THE YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE, VOL. XXV, JULY, 1860, NO. VIII, PP. 332-375

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649191680

The Yale literary magazine, Vol. XXV, July, 1860, No. VIII, pp. 332-375 by Various

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

VARIOUS

THE YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE, VOL. XXV, JULY, 1860, NO. VIII, PP. 332-375

Trieste

THE

YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXV. JULY, 1860. No. VIII.

EDITORS FOR THE CLASS OF '61.

WILLAM H. FULLER, SEXTUS SHEARER.
JOSEPH L. SHIPLEY, EDWARD R. SILL.
RALPH O. WILLIAMS.

The Significance of Drinking-Songs.

WHILE Byron was absent on that long, devious journey which was only terminated by his death, he inscribed the well-known verses to Moore, begining:

"My boat is on the shore,
And my bark is on the sea;
But, before I go, Tom Moore,
Here's a double health to thee!"

Perhaps, nothing ever written by or of Byron has more clearly exhibited his fortune and character than this address of twenty lines. From those twenty lines or five stanzas there stand out all the misused poets aversion for the past, his vexation at the present, and deep distrust of the future; all his defiant daring rooted in despair; and far beyond these, the bitterness of his hatred, and passion of his love. The image of what the author was, and of what he suffered, makes so full an impression, that every one immediately realizes the intense meaning of those words:

"Were't the last drop in the well,
As I gasped upon thee brink,
Ere my fainting spirit fell,
'Tis to thee that I would drink."

Deep, however, as the feeling of sympathy is with the gasping yearner after the absent, I question whether there is not brought to every mind, when these lines are read under favorable circumstances, or, especially, when sung, another sensation and a profounder one;——— the insignificance of an individual in the great sum of the race. Let any one hear those lines recited, or, better still, sung in the dusk of twilight, and impulsively his mind will step down from communing with the sorrows of Byron into the thought—how transitory is the world's recollection of those sorrows! A little more than forty years ago those passionate words were penned, and now how few ever call to mind, and how seldom do even they, the pangs which wrung them out. But when he recollects that those heart throbs belonged not to Byron only, but to all the forgotten sons of Adam, it rushes upon him that the emotions of himself, the listener and meditator, are doomed in time to come to the same oblivion. Now it must be remembered that each of us is to himself individualized by his sensations; and when the idea has once searchingly taken hold of the mind of any one, that these sensations of his, which he supposed were peculiarly his own, belong not only to himself, but to the whole Race—Past and Future—he has begun to realize the utter nothingness of the individual in the aggregate of things; so easily and simply are we often led to thoughts that lie "too deep for tears."

This sense of individual insignificance, which has been reached again and again in ways similar to the one described, seems to have possessed the majority of the composers and singers of drinking-songs. Any reader of Anacreon, as Moore has rendered him, or of Moore's original melodies, must have been struck by the entire absence of mirthfulness from their most mirthful attempts. Anacreon, I suppose, may be taken as the exponent of the higher order of ancient classical bacchanals; certainly Tom Moore can be, of modern refined revelers. Now it is interesting to observe how the pages of both these men, so widely separated by time, labor under one monotonous burden. The most hilarious jubilates of Anacreon unceasingly repeat:

"Man of sorrow, drown thy thinking!"

—and from the distance of twenty-four centuries Tom Moore echoes:

"Quick! we have but a second,
Fill round the cup, while you may."

The same vein of despondency is plainly visible in Scotch, French and

Spanish drinking songs, and coarsely exposes itself in riotous German airs; while the fact that this minstrelsy is taken up and drank to and wept to by high and low, the world over, shows that it is not an expression of personal feeling, but a voice from human nature. This despondency, whether clearly defined or not in its origin, in all cases, upon examination, seems to have for its cause, the perishability of the temporal individual. The drinker, so far as he gives expression to his emotions in these songs, tips the cup, and lives out to-day, because he is conscious that all of him which the world recognizes, will be to-morrow among unremembered rubbish. At any rate, in looking for the impulse to any vice, it is always desirable to settle upon one commensurate with the supposed dignity of man. And in cases where a vice is not sectional, but universal, I believe that its origin always lies in such an impulse. Take for an instance, swearing. We have all of us heard discourses on the sinfulness of profanity, closed up and fortified by an appeal to the uselessness of the practice. Now, without defending an employment of terms, which is shocking even to the irreligious, I would question whether a practice so prevalent in all regions and ages, were, in the sense meant by the reprover, utterly useless. Christian, Jew, Mohammedan and Pagan employs each his formula of profanity; the man of the nineteenth century curses to-day—so did Peter nearly two thousand years ago; and each, we are told, idly. Is it not preferable to believe, however, that what is of perennial life in human conduct, roots itself in some-thing deeper than irreverent thoughtlessness and absence of purpose? The fact is, plainly, that profanity (not as habit, but as the forerunner of a habit,) is a vent for ungovernable emotions. Not till vexation and anger have ceased from the land will there be an end of cursing. As far as changing the relations of object, profanity is useless;—so also are tears. But tears are among the things which have been, which are, and ever will be. And were it not that throats are somewhat more subservient to the will than eyes, many and many a time, from lips that were never known to speak profanely, a great salt oath would gush out.

