And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
Before thee lies revealed, —
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathéd horn!
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings: —

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

V.

A LYRIC conception — my friend, the Poet, said — hits me like a bullet in the forehead. I have often had the blood drop from my cheeks when it struck, and felt that I turned as white as death. Then comes a creeping as of centipedes running down the spine, — then a gasp and a great jump of the heart, — then

a sudden flush and a beating in the vessels of the head, — then a long sigh, — and the poem is written.

It is an impromptu, I suppose, then, if you write it so suddenly, — I replied.

No, — said he, — far from it. I said written, but I did not say *copied*. Every such poem has a soul and a body, and it is the body of it, or the copy, that men read and publishers pay for. The soul of it is born in an instant in the poet's soul. It comes to him a thought, tangled in the meshes of a few sweet words, — words that have loved each other from the cradle of the language, but have never been wedded until now. Whether it will ever fully embody itself in a bridal train of a dozen stanzas or not is uncertain; but it exists potentially from the instant that the poet turns pale with it. It is enough to stun and scare anybody, to have a hot thought come crashing into his brain, and ploughing up those parallel ruts where the wagon trains of common ideas were jogging along in their regular sequences of association. No wonder the ancient, made the poetical impulse wholly external. Μῆνιν ἄειδε Θεά· Goddess, — Muse, — divine afflatus, — something outside always. *I* never wrote any verses worth reading. I can't. I am too stupid. If I ever copied any that were worth reading, I was only a medium.

[I was talking all this time to our boarders, you understand, — telling them what this poet told me. The company listened rather attentively, I thought, considering the literary character of the remarks.]

The old gentleman opposite all at once asked me if I ever read anything better than Pope's "Essay on Man"? Had I ever perused McFingal? He was fond of poetry when he was a boy, — his mother taught

him to say many little pieces, — he remembered one beautiful hymn; — and the old gentleman began, in a clear, loud voice, for his years, —

"The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens," —

He stopped, as if startled by our silence, and a faint flush ran up beneath the thin white hairs that fell upon his cheek. As I looked round, I was reminded of a show I once saw at the Museum, — the Sleeping Beauty, I think they called it. The old man's sudden breaking out in this way turned every face towards him, and each kept his posture as if changed to stone. Our Celtic Bridget, or Biddy, is not a foolish fat scullion to burst out crying for a sentiment. She is of the serviceable, red-handed, broad-and-high-shouldered type; one of those imported female servants who are known in public by their amorphous style of person, their stoop forwards, and a headlong and as it were precipitous walk, — the waist plunging downwards into the rocking pelvis at every heavy footfall. Bridget, constituted for action, not for emotion, was about to deposit a plate heaped with something upon the table, when I saw the coarse arm stretched by my shoulder arrested, — motionless as the arm of a terra-cotta caryatid; she could n't set the plate down while the old gentleman was speaking!

He was quite silent after this, still wearing the slight flush on his cheek. Don't ever think the poetry is dead in an old man because his forehead is wrinkled, or that his manhood has left him when his hand trembles! If they ever *were* there, they *are* there still!

By and by we got talking again. — Does a poet

love the verses written through him, do you think, Sir? — said the divinity-student.

So long as they are warm from his mind, — carry any of his animal heat about them, *I know* he loves them, — I answered. When they have had time to cool, he is more indifferent.

A good deal as it is with buckwheat cakes, — said the young fellow whom they call John.

The last words, only, reached the ear of the economically organized female in black bombazine. — Buckwheat is skerce and high, — she remarked. [Must be a poor relation sponging on our landlady — pays nothing, — so she must stand by the guns and be ready to repel boarders.]

I liked the turn the conversation had taken, for I had some things I wanted to say, and so, after waiting a minute, I began again. — I don't think the poems I read you sometimes can be fairly appreciated, given to you as they are in the green state.

