

historical document, of the Ziska drum-head pattern,—a real *cutis humana*, stripped from some old Scandinavian filibuster,—and the legend was true.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 *minutiae* 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 *haalth*)—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 satisfaction. Or saying that you "remember of" such a thing, or that you have been "stopping" 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 aesthetic 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 have said, "From a peck of apples you may judge of the barrel." *Ex pede*, to be sure! Read, instead, *Ex ungue minimi digiti pedis, Herculem, ejusque patrem, matrem, avos et proavos, filios, nepotes at pronepotes!* Talk to me about your *des pon oro!* Tell me about Cuvier's getting up a megatherium from a tooth, or Agassiz's drawing

a portrait of an undiscovered fish from a single scale! As the "O" revealed Giotto,—as the one word "moi" betrayed the Stratford-atte-Bowe-taught Anglais,—so all a man's antecedents and possibilities are summed up in a single utterance which gives at once the gauge of his education and his mental organization.

Possibilities, Sir? said the divinity-student; can't a man who says Haow? arrive at distinction?

Sir,—I replied,—in a republic all things are possible. But the man *with a future* has almost of necessity sense enough to see that any odious trick of speech or manners must be got rid of. Doesn't Sidney Smith say that a public man in England never gets over a false quantity uttered in early life? *Our* public men are in little danger of this fatal mis-step, as few of them are in the habit of introducing Latin into their speeches,—for good and sufficient reasons. But they are bound to speak decent English,—unless, indeed, they are rough old campaigners, like General Jackson or General Taylor; in which case, a few scars on Prisciam's head are pardoned to old fellows that have quite as many on their own, and a constituency of thirty empires is not at all particular, provided they do not swear in their Presidential Messages.

However, it is not for me to talk. I have made mistakes enough in conversation and print. "Don't" for doesn't,—base misspelling of Clos Vougeot, (I wish I saw the label on the bottle a little oftener.)—and I don't know how many more. I never find them out until they are stereotyped, and then I think they rarely escape me.

I have no doubt I shall make half a dozen slips before this breakfast is over, and remember them all before another. How one does tremble with rage at his own intense momentary stupidity about things he knows perfectly well, and to think how he lays himself open to the impertinences of the *captatores verborum*, those useful but humble scavengers of the language, whose business it is to pick up what might offend or injure, and remove it, hugging and feeding on it as they go! I don't want to speak too slightly of these verbal critics;—how can I, who am so fond of talking about errors and vulgarisms of speech? Only there is a difference between those clerical blunders which almost every man commits, knowing better, and that habitual grossness or meanness of speech which is unendurable to educated persons, from anybody that wears silk or broadcloth.

[I write down the above remarks this morning, January 26th, making this record of the date that nobody may think it was written in wrath, on account of any particular grievance suffered from the invasion of any individual *scarabaeus grammaticus*.]

—I wonder if anybody ever finds fault with anything I say at this table when it is repeated? I hope they do, I am sure. I should be very certain that I had said nothing of much significance, if they did not.

Did you never in walking the fields, come across a large flat stone, which has lain, nobody knows how long, just where you found it, with the grass forming a little hedge, as it were, close to its edges,—and have you not, in obedience to

a kind of feeling that told you it had been lying there long enough, insinuated your stick or your foot or your fingers under its edge and turned it over as a housewife turns a cake, when she says to herself, "It's done brown enough by this time"? What an odd revelation, and what an unforeseen and unpleasant surprise to a small community, the very existence of which you had not suspected, until the sudden dismay and scattering among its members produced by your turning the old stone over! Blades of grass flattened down, colorless, matted together, as if they had been bleached and ironed; hideous crawling creatures, some of them coleopterous or horny-shelled,—turtle-bugs one wants to call them; some of them softer, but cunningly spread out and compressed like Lepine watches; (Nature never loses a crack or a crevice, mind you, or a joint in a tavern bedstead, but she always has one of her flat-pattern live timekeepers to slide into it;) black, glossy crickets, with their long filaments sticking out like the whips of four-horse stage coaches; motionless, slug-like creatures, larvæ, perhaps, more horrible in their pulpy stillness than even in the infernal wriggle of maturity! But no sooner is the stone turned and the wholesome light of day let upon this compressed and blinded community of creeping things, than all of them that enjoy the luxury of legs—and some of them have a good many—rush round wildly, butting each other and everything in their way, and end in a general stampede for underground retreats from the region poisoned by sunshine. *Next year* you will find the grass growing tall and green where

the stone lay; the ground-bird builds her nest where the beetle had his hole; the dandelion and the buttercup are growing there, and the broad fans of insect-angels open and shut over their golden disks, as the rhythmic waves of blissful consciousness pulsate through their glorified being.

