

And linked to reason's guiding reins  
By myriad rings in trembling chains,  
Each graven with the threaded zone  
Which claims it as the master's own.

See how yon beam of seeming white  
Is braided out of seven-hued light,  
Yet in those lucid globes no ray  
By any chance shall break astray.  
Hark how the rolling surge of sound,  
Arches and spirals circling round,  
Wakes the hushed spirit through thine ear  
With music it is heaven to hear.

Then mark the cloven sphere that holds  
All thought in its mysterious folds,  
That feels sensation's faintest thrill  
And flashes forth the sovereign will;  
Think on the stormy world that dwells  
Locked in its dim and clustering cells!  
The lightning gleams of power it sheds  
Along its slender glassy threads!

O Father! grant thy love divine  
To make these mystic temples thine!  
When wasting age and wearying strife  
Have sapped the leaning walls of life,  
When darkness gathers over all,  
And the last tottering pillars fall,  
Take the poor dust thy mercy warms  
And mould it into heavenly forms.

## VIII.

[SPRING has come. You will find some verses to that effect at the end of these notes. If you are an impatient reader, skip to them at once. In reading aloud, omit, if you please, the sixth and seventh

verses. These are parenthetical and digressive, and, unless your audience is of superior intelligence, will confuse them. Many people can ride on horseback who find it hard to get on and to get off without assistance. One has to dismount from an idea, and get into the saddle again, at every parenthesis.]

— The old gentleman who sits opposite, finding that spring had fairly come, mounted a white hat one day, and walked into the street. It seems to have been a premature or otherwise exceptionable exhibition, not unlike that commemorated by the late Mr. Bayly. When the old gentleman came home, he looked very red in the face, and complained that he had been "made sport of." By sympathizing questions, I learned from him that a boy had called him "old daddy," and asked him when he had his hat white-washed.

This incident led me to make some observations at table the next morning, which I here repeat for the benefit of the readers of this record.

— The hat is the vulnerable point of the artificial integument. I learned this in early boyhood. I was once equipped in a hat of Leghorn straw, having a brim of much wider dimensions than were usual at that time, and sent to school in that portion of my native town which lies nearest to this metropolis. On my way I was met by a "Port-chuck," as we used to call the young gentlemen of that locality, and the following dialogue ensued.

*The Port-chuck.* Hullo, You-sir, joo know th' wuz gōn-to be a race to-morrah?

*Myself.* No. Who 's gōn-to run, 'n' wher 's't gōn-to be?

*The Port-chuck.* Squire Mycall 'n' Doctor Williams, round the brim o' your hat.

These two much-respected gentlemen being the oldest inhabitants at that time, and the alleged race-course being out of the question, the Port-chuck also winking and thrusting his tongue into his cheek, I perceived that I had been trifled with, and the effect has been to make me sensitive and observant respecting this article of dress ever since. Here is an axiom or two relating to it.

A hat which has been *popped*, or exploded by being sat down upon, is never itself again afterwards.

It is a favorite illusion of sanguine natures to believe the contrary.

Shabby gentility has nothing so characteristic as its hat. There is always an unnatural calmness about its nap, and an unwholesome gloss, suggestive of a wet brush.

The last effort of decayed fortune is expended in smoothing its dilapidated castor. The hat is the *ultimum moriens* of "respectability."

— The old gentleman took all these remarks and maxims very pleasantly, saying, however, that he had forgotten most of his French except the word for potatoes, — *pummies de tare*. — *Ultimum moriens*, I told him, is old Italian, and signifies *last thing to die*. With this explanation he was well contented, and looked quite calm when I saw him afterwards in the entry with a black hat on his head and the white one in his hand.

— I think myself fortunate in having the Poet and the Professor for my intimates. We are so much together, that we no doubt think and talk a good deal

alike; yet our points of view are in many respects individual and peculiar. You know me well enough by this time. I have not talked with you so long for nothing and therefore I don't think it necessary to draw my own portrait. But let me say a word or two about my friends.

