. While I was suffering from it, I wrote some sadly desponding poems, and a theological essay which took a very melancholy view of creation. When

I got better I labelled them all "Pie-crust," and laid them by as scarecrows and solemn warnings. I have a number of books on my shelves which I should like to label with some such title; but, as they have great names on their title-pages, — Doctors of Divinity, some of them, — it would n't do.]

— My friend, the Professor, whom I have mentioned to you once or twice, told me yesterday that somebody had been abusing him in some of the journals of his calling. I told him that I did n't doubt he deserved it; that I hoped he did deserve a little abuse occasionally, and would for a number of years to come; that nobody could do anything to make his neighbors wiser or better without being liable to abuse for it; especially that people hated to have their little mistakes made fun of, and perhaps he had been doing something of the kind. — The Professor smiled. — Now, said I, hear what I am going to say. It will not take many years to bring you to the period of life when men, at least the majority of writing and talking men, do nothing but praise. Men, like peaches and pears, grow sweet a little while before they begin to decay. I don't know what it is, — whether a spontaneous change, mental or bodily, or whether it is thorough experience of the thanklessness of critical honesty, — but it is a fact, that most writers, except sour and unsuccessful ones, get tired of finding fault at about the time when they are beginning to grow old. As a general thing, I would not give a great deal for the fair words of a critic, if he is himself an author, over fifty years of age. At thirty we are all trying to cut our names in big letters upon the walls of this tenement of life; twenty years later we have carved it, or shut up our jack-knives. Then we are

ready to help others, and more anxious not to hinder any, because nobody's elbows are in our way. So I am glad you have a little life left; you will be saccharine enough in a few years.

— Some of the softening effects of advancing age have struck me very much in what I have heard or seen here and elsewhere. I just now spoke of the sweetening process that authors undergo. Do you know that in the gradual passage from maturity to helplessness the harshest characters sometimes have a period in which they are gentle and placid as young children? I have heard it said, but I cannot be sponsor for its truth, that the famous chieftain, Lochiel, was rocked in a cradle like a baby, in his old age. An old man, whose studies had been of the severest scholastic kind, used to love to hear little nursery-stories read over and over to him. One who saw the Duke of Wellington in his last years describes him as very gentle in his aspect and demeanor. I remember a person of singularly stern and lofty bearing who became remarkably gracious and easy in all his ways in the later period of his life.

And that leads me to say that men often remind me of pears in their way of coming to maturity. Some are ripe at twenty, like human Jargonelles, and must be made the most of, for their day is soon over. Some come into their perfect condition late, like the autumn kinds, and they last better than the summer fruit. And some, that, like the Winter-Nelis, have been hard and uninviting until all the rest have had their season, get their glow and perfume long after the frost and snow have done their worst with the orchards. Beware of rash criticisms; the rough and astringent fruit you condemn may be an autumn or a winter pear, and

that which you picked up beneath the same bough in August may have been only its worm-eaten windfalls. Milton was a Saint-Germain with a graft of the roseate Early-Catherine. Rich, juicy, lively, fragrant, russet skinned old Chaucer was an Easter-Beurré; the buds of a new summer were swelling when he ripened.

— There is no power I envy so much, — said the divinity-student, — as that of seeing analogies and making comparisons. I don't understand how it is that some minds are continually coupling thoughts or objects that seem not in the least related to each other, until all at once they are put in a certain light and you wonder that you did not always see that they were as like as a pair of twins. It appears to me a sort of miraculous gift.

[He is a rather nice young man, and I think has an appreciation of the higher mental qualities remarkable for one of his years and training. I try his head occasionally as housewives try eggs, — give it an intellectual shake and hold it up to the light, so to speak, to see if it has life in it, actual or potential, or only contains lifeless albumen.]

You call it *miraculous*, — I replied, — tossing the expression with my facial eminence, a little smartly, I fear. — Two men are walking by the polyphloesbean ocean, one of them having a small tin cup with which he can scoop up a gill of sea-water when he will, and the other nothing but his hands, which will hardly hold water at all, — and you call the tin cup a miraculous possession! It is the ocean that is the miracle, my infant apostle! Nothing is clearer than that all things are in all things, and that just according to the intensity and extension of our mental being we