

meddle with it again, we miss the novelty and get the blisters. The story is often quoted of Whitfield that he said a sermon was good for nothing until it had been preached forty times. A lecture doesn't begin to be old until it has passed its hundredth delivery; and some, I think, have doubled, if not quadrupled that number. These old lectures are a man's best, commonly; they improve by age, also,—like the pipes, fiddles, and poems I told you of the other day. One learns to make the most of their strong points and to carry off their weak ones,—to take out the really good things which don't tell on the audience, and put in cheaper things that do. All this degrades him, of course, but it improves the lecture for general delivery. A thoroughly popular lecture ought to have nothing in it which five hundred people cannot all take in a flash, just as it is uttered.

—No, indeed; I should be very sorry to say anything disrespectful of audiences. I have been kindly treated by a great many, and may occasionally face one hereafter. But I tell you the *average* intellect of five hundred persons, taken as they come, is not very high. It may be sound and safe, so far as it goes, but it is not very rapid or profound. A lecture ought to be something which all can understand, about something which interests everybody. I think that, if any experienced lecturer gives you a different account from this, it will probably be one of those eloquent or forcible speakers who hold an audience by the charm of their manner, whatever they talk about,—even when they don't talk very well.

But an *average*, which was what I meant to speak about, is one of the most extraordinary subjects of observation and study. It is awful in its uniformity, in its automatic necessity of action. Two communities of ants or bees are exactly alike in all their actions, so far as we can see. Two lyceum assemblies, of five hundred each, are so nearly alike, that they are absolutely undistinguishable in many cases by any definite mark, and there is nothing but the place and time by which one can tell the "remarkably intelligent audience" of a town in New York or Ohio from one in any New England town of similar size. Of course, if any principle of selection has come in, as in those special associations of young men which are common in cities, it deranges the uniformity of the assemblage. But let there be no such interfering circumstances, and one knows pretty well even the look the audience will have before he goes in. Front seats; a few old folks,—shiny-headed,—slant up best ear towards the speaker,—drop off asleep after a while, when the air begins to get a little narcotic with carbonic acid. Bright women's faces, young and middle-aged, a little behind these, but toward the front—(pick out the best, and lecture mainly to that). Here and there a countenance sharp and scholarlike, and a dozen pretty female ones sprinkled about. An indefinite number of pairs of young people,—happy, but not always very attentive. Boys in the background, more or less quiet. Dull faces here, there,—in how many places! I don't say dull *people*, but faces without a ray of sympathy or a movement of expression. They are what kill

the lecturer. These negative faces with their vacuous eyes and stony lineaments pump and suck the warm soul out of him;—that is the chief reason why lecturers grow so pale before the season is over. They render *latent* any amount of vital caloric; they act on our minds as those cold-blooded creatures I was talking about act on our hearts.

Out of all these inevitable elements the audience is generated—a great compound vertebrate, as much like fifty others you have seen as any two mammals of the same species are like each other. Each audience laughs, and each cries, in just the same places of your lecture; that is, if you make one laugh or cry, you make all. Even those little, indescribable movements which a lecturer takes cognizance of, just as a driver notices his horse's cocking his ears, are sure to come in exactly the same place of your lecture, always. I declare to you that, as the monk said about the picture in the convent, that he sometimes thought the living tenants were the shadows and the painted figures the realities, I have sometimes felt as if I were a wandering spirit, and this great unchanging multivertebrate which I faced night after night, was one ever-listening animal, which writhed along after me wherever I fled, and coiled at my feet every evening, turning up to me the same sleepless eyes which I thought I had closed with my last drowsy incantation!

Oh, yes! A thousand kindly and courteous acts, a thousand faces that melted individually out of my recollection as the April snow melts, but only to steal away and find the beds of

flowers whose roots are memory, but which blossom in poetry and dreams. I am not ungrateful, nor unconscious of all the good feeling and intelligence everywhere to be met with through the vast parish to which the lecturer ministers. But when I set forth, leading a string of my mind's daughters to market, as the country-folk fetch in their strings of horses—pardon me, that was a coarse fellow who sneered at the sympathy wasted on an unhappy lecturer, as if, because he was decently paid for his services, he had therefore sold his sensibilities. Family men get dreadfully homesick. In the remote and bleak village the heart returns to the red blaze of the logs in one's fireplace at home.

“There are his young barbarians all at play,”—if he owns any youthful savages.—No, the world has a million roosts for a man, but only one nest.

It is a fine thing to be an oracle to which an appeal is always made in all discussions. The men of facts wait their turn in grim silence, with that slight tension about the nostrils, which the consciousness of carrying a “settler” in the form of a fact or a revolver gives the individual thus armed. When a person is really full of information, and does not abuse it to crush conversation, his part is to that of the real talkers what the instrumental accompaniment is in a trio or quartette of vocalists.