The Professor considers himself, and I consider him, a very useful and worthy kind of drudge. I think he has a pride in his small technicalities. I know that he has a great idea of fidelity; and though I suspect he laughs a little inwardly at times, at the grand airs "Science" puts on, as she stands marking time, but not getting on, while the trumpets are blowing and the big drums beating, — yet I am sure he has a liking for his specialty, and a respect for its cultivators.

But I'll tell you what the Professor said to the Poet the other day. — My boy, said he, I can work a great deal cheaper than you, because I keep all my goods in the lower story. You have to hoist yours into the upper chambers of the brain, and let them down again to your customers. I take mine in at the level of the ground, and send them off from my doorstep almost without lifting. I tell you, the higher a man has to carry the raw material of thought before he works it up, the more it costs him in blood, nerve, and muscle. Coleridge knew all this very well when he advised every literary man to have a profession.

— Sometimes I like to talk with one of them, and sometimes with the other. After a while I get tired of both. When a fit of intellectual disgust comes over me, I will tell you what I have found admirable as a diversion, in addition to boating and other amusements which I have spoken of, — that is, working at

my carpenter's-bench. Some mechanical employment is the greatest possible relief, after the purely intellectual faculties begin to tire. When I was quarantined once at Marseilles, I got to work immediately at carving a wooden wonder of loose rings on a stick, and got so interested in it, that, when we were let out, I "regained my freedom with a sigh," because my toy was unfinished.

There are long seasons when I talk only with the Professor, and others when I give myself wholly up to the Poet. Now that my winter's work is over and spring is with us, I feel naturally drawn to the Poet's company. I don't know anybody more alive to life than he is. The passion of poetry seizes on him every spring, he says, — yet oftentimes he complains, that when he feels most, he can sing least.

Then a fit of despondency comes over him. — I feel ashamed sometimes, — said he, the other day, — to think how far my worst songs fall below my best. It sometimes seems to me, as I know it does to others who have told me so, that they ought to be *all best*, — if not in actual execution, at least in plan and motive. I am grateful — he continued — for all such criticisms. A man is always pleased to have his most serious efforts praised, and the highest aspect of his nature get the most sunshine.

Yet I am sure, that, in the nature of things, many minds must change their key now and then, on penalty of getting out of tune or losing their voices. You know, I suppose, — he said, — what is meant by complementary colors? You know the effect, too, which the prolonged impression of any one color has on the retina. If you close your eyes after looking steadily at a *red* object, you see a *green* image.

It is so with many minds, — I will not say with all. After looking at one aspect of external nature, or of any form of beauty or truth, when they turn away, the *complementary* aspect of the same object stamps itself irresistibly and automatically upon the mind. Shall they give expression to this secondary mental state, or not?

When I contemplate — said my friend, the Poet — the infinite largeness of comprehension belonging to the Central Intelligence, how remote the creative conception is from all scholastic and ethical formulæ, I am led to think that a healthy mind ought to change its mood from time to time, and come down from its noblest condition, — never, of course, to degrade itself by dwelling upon what is itself debasing, but to let its lower faculties have a chance to air and exercise themselves. After the first and second floor have been out in the bright street dressed in all their splendors, shall not our humble friends in the basement have their holiday, and the cotton velvet and the thin-skinned jewelry — simple adornments, but befitting the station of those who wear them — show themselves to the crowd, who think them beautiful, as they ought to, though the people up-stairs know that they are cheap and perishable?

— I don't know that I may not bring the Poet here, some day or other, and let him speak for himself. Still I think I can tell you what he says quite as well as he could do it. — Oh, — he said to me, one day, — I am but a hand-organ man, — say rather, a hand-organ. Life turns the winch, and fancy or accident pulls out the stops. I come under your windows, some fine spring morning, and play you one of my *adagio* movements, and some of you say, — This

is good, — play us so always. But, dear friends, if I did not change the stop sometimes, the machine would wear out in one part and rust in another. How easily this or that tune flows! — you say, — there must be no end of just such melodies in him. — I will open the poor machine for you one moment, and you shall look. — Ah! Every note marks where a spur of steel has been driven in. It is easy to grind out the song, but to plant these bristling points which make it was the painful task of time.

