

So you will not think I mean to speak lightly of old friendships, because we cannot help in stituting comparisons between our present and former selves by the aid of those who were what we are, nothing strikes me more, in the race of life, than to see how many give out in the first half of the course. "Commencement day" always reminds me of the start for the "Derby," when the beautiful high-bred three-year olds of the season are brought up for trial. That day is the start, and life is the race. Here we are at Cambridge, and a class is just "graduating." Poor Harry! he was to have been there too, but he has paid forfeit; step out here into the grass back of the church; ah! there it is:

"*Hunc lapidem posuerunt  
Soch Moerentes.*"

But this is the start, and here they are,—coats bright as silk, and manes as smooth as *cau lus-trale* can make them. Some of the best of the colts are pranced round, a few minutes each, to show their paces. What is that old gentleman crying about? and the old lady by him, and the three girls, all covering their eyes for? Oh, that is *their* colt that has just been trotted up on the stage. Do they really think those little thin legs can do anything in such a slashing sweepstakes as is coming off in the next forty years? Oh, this terrible gift of second-sight that comes to some of us when we begin to look through the silvered rings of the *arcus senilis*.

*Ten years gone.* First turn in the race. A few broken down; two or three bolted. Several

show in advance of the ruck. *Cassock*, a black colt, seems to be ahead of the rest; those black colts commonly get the start, I have noticed, of the others, in the first quarter. *Meteor* has pulled up.

*Twenty years.* Second corner turned. *Cassock* has dropped from the front, and *Judex*, an iron-gray, has the lead. But look! how they have thinned out? Down flat,—five,—six,—how many? They lie still enough! they will not get up again in this race, be very sure! And the rest of them, what a "tailing off"! Anybody can see who is going to win,—perhaps.

*Thirty years.* Third corner turned. *Dives*, bright sorrel, ridden by the fellow in a yellow jacket, begins to make play fast; is getting to be the favorite with many. But who is that other one that has been lengthening his stride from the first, and now shows close up to the front? Don't you remember the quiet brown colt *Asteroid*, with the star in his forehead? That is he; he is one of the sort that lasts; look out for him! The black "colt," as we used to call him, is in the background, taking it easy in a gentle trot. There is one they used to call the *Filly*, on account of a certain feminine air he had; well up, you see; the *Filly* is not to be despised, my boy!

*Forty years.* More dropping off,—but places much as before.

*Fifty years.* Race over. All that are on the course are coming in at a walk; no more running. Who is ahead? Ahead? What! and the winning-post a slab of white or gray stone standing out from that turf where there is no

more jockeying or straining for victory! Well, the world marks their places in its betting-book; but be sure that these matter very little, if they have run as well as they knew how!

Did I not say to you a little while ago that the universe swam in an ocean of similitudes and analogies? I will not quote Cowley, or Burns, or Wordsworth, just now; to show you what thoughts were suggested to them by the simplest natural objects, such as a flower or a leaf; but I will read you a few lines, if you do not object, suggested by looking at a section of one of those chambered shells to which is given the name of Pearly Nautilus. We need not trouble ourselves about the distinction between this and the Paper Nautilus, the *Argonauta* of the ancients. The name applied to both shows that each has long been compared to a ship, as you may see more fully in Webster's Dictionary or the Encyclopedia, to which he refers. If you will look into Roget's Bridgewater Treatise, you will find a figure of one of these shells, and a section of it. The last will show you the series of enlarging compartments successfully dwelt in by the animal that inhabits the shell, which is built in a widening spiral. Can you find no lesson in this?

#### THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS.

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,  
Sails the unshadowed main,—  
The venturous bark that flings  
On the sweet summer wind its purple wings  
In gulfs enchanted, where the siren sings,  
And coral reefs lie bare,  
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;  
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!  
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 behold 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 wreathed 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!

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 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 through 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 ancients made the poetical impulse wholly external. 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 remembers 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 one 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 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 couldn'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 called 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 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 groundswell 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 strikes 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 regimens, 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 Straduarius! 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 cause 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 that 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 essences 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 organit whole, as if it were a great seed-capsule that had grown from a garden-bed in Cremona, or elsewhere. Be-

sides, 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 Neaera cheated:—

“Nox erat, et coelo fulgebat Luna sereno  
Inter Minora sidera,  
Cum tu magnorum numen laesuta deorum  
In verba jurabas mea.”

Don't you perceive the sonorousness of these old 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 verse, 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 awhile.

[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 stimulating expression of enthusiasm. But as a reward 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 articulative. 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 *devalise* 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....*Grac!* from

the *sergent-de-ville's* broad palm on the white shoulder! Now look! *Vogue la galere!* Out comes the big V—mark of the hot iron;—he had blistered it out pretty nearly,—hadn'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-gentle go-cart that 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 unostentiously, 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, that 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 bans 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 that the school-mistress 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 micropist 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