The young fellow whom they call John saw fit to say, in his familiar way,—at which time I do not choose to take offence, but which I sometimes think it necessary to repress,—that I was coming it rather strong on the butterflies.

No, I replied; there is meaning in each of those images,—the butterfly as well as the others. The stone is ancient error. The grass is human nature borne down and bleached of all its color by it. The shapes that are found beneath are the crafty beings that thrive in darkness, and the weaker organisms kept helpless by it. He who turns the stone over is whosoever puts the staff of truth to the old lying incubus, no matter whether he do it with a serious face or a laughing one. The next year stands for the coming time. Then shall the nature which has lain blanched and broken rise in its full stature and notice hues in the sunshine. Then shall God's minstrels build their nests in the hearts of a new-born humanity. Then shall beauty—Divinity taking outlines and color—light upon the souls of men as the butterfly, image of the beautified spirit rising from the dust, soars from the shell that held a poor grub, which would never have found wings, had not the stone been lifted.

You never need think you can turn over any

old falsehood without a terrible squirming and scattering of the horrid little population that dwells under it.

Every real thought on every real subject knocks the wind out of somebody or other. As soon as his breath comes back, he very probably begins to expand it in hard words. These are the best evidence a man can have that he has said something it was time to say. Dr. Johnson was disappointed in the effect of one of his pamphlets. "I think I have not been attacked enough for it," he said;—"attack is the reaction, I never think I have hit hard unless it rebounds."

If a fellow attacked my opinions in print, would I reply? A. Not I. Do you think I don't understand what my friend, the Professor, long ago called *the hydrostatic paradox of controversy*?

Don't know what that means?—Well, I will tell you. You know that if you had a bent tube, one arm of which was of the size of a pipe-stem, and the other big enough to hold the ocean, water would stand at the same height in one as in the other. Controversy equalizes fools and wise men in the same way,—*and the fools know it.*

No, but I often read what they say about other people. There are about a dozen phrases that all come tumbling along together, like the tongs, and the shovel, and the poker, and the brush, and the bellows, in one of these domestic avalanches that everybody knows. If you get one, you get the whole lot.

What are they?—Oh that depends a good deal on latitude and longitude. Epithets follow the isothermal lines pretty accurately. Grouping them in two families, one finds him-

self a clever, genial, witty, wise, brilliant, sparkling, thoughtful, distinguished, celebrated, illustrious scholar and perfect gentleman, and first writer of the age; or a dull, foolish, wicked, pert, shallow ignorant, insolent, traitorous, black-hearted out-cast and disgrace to civilization.

What do I think determines the set of phrases a man gets?—Well, I should say a set of influences something like these:—1st. Relationships, political, religious, social, domestic. 2nd. Oysters; in the form of suppers given to gentlemen connected with criticism. I believe in the school, the college, and the clergy; but my sovereign logic for refuting public opinion—which means commonly the opinion of half a dozen of the critical gentry—is the following: *Major proposition.* Oysters *au naturel.* *Minor proposition.* The same "scalped." *Conclusion.* That—(here insert entertainer's name) is clever, witty, wise, brilliant,—and the rest.

No, it isn't exactly bribery. One man has oysters, and another epithets. It is an exchange of hospitalities; one gives a "spread" on linen, and the other on paper, that is all. Don't you think you and I should be apt to do just so, if we were in the critical line? I am sure I couldn't resist the softening influences of hospitality. I don't like to dine out, you know, I dine so well at our own table (our landlady looked radiant), and the company is so pleasant (a rustling movement of satisfaction among the boarders); but if I did partake of a man's salt, with such additions as that article of food requires to make it palatable, I could never

abuse him, and if I had to speak of him, I suppose, I should hang my set of jingling epithets round him like a string of sleigh-bells. Good feeling helps society to make liars of most of us, not absolute liars, but such careless handlers of truth that its sharp corners get terribly rounded. I love truth as chiefest among the virtues; I trust it runs in my blood; but I would never be a critic, because I know I could not always tell it. I might write a criticism of a book that happened to please me; that is another matter.

Listen, Benjamin Franklin! This is for you, and such others of tender age as you may tell it to.