— You don't know what I mean by the *green state?* Well, then, I will tell you. Certain things are good for nothing until they have been kept a long while; and some are good for nothing until they have been long kept and *used*. Of the first, wine is the illustrious and immortal example. Of those which must be kept and used I will name three, — meerschaum pipes, violins, and poems. The meerschaum is but a poor affair until it has burned a thousand offerings to the cloud-compelling deities. It comes to us without complexion or flavor, — born of the sea-foam, like Aphrodite, but colorless as *pallida Mors* herself. The fire is lighted in its central shrine, and gradually the juices which the broad leaves of the Great Vegetable had sucked up from an acre and curdled into a drachm are

diffused through its thirsting pores. First a discoloration, then a stain, and at last a rich, glowing, umber tint spreading over the whole surface. Nature true to her old brown autumnal hue, you see, — as true in the fire of the meerschaum as in the sunshine of October! And then the cumulative wealth of its fragrant reminiscences! he who inhales its vapors takes a thousand whiffs in a single breath; and one cannot touch it without awakening the old joys that hang around it as the smell of flowers clings to the dresses of the daughters of the house of Farina!

[Don't think I use a meerschaum myself, for *I do not*, though I have owned a calumet since my childhood, which from a naked Pict (of the Mohawk species) my grandsire won, together with a tomahawk and beaded knife-sheath; paying for the lot with a bullet-mark on his right cheek. On the maternal side I inherit the loveliest silver-mounted tobacco-stopper you ever saw. It is a little box-wood Triton, carved with charming liveliness and truth. I have often compared it to a figure in Raphael's "Triumph of Galatea." It came to me in an ancient shagreen case, — how old it is I do not know, — but it must have been made since Sir Walter Raleigh's time. If you are curious, you shall see it any day. Neither will I pretend that I am so unused to the more perishable smoking contrivance that a few whiffs would make me feel as if I lay in a ground-swell on the Bay of Biscay. I am not unacquainted with that fusiform, spiral-wound bundle of chopped stems and miscellaneous incombustibles, the *cigar*, so called, of the shops, — which to "draw" asks the suction-power of a nursling infant Hercules, and to relish, the leathery palate of an old Silenus. I do not advise you, young man,

even if my illustration strike your fancy, to consecrate the flower of your life to painting the bowl of a pipe, for, let me assure you, the stain of a reverie-breeding narcotic may strike deeper than you think for. I have seen the green leaf of early promise grow brown before its time under such Nicotian regimen, and thought the umbered meerschaum was dearly bought at the cost of a brain enfeebled and a will enslaved.]

Violins, too, — the sweet old Amati! — the divine Stradivarius! Played on by ancient *maestros* until the bow-hand lost its power and the flying fingers stiffened. Bequeathed to the passionate young enthusiast, who made it whisper his hidden love, and cry his inarticulate longings, and scream his untold agonies, and wail his monotonous despair. Passed from his dying hand to the cold *virtuoso*, who let it slumber in its case for a generation, till, when his hoard was broken up, it came forth once more and rode the stormy symphonies of royal orchestras, beneath the rushing bow of their lord and leader. Into lonely prisons with improvident artists; into convents from which arose, day and night, the holy hymns with which its tones were blended; and back again to orgies in which it learned to howl and laugh as if a legion of devils were shut up in it; then again to the gentle *dilettante* who calmed it down with easy melodies until it answered him softly as in the days of the old *maestros*. And so given into our hands, its pores all full of music; stained, like the meerschaum, through and through, with the concentrated hue and sweetness of all the harmonies which have kindled and faded on its strings.

Now I tell you a poem must be kept *and used*, like a meerschaum, or a violin. A poem is just as porous

as the meerschaum; — the more porous it is, the better. I mean to say that a genuine poem is capable of absorbing an indefinite amount of the essence of our own humanity, — its tenderness, its heroism, its regrets, its aspirations, so as to be gradually stained through with a divine secondary color derived from ourselves. So you see it must take time to bring the sentiment of a poem into harmony with our nature, by staining ourselves through every thought and image our being can penetrate.