Intemperance is as deeply and firmly based. All attempts, therefore, for its extirpation, whether by Maine-laws or associations, I cannot but think, however praiseworthy, will be, as regards the mass of men, unavailing. The use of intoxicating liquors is not a fashion and cannot be cleared away by human decrees. It began before History, and is, take it the world through, unabated. There is not a nation which is not largely subservient to the practice; a practice inexplicable, but for those chanted expositions forever accompanying it. Bac-

chanal songs may seem in our every-day thoughts to be mere bubbles; but if they are so, they rise from depths so profound, that only omnipotent power might reach and cleanse them. In that beautiful play, Schiller's Wallenstein, which by the genius of Coleridge has become part of our English literature, we are assured by the hero that every pain can be only transitory.

> "This anguish will be wearied down, I know;
> What pang is permanent with man?"

And the "Opium-Eater" in language worthy of both poet and translator, has reaffirmed the truth. But it must be remembered that this truth belongs only to men separately. Man, the individual, as regards his sorrows, the "strong hours" do "conquer." But the sorrow which in him is subdued and extinguished by the lapse of time, through the endless repetition of the race, rises again and reasserts for itself an immortal existence. And the chiefest one and deepest, forever appearing as generation follows generation, is that which springs from individual perishability and, therefore, insignificance. And while it is so we must expect that siren voices will call to responsive hearts:

> "Man of sorrow, drown thy thinking!"

and

> "Quick! we have but a second,
> Fill round the cup, while you may."

R. O. W.

We Students.

To say that a fit of passion has been augmenting, by degrees, through three years, is to predicate of it an intensity truly fearful; yet the writer of this article has, for the above space, been growing out of temper at a species of essay, neither rare or delightful, whose only achievement has been, studiously to avoid treating of the subject they undertook. He has read one or more desponding papers on College Politics, by worn out intriguers; he has observed high scholarship denounced by those more than willing to be valedictorians, but has seldom found an account untinged with anger or disappointment.

To come to the point at once, we have no business to abhor the man who competes for a prize, or plumes himself on his mathematical

attainments. I do not scruple to state that, were I on a jury, I would not be for hanging him, unless he had outraged decency in some more shameful way. I do not want to acknowledge unprincipled associates, yet I must confess to a speaking acquaintance with an individual to whom a scholarship had been awarded, and remember once to have met a vulgar fellow, who had solved correctly various algebraic problems. Under compulsion, it is not unlikely that we might admit participation in similar ambitious endeavors. How we worked, then! How dear to us was our little one, tricked out in ribbons. We all have our especial weaknesses; may be, this was yours or mine. But, to hedge us off from the residue of the flock, and subject us to every particle of the cheap sarcasm, which no one is without when he talks about us, is grossly unjust. What is the use of flouting at prizes, when we can't help, in some way, coveting them; when, in doing so, we are merely obeying a nature the Almighty gave us? No—my fortunately insipid satirist—if there is a single honor you can grasp, your parents may be assured you will not fail to get it. We utter no complaint for this; only act honestly about it, and keep quiet when others are doing the same; only be severe when you can be sensible, and you will not need to slice us into "great scholars," "great speakers," "great poets," "great boobies." Above all, don't laugh at us for doing our best. Our prose may be vile, and our poetry altogether beneath notice, yet—like all else under the sun—they have a meaning and a comfort for somebody. Rather—if a choice must be made—encourage us to keep on, delving away at our slender veins of precious ore—straining all our energies to satisfy ambition. For the time is drawing nigh, when, if even "successful" in our College course, we will loathe our gift. For every lisp of praise, hereafter, shall be recompensed with heartburns; for every victory shall, in later life, twinge sharper than rheumatism.