When we are as yet small children, long before the time when those two grown ladies offer us the choice of Hercules, there comes up to us a youthful angel, holding in his right hand cubes like dice, and in his left spheres like marbles. The cubes are of stainless ivory, and on each is written in letters of gold—*Truth*. The spheres are veined and streaked and spotted beneath, with a dark crimson flush above, where the light falls on them, and in a certain aspect you can make out upon every one of them the three letters L. I. E. The child to whom they are offered very probably clutches at both. The spheres are the most convenient things in the world; they roll with the least possible impulse just where the child would have them. The cubes will not roll at all; they have a great talent for standing still, and always keep right side up. But very soon the young philosopher finds that things which roll so easily are very apt to roll into the wrong corner, and to get out of his way when he most

wants them, while he always knows where to find the others, which stay where they are left. Thus he learns—thus we learn—to drop the streaked and speckled globes of falsehood and and to hold fast the white angular blocks of truth. But then comes Timidity, and after her Good-nature, and last of all Polite-behavior, all insisting that truth must *roll* or nobody can do anything with it; and so the first with her coarse rasp, and the second with her broad file, and the third with her silken sleeve, do so round off and smooth and polish the snow-white cubes of truth, that, when they have got a little dingy by use, it becomes hard to tell them from the rolling spheres of falsehood.

The schoolmistress was polite enough to say that she was pleased with this, and that she would read it to her little flock the next day. But she should tell the children, she said, that there were better reasons for truth than could be found in mere experience of its convenience and the inconvenience of lying.

Yes, I said, but education always begins through the senses, and works up to the idea of absolute right and wrong. The first thing the child has to learn about this matter is, that lying is unprofitable,—afterwards, that it is against the peace and dignity of the universe,

Do I think that the particular form of lying often seen in newspapers, under the title, "From our Foreign Correspondent," does any harm? Why, no,—I don't know that it does. I suppose it doesn't really deceive people any more than the "Arabian Nights" or "Gulliver's Travels" do. Sometimes the writers compile

too carelessly, though, and mix up facts out of geographies, and stories out of the penny papers, so as to mislead those who are desirous of information. I cut a piece out of one of the papers, the other day that contains a number of impossibilities, and, I suspect, misstatements. I will send up and get it for you, if you would like to hear it. Ah, this is it; it is headed

"Our Sumatra Correspondence.—This island is now the property of the Stamford family, having been won, it is said, by Sir Stamford during the stock-gambling mania of the South-Sea scheme. The history of this gentleman may be found in an interesting series of questions (unfortunately not yet answered) contained in 'Notes and Queries.' This island is entirely surrounded by the ocean, which here contains a large amount of saline substance, crystallizing in cubes remarkable for their symmetry and frequently displays on its surface, during calm weather, the rainbow tints of the celebrated South-Sea bubbles. The summers are oppressively hot, and the winters very probably cold; but this fact cannot be ascertained precisely, as for some peculiar reason the mercury in these latitudes never shrinks, as in more northern regions, and thus the thermometer is rendered useless in winter.

"The principal vegetable productions of the island are the pepper tree and the bread-fruit tree. Pepper being very abundantly produced, a benevolent society was organized in London during the last century for supplying the natives with vinegar and oysters, as an addition to this delightful condiment. [Note received from Dr.

D. P.] It is said, however, that, as the oysters were of the kind called *natives* in England, the natives of Sumatra, in obedience to natural instinct, refused to touch them, and confined themselves entirely to the crew of the vessel in which they were brought over. This information was received from one of the oldest inhabitants, a native himself and exceedingly fond of missionaries. He is said also to be very skillful in the *cuisine* peculiar to the island.

"During the season of gathering the pepper, the persons employed are subject to various incommodities, the chief of which is violent and long-continued sternutation, or sneezing. Such is the vehemence of these attacks, that the unfortunate subjects of them are often driven backwards for great distances at immense speed, on the well-known principle of the aeolipile. Not being able to see where they are going, these poor creatures dash themselves to pieces against the rocks or are precipitated over the cliffs, and thus many valuable lives are lost annually. As, during the whole pepper-harvest, they feed exclusively on this stimulant, they become exceedingly irritable. The smallest injury is resented with ungovernable rage. A young man suffering from the *pepper-fever*, as it is called, cudgelled another most severely for appropriating a superannuated relative of trifling value, and was only pacified by having a present made him of a pig of that peculiar species of swine called the *Peccavi* by the Catholic Jews, who, it is well-known, abstain from swine's flesh in imitation of the Mahometan Buddhists.

"The bread-tree grows abundantly. Its branches are well known to Europe and America under the familiar name of *maccaroni*. They have a decided animal flavor, as may be observed in the soups containing them. Maccaroni, being tubular, is the favorite habitat of a very dangerous insect, which is rendered peculiarly ferocious by being boiled. The government of the island, therefore, never allows a stick of it to be exported without being accompanied by a piston with which its cavity may at any time be thoroughly swept out. These are commonly lost or stolen before the maccaroni arrives among us. It therefore always contains many of these insects, which, however, generally die of old age, in the shops, so that accidents from this source are comparatively rare.