I don't like to say it, — he continued, — but poets commonly have no larger stock of tunes than hand-organs; and when you hear them piping up under your window, you know pretty well what to expect. The more stops, the better. Do let them all be pulled out in their turn!

So spoke my friend, the Poet, and read me one of his stateliest songs, and after it a gay *chanson*, and then a string of epigrams. All true, — he said, — all flowers of his soul; only one with the corolla spread, and another with its disk half opened, and the third with the heart-leaves covered up and only a petal or two showing its tip through the calyx. The water-lily is the type of the poet's soul, — he told me.

— What do you think, Sir, — said the divinity-student, — opens the souls of poets most fully?

Why, there must be the internal force and the external stimulus. Neither is enough by itself. A rose will not flower in the dark, and a fern will not flower anywhere.

What do I think is the true sunshine that opens the poet's corolla? — I don't like to say. They spoil a good many, I am afraid; or at least they shine on a good many that never come to anything.

Who are *they*? — said the schoolmistress.

Women. Their love first inspires the poet, and their praise is his best reward.

The schoolmistress reddened a little, but looked pleased. — Did I really think so? — I do think so; I never feel safe until I have pleased them; I don't think they are the first to see one's defects, but they are the first to catch the color and fragrance of a true poem. Fit the same intellect to a man and it is a bow-string, — to a woman and it is a harp-string. She is vibratile and resonant all over, so she stirs with slighter musical tremblings of the air about her. — Ah, me! — said my friend, the Poet, to me, the other day, — what color would it not have given to my thoughts, and what thrice-washed whiteness to my words, had I been fed on women's praises! I should have grown like Marvell's fawn, —

“Lilies without; roses within!”

But then, — he added, — we all think, *if* so and so, we should have been this or that, as you were saying the other day, in those rhymes of yours.

— I don't think there are many poets in the sense of creators; but of those sensitive natures which reflect themselves naturally in soft and melodious words, pleading for sympathy with their joys and sorrows, every literature is full. Nature carves with her own hands the brain which holds the creative imagination, but she casts the over-sensitive creatures in scores from the same mould.

There are two kinds of poets, just as there are two kinds of blondes. [Movement of curiosity among our ladies at table. — Please to tell us about those blondes, said the schoolmistress.] Why, there are blondes

who are such simply by deficiency of coloring matter, — *negative* or *washed* blondes, arrested by Nature on the way to become albinesses. There are others that are shot through with golden light, with tawny or fulvous tinges in various degree, — *positive* or *stained* blondes, dipped in yellow sunbeams, and as unlike in their mode of being to the others as an orange is unlike a snowball. The albino-style carries with it a wide pupil and a sensitive retina. The other, or the leonine blonde, has an opaline fire in her clear eye, which the brunette can hardly match with her quick glittering glances.

Just so we have the great sun-kindled, constructive imaginations, and a far more numerous class of poets who have a certain kind of moonlight-genius given them to compensate for their imperfection of nature. Their want of mental coloring-matter makes them sensitive to those impressions which stronger minds neglect or never feel at all. Many of them die young, and all of them are tinged with melancholy. There is no more beautiful illustration of the principle of compensation which marks the Divine benevolence than the fact that some of the holiest lives and some of the sweetest songs are the growth of the infirmity which unfits its subject for the rougher duties of life. When one reads the life of Cowper, or of Keats, or of Lucretia and Margaret Davidson, — of so many gentle, sweet natures, born to weakness, and mostly dying before their time, — one cannot help thinking that the human race dies out singing, like the swan in the old story. The French poet, Gilbert, who died at the Hôtel Dieu, at the age of twenty-nine, — (killed by a key in his throat, which he had swallowed when delirious in consequence of a fall), — this poor fellow

was a very good example of the poet by excess of sensibility. I found, the other day, that some of my literary friends had never heard of him, though I suppose few educated Frenchmen do not know the lines which he wrote, a week before his death, upon a mean bed in the great hospital of Paris.