What do I mean by the real talkers?—Why, the people with fresh ideas, of course, and plenty of good warm words to dress them in. Facts always yield the place of honor, in conversation, to thoughts about facts; but if a false

note is uttered, down comes the finger on the key and the man of facts asserts his true dignity. I have known three of these men of facts, at least, who were always formidable,—and one of them was tyrannical.

Yes, a man sometimes makes a grand appearance on a particular occasion; but these men knew something about almost everything, and never made mistakes.—He? *Veneers* in first-rate style. The mahogany scales off now and then in spots, and then you see the cheap light stuff.—I found———very fine in conversational information, the other day, when we were in company. The talk ran upon mountains. He was wonderfully well acquainted with the leading facts about the Andes, the Apennines, and the Appalachians; he had nothing in particular to say about Ararat, Ben Nevis, and various other mountains that were mentioned. By and by some Revolutionary anecdote came up and he showed singular familiarity with the lives of the Adamses, and gave many details relating to Major Andre. A point of Natural History being suggested, he gave an excellent account of the air-bladder of fishes. He was very full upon the subject of agriculture, but retired from the conversation when horticulture was introduced in the discussion. So he seemed well acquainted with the geology of anthracite, but did not pretend to know anything of other kinds of coal. There was something so odd about the extent and limitations of his knowledge, that I suspected all at once what might be the meaning of it, and waited till I got an opportunity.—Have you seen the "New American Cyclopaedia?" said I.

I have, he replied; I received an early copy. How far does it go? He turned red, and answered, to Araguay. Oh, said I to myself, not quite so far as Ararat; that is the reason he knew nothing about it; but he must have read all the rest straight through and, if he can remember what is in this volume until he has read all those that are to come, he will know more than I ever thought he would.

Since I had this experience, I heard that somebody else has related a similar story. I didn't borrow it, for all that. I made a comparison at table, some time since, which has often been quoted and received many compliments. It was that of the mind of a bigot to the pupil of the eye; the more light you pour on it, the more it contracts. The simile is very obvious, and, I suppose I may now say, a very happy one; for it has just been shown me that it occurs in a preface to certain political poems of Thomas Moore's, published long before my remark was repeated. When a person of fair character for literary honesty uses an image such as another has employed before him, the presumption is that he has struck upon it independently, or unconsciously recalled it, supposing it to be his own.

It is impossible to tell, in a great many cases, whether a comparison which suddenly suggests itself is a new conception or a recollection. I told you the other day that I never wrote a line of verse that seemed to me comparatively good, but it appeared old at once, and often as if it had been borrowed. But I confess I never suspected the above comparison of being old, except from the fact of its obviousness. It is proper, how-

ever, that I proceed by a formal instrument to relinquish all claim to any property in an idea given to the world at about the time when I had just joined the class in which Master Thomas Moore was then a somewhat advanced scholar.

I, therefore, in full possession of my native honesty, but knowing the liability of all men to be elected to public office, and for that reason feeling uncertain how soon I may be in danger of losing it, do hereby renounce all claim to being considered the *first* person who gave utterance to a certain simile or comparison referred to in the accompanying documents, and relating to the pupil of the eye, on the one part and the mind of the bigot on the other. I hereby relinquish all glory and profit, and especially all claims to letters from autograph collectors, founded upon my supposed property in the above comparison,—knowing well, that, according to the laws of literature, they who speak first hold the fee of the thing said. I do also agree that all Editors of Cyclopedias and Biographical Dictionaries, all Publishers of Reviews and Papers, and all Critics writing therein, shall be at liberty to retract or qualify any opinion predicated on the supposition that I was the sole and undisputed author of the above comparison. But, inasmuch as I do affirm that the comparison aforesaid was uttered by me in the firm belief that it was new and wholly my own, and as I have good reason to think that I had never seen or heard it when first expressed by me, and as it is well known that different persons may independently utter the same idea,—as is evinced by that familiar line from Donatus,—

“Pereant illi qui ante nos nostra dixerunt,”—now, therefore, I do request by this instrument that all well-disposed persons will abstain from asserting or implying that I am open to any accusation whatsoever touching the said comparison, and, if they have so asserted or implied, that they will have the manliness forthwith to retract the same assertion or insinuation.

I think few persons have a greater disgust for plagiarism than myself; if I had even suspected that the idea in question was borrowed, I should have disclaimed originality, or mentioned the coincidence, as I once did in a case where I had happened to hit on an idea of Swift's.—But what shall I do about these verses I was going to read you? I am afraid that half mankind would accuse me of stealing their thoughts, if I printed them. I am convinced that several of you, especially if you are getting a little on in life, will recognize some of these sentiments as having passed through your consciousness at some time. I can't help it,—it is too late now. The verses are written, and you must have them. Listen, then, and you shall hear.

WHAT WE ALL THINK.

That age was older once than now;
In spite of locks untimely shed,
Or silvered on the youthful brow;
That babes make love and children wed.

That sunshine had a heavenly glow,
Which faded with those “good old days,”
When winters came with deeper snow,
And autumns with a softer haze.