"The fruit of the bread-tree consists principally of hot roots. The buttered-muffin variety is supposed to be a hybrid with the cocoa-nut palm, the cream found on the milk of the cocoa-nut exuding from the hybrid in the shape of butter, just as the ripe fruit is splitting, so as to fit it for the tea-table, where it is commonly served up cold."

There,—I don't want to read any more of it. You see that many of these statements are highly improbable.—No, I shall not mention the paper. No, neither of them wrote it, though it reminds me of the style of these popular writers. I think the fellow that wrote it must have been reading some of their stories, and got them mixed up with his history and geography. I don't suppose *he* lies;—he sells it to the editor, who knows how many squares off "Sumatra" is. The edi-

tor,—who sells it to the public—By the way, the papers have been very civil—haven't they?—to the—the—what d'ye call it?—"Northern Magazine,"—isn't it?—got up by some of those Comeouters, down East, as an organ for their local peculiarities.

The Professor has been to see me. Came in glorious, at about twelve o'clock, last night. Said he had been with "the boys." On inquiry, found that "the boys" were certain baldish and grayish old gentlemen that one sees and hears of in various important stations of society. The Professor is one of the same set, but he always talks as if he had been out of College about ten years, whereas..... [Each of these dots was a little nod, which the company understood, as the reader will, no doubt.] He calls them sometimes "the boys" and sometimes "the old fellows." Call him by the latter title, and see how he likes it.—Well, he came in last night, glorious, as I was saying. Of course I don't mean vinously exalted; he drinks little wine on such occasions, and is well known to all the Johns and Patricks, as the gentleman that always has indefinite quantities of black tea to kill any extra glass of red claret he may have swallowed. But the Professor says he always gets tipsy on old memories at these gatherings. He was, I forget how many years old when he went to the meeting; just turned of twenty now, he said. He made various youthful proposals to me, including a duet under the landlady's daughter's window. He had just learned a trick, he said, of one of "the boys," of getting a splendid bass out of a door-panel

by rubbing it with the palm of his hand,—offered to sing, "The sky is bright," accompanying himself on the front-door, if I would go down and help in the chorus. Said there never was such a set of fellows as the old boys of the set he has been with. Judges, mayors, congressmen, Mr. Speakers, leaders in science, clergymen, better than famous, and famous too, poets by the half-dozen, singers with voices like angels, financiers, wits, three of the best laughers in the commonwealth, engineers, agriculturists, all forms of talent and knowledge he pretended were represented in that meeting. Then he began to quote Byron about Santa Croce, and maintained that he could "furnish out creation" in all its details from that set of his. He would like to have the whole boodle of them, (I remonstrated against this word, but the Professor said it was a diabolish good word, and he would have no other), with their wives and children, shipwrecked on a remote island, just to see how splendidly they would reorganize society. They could build a city, they have done it; makes constitutions and laws; establish churches and lyceums; teach and practice the healing art; instruct in every department; found observatories; create commerce and manufactures; write songs and hymns, and sing 'em and make instruments to accompany the songs with; lastly, publish a journal almost as good as the *Northern Magazine*, edited by the Comeouters. There was nothing they were not up to, from a christening to a hanging; the last, to be sure, could never be called for, unless some stranger got in among them.

—I let the Professor talk as long as he liked; it didn't make much difference to me whether it was all truth, or partly made up of pale Sherry and similar elements. All at once he jumped up and said,—

Don't you want to hear what I just read to the boys?

I have had questions of a similar character asked me before, occasionally. A man of iron mould might perhaps say, No! I am not a man of iron mould, and said that I should be delighted.

The Professor then read—with that slightly sing-song cadence which is observed to be common in poets reading their own verses—the following stanzas; holding them at a focal distance of about two feet and a half, with an occasional movement back or forward for better adjustment, the appearance of which has been likened by some impertinent young folks to that of the act of playing on the trombone. His eyesight was never better; I have his word for it.

MARE RUBRUM.

Flash out a stream of blood-red wine!
 For I would drink to other days;
 And brighter shall thy memory shine,
 Seen flaming through its crimson blaze.
 The roses die, the summers fade;
 But every ghost of boyhood's dream
 By nature's magic power is laid
 To sleep beneath this blood-red stream.

It filled the purple grapes that lay
 And drank the splendors of the sun,
 Where the long summer's cloudless day
 Is mirrored in the broad Garonne;