“ Au banquet de la vie, infortuné convive  
J’apparus un jour, et je meurs;  
Je meurs, et sur ma tombe, où lentement j’arrive  
Nul ne viendra verser des pleurs.”

At life’s gay banquet placed, a poor unhappy guest,  
One day I pass, then disappear;  
I die, and on the tomb where I at length shall rest  
No friend shall come to shed a tear.

You remember the same thing in other words somewhere in Kirke White’s poems. It is the burden of the plaintive songs of all these sweet albino-poets. “I shall die and be forgotten, and the world will go on just as if I had never been; — and yet how I have loved! how I have longed! how I have aspired!” And so singing, their eyes grow brighter and brighter, and their features thinner and thinner, until at last the veil of flesh is threadbare, and, still singing, they drop it and pass onward.

— Our brains are seventy-year clocks. The Angel of Life winds them up once for all, then closes the case, and gives the key into the hand of the Angel of the Resurrection.

Tic-tac! tic-tac! go the wheels of thought; our will cannot stop them; they cannot stop themselves; sleep cannot still them; madness only makes them go faster; death alone can break into the case, and, seiz

ing the ever-swinging pendulum, which we call the heart, silence at last the clicking of the terrible escapement we have carried so long beneath our wrinkled foreheads.

If we could only get at them, as we lie on our pillows and count the dead beats of thought after thought and image after image jarring through the overtired organ! Will nobody block those wheels, uncouple that pinion, cut the string that holds those weights, blow up the infernal machine with gunpowder? What a passion comes over us sometimes for silence and rest! — that this dreadful mechanism, unwinding the endless tapestry of time, embroidered with spectral figures of life and death, could have but one brief holiday! Who can wonder that men swing themselves off from beams in hempen lassos? — that they jump off from parapets into the swift and gurgling waters beneath? — that they take counsel of the grim friend who has but to utter his one peremptory monosyllable and the restless machine is shivered as a vase that is dashed upon a marble floor? Under that building which we pass every day there are strong dungeons, where neither hook, nor bar, nor bed-cord, nor drinking-vessel from which a sharp fragment may be shattered, shall by any chance be seen. There is nothing for it, when the brain is on fire with the whirling of its wheels, but to spring against the stone wall and silence them with one crash. Ah, they remembered that, — the kind city fathers, — and the walls are nicely padded, so that one can take such exercise as he likes without damaging himself on the very plain and serviceable upholstery. If anybody would only contrive some kind of a lever that one could thrust in among the works of this horrid automaton and check them,

or alter their rate of going, what would the world give for the discovery?

— From half a dime to a dime, according to the style of the place and the quality of the liquor, — said the young fellow whom they call John.

You speak trivially, but not unwisely, — I said. Unless the will maintain a certain control over these movements, which it cannot stop, but can to some extent regulate, men are very apt to try to get at the machine by some indirect system of leverage or other. They clap on the brakes by means of opium; they change the maddening monotony of the rhythm by means of fermented liquors. It is because the brain is locked up and we cannot touch its movement directly, that we thrust these coarse tools in through any crevice, by which they may reach the interior, and so alter its rate of going for a while, and at last spoil the machine.

Men who exercise chiefly those faculties of the mind which work independently of the will, — poets and artists, for instance, who follow their imagination in their creative moments, instead of keeping it in hand as your logicians and practical men do with their reasoning faculty, — such men are too apt to call in the mechanical appliances to help them govern their intellects.

— He means they get drunk, — said the young fellow already alluded to by name.

Do you think men of true genius are apt to indulge in the use of inebriating fluids? — said the divinity-student.

If you think you are strong enough to bear what I am going to say, — I replied, — I will talk to you about this. But mind, now, these are the things that