Then again as to the mere music of a new poem, why, who can expect anything more from that than from the music of a violin fresh from the maker's hands? Now you know very well that there are no less than fifty-eight different pieces in a violin. These pieces are strangers to each other, and it takes a century, more or less, to make them thoroughly acquainted. At last they learn to vibrate in harmony and the instrument becomes an organic whole, as if it were a great seed-capsule which had grown from a garden-bed in Cremona, or elsewhere. Besides, the wood is juicy and full of sap for fifty years or so, but at the end of fifty or a hundred more gets tolerably dry and comparatively resonant.

Don't you see that all this is just as true of a poem? Counting each word as a piece, there are more pieces in an average copy of verses than in a violin. The poet has forced all these words together, and fastened them, and they don't understand it at first. But let the poem be repeated aloud and murmured over in the mind's muffled whisper often enough, and at length the parts become knit together in such absolute solidarity that you could not change a syllable without the whole world's crying out against you for meddling

with the harmonious fabric. Observe, too, how the drying process takes place in the stuff of a poem just as in that of a violin. Here is a Tyrolese fiddle that is just coming to its hundredth birthday, — (Pedro Klauss, Tyroli, fecit, 1760), — the sap is pretty well out of it. And here is the song of an old poet whom Neæra cheated: —

"Nox erat, et cœlo fulgebat Luna sereno
Inter minora sidera,
Cum tu magnorum numen læsura deorum
In verba jurabas mea."

Don't you perceive the sonorousness of these old dead Latin phrases? Now I tell you that every word fresh from the dictionary brings with it a certain succulence; and though I cannot expect the sheets of the "Pactolian," in which, as I told you, I sometimes print my verses, to get so dry as the crisp papyrus that held those words of Horatius Flaccus, yet you may be sure, that, while the sheets are damp, and while the lines hold their sap, you can't fairly judge of my performances, and that, if made of the true stuff, they will ring better after a while.

[There was silence for a brief space, after my somewhat elaborate exposition of these self-evident analogies. Presently *a person* turned towards me — I do not choose to designate the individual — and said that he rather expected my pieces had given pretty good "sahtisfahction." — I had, up to this moment, considered this complimentary phrase as sacred to the use of secretaries of lyceums, and, as it has been usually accompanied by a small pecuniary testimonial, have acquired a certain relish for this moderately tepid and unstimulating expression of enthusiasm. But as a re-

ward for gratuitous services I confess I thought it a little below that blood-heat standard which a man's breath ought to have, whether silent, or vocal and articulate. I waited for a favorable opportunity, however, before making the remarks which follow.]

— There are single expressions, as I have told you already, that fix a man's position for you before you have done shaking hands with him. Allow me to expand a little. There are several things, very slight in themselves, yet implying other things not so unimportant. Thus, your French servant has *dévalisé* your premises and got caught. *Excusez*, says the *sergent-de-ville*, as he politely relieves him of his upper garments and displays his bust in the full daylight. Good shoulders enough, — a little marked, — traces of smallpox, perhaps, — but white. . . . *Crac!* from the *sergent-de-ville's* broad palm on the white shoulder! Now look! *Vogue la galère!* Out comes the big red V —mark of the hot iron; — he had blistered it out pretty nearly, — had n't he? — the old rascal VOLEUR, branded in the galleys at Marseilles! [Don't! What if he has got something like this? — nobody supposes I *invented* such a story.]

My man John, who used to drive two of those six equine females which I told you I had owned, — for, look you, my friends, simple though I stand here, I am one that has been driven in his "kerridge," — not using that term, as liberal shepherds do, for any battered old shabby-genteel go-cart which has more than one wheel, but meaning thereby a four-wheeled vehicle *with a pole*, — my man John, I say, was a retired soldier. He retired unostentatiously, as many of Her Majesty's modest servants have done before and since. John told me, that when an officer thinks he recognizes one of these retiring heroes, and would know if he has really been in the service, that he may restore him, if possible, to a grateful country, he comes suddenly upon him, and says, sharply, "Strap!" If he has ever worn the shoulder-strap, he has learned the reprimand for its ill adjustment. The old word of command flashes through his muscles, and his hand goes up in an instant to the place where the strap used to be.

[I was all the time preparing for my grand *coup*, you understand; but I saw they were not quite ready for it, and so continued, — always in illustration of the general principle I had laid down.]

Yes, odd things come out in ways that nobody thinks of. There was a legend, that, when the Danish pirates made descents upon the English coast, they caught a few Tartars occasionally, in the shape of Saxons, who would not let them go, — on the contrary, insisted on their staying, and, to make sure of it, treated them as Apollo treated Marsyas, or as Bartholinus has treated a fellow-creature in his title-page, and, having divested them of the one essential and perfectly fitting garment, indispensable in the mildest climates, nailed the same on the church-door as we do the banns of marriage, *in terrorem*.

[There was a laugh at this among some of the young folks; but as I looked at our landlady, I saw that "the water stood in her eyes," as it did in Christiana's when the interpreter asked her about the spider, and I fancied, but was n't quite sure that the schoolmistress blushed, as Mercy did in the same conversation, as you remember.]

That sounds like a cock-and-bull-story, — said the young fellow whom they call John. I abstained

from making Hamlet's remark to Horatio, and continued.

Not long since, the church-wardens were repairing and beautifying an old Saxon church in a certain English village, and among other things thought the doors should be attended to. One of them particularly, the front-door, looked very badly, crusted, as it were, and as if it would be all the better for scraping. There happened to be a microscopist in the village who had heard the old pirate story, and he took it into his head to examine the crust on this door. There was no mistake about it; it was a genuine historical document, of the Ziska drum-head pattern, — a real *cutis humana*, stripped from some old Scandinavian filibuster, and the legend was true.

My friend, the Professor, settled an important historical and financial question once by the aid of an exceedingly minute fragment of a similar document. Behind the pane of plate-glass which bore his name and title burned a modest lamp, signifying to the passers-by that at all hours of the night the slightest favors (or fevers) were welcome. A youth who had freely partaken of the cup which cheers and likewise inebriates, following a moth-like impulse very natural under the circumstances, dashed his fist at the light and quenched the meek luminary, — breaking through the plate-glass, of course, to reach it. Now I don't want to go into *minutiæ* at table, you know, but a naked hand can no more go through a pane of thick glass without leaving some of its cuticle, to say the least, behind it, than a butterfly can go through a sausage-machine without looking the worse for it. The Professor gathered up the fragments of glass, and with them certain very minute but entirely satisfactory documents which would have identified and hanged any rogue in Christendom who had parted with them. — The historical question, *Who did it?* and the financial question, *Who paid for it?* were both settled before the new lamp was lighted the next evening.

You see, my friends, what immense conclusions, touching our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, may be reached by means of very insignificant premises. This is eminently true of manners and forms of speech; a movement or a phrase often tells you all you want to know about a person. Thus, "How 's your health?" (commonly pronounced *haälth*) instead of, How do you do? or, How are you? Or calling your little dark entry a "hall," and your old rickety one-horse wagon a "kerridge." Or telling a person who has been trying to please you that he has given you pretty good "sahtisfahction." Or saying that you "remember of" such a thing, or that you have been "stoppin'" at Deacon Somebody's, — and other such expressions. One of my friends had a little marble statuette of Cupid in the parlor of his country-house, — bow, arrows, wings, and all complete. A visitor, indigenous to the region, looking pensively at the figure, asked the lady of the house "if that was a statoo of her deceased infant?" What a delicious, though somewhat voluminous biography, social, educational, and æsthetic, in that brief question!

[Please observe with what Machiavellian astuteness I smuggled in the particular offence which it was my object to hold up to my fellow-boarders, without too personal an attack on the individual at whose door it lay.]

That was an exceedingly dull person who made the remark, *Ex pede Herculem*. He might as well have