In fact, would we not do well to commiserate the Student—a mongrel creature, concerning whom authorities are at variance? If we call him boy, the Scriptures, respecting him, are not devoid of allusions to the rod. If we call him man, we find he must do his work with boy's tools. The well-behaved citizen glares upon him from his dwelling, as the evident purloiner of his gate. The Faculty, (blessings on its paternal head, waxing more and more sensible, through a hundred and fifty years!) tells him, that he should be a man at his books, but a boy when he comes to discussing the opinions contained between their covers. Finally, his comrade, oftentimes, knowing beyond his years, will pen a discreet article, which shall make his ora-

torical efforts of no account; which shall deride, most bitterly, his attempts to think for himself; and which, of course, shall be deemed a marvel of judicious criticism, as well as an instance of benignant, pains taking reproof. Woe is me! The Fejee Islander has trowsers stitched by the fairy fingers of Columbia's daughters, but no benevolent society has tears for the wretched Student!

I am not certain that our proneness to worship gods—although mean and made of mud—is a sign of utter depravity. It furnishes, as all are aware, an excellent topic for the vivacious, yet Ciceronian pen of our sardonic satirist. He can exult as vociferously as gentility will permit over the College Politician, yet we kneel before the shrine, knowing better than he can know, why we do homage there. In all young men, comfortably removed from idiocy, an irrepressible desire has been implanted, to enjoy intellect, wherever found. The boon for which we would especially plead, is to have the heaven-sent spark of genius ourselves, and next to this, we desire to search out him who has it, and honor him. Must one be painfully acute, in order to detect something praiseworthy in this? What can it be, other than a nervously subtle apprehension of mind, and a veneration for it, as the most august thing in creation—its Maker excepted? Grant you that it makes us ridiculous: let our satirist, then, shake out his hard laughter; if his lungs can bear it, we can. We Americans hung our heads a trifle, after being agitated about our welcome to Dickens, but the motive that incited us to throng around him, also made us know sooner than others, that England had two giants in her midst, and impelled us to cry out to them, to come up and take their stations among the illustrious of our Age. Thus it will be for many generations to come. In spite of numerous mistakes, while Colleges last, the smartest man in his class will be known and admired as such. We give not the slightest heed to logic in our conduct, but without doubt Nature has ordained, and one has slim chance of an appeal from her decision. If any body will give us loftier things to worship, we will accept them gladly. Till then, we are obliged to keep on as usual, being, so to speak, servants of the strongest, swearing allegiance to him sooner than to another. Mournful would it be for us—and not us alone, but for our country—if a *really* great spirit should be so buffeted and scorned, here in his youth, that he would sorrowfully gather his garments over the symbols of his nobility, and walk till death in the common herd, silent of the kind thoughts within him.

On the other hand, dare we not put in a plea for this *smartest man?* I have already gone so far as to say, that the extremest rigor of the

law should not be visited upon him simply because he has carried off a brace or two of prizes. You or I would have done the like, if we had been able. It is no rash surmise to say that "a DeForest man" can be grieved by a cutting remark, or that a Class Orator is of like passions with ourselves. Surely, it would seem, from the spirit of the disquisitions upon "the Student," which infest somewhat our Collegiate literature, that divers amongst us are either forgetting or ignoring the fact that he is a man.—Brothers, (or must we wait till Presentation Day to use the title?) the world at best is full enough of bickerings and sour looks. We saw, only the other day, how men by no means babyish, clung weeping to each other, when the time of parting comes; shall we too not clasp hands and try to smile cheerfully on one another, through this the only common sojourn for us, outside the grave-yard?

I have not mentioned yet the chief character among us—actually the chief, but never apparently. He is made of different stuff from others. He never took a prize. He is not solicited for any Society, it may be. He is frequently dealt with crustily by self-conscious instructors who do not need to be told that they are the wisest men who ever lived, and that knowledge will perish at their demise. He does not wear as fine clothes as you, Byronic satirist. Once I saw him sawing wood, and again cleaning one of the Colleges, by way of vacation pastime. Now, what can he be? One, who—if these were patriarchal times—might have Angels visit him; one, who—were our Society an earnest thing—could set his foot—oh, spotless satirist!—even upon thy clean-cravated neck. There ought to be no end of our love and respect for this student. He would not do for any set of brave jolly hearts, who would fain shed tears over the fidelity with which each of their number can get drunk or sober without faltering. He is not sprightly enough, possibly, to be funny. Yet after the "good time" is over—when the brave jolly heart gets out of bed, with a leathery tongue and half-stewed brain, with the irresistible jest leaving as flat a flavor on his mind as the wine has left on his palate—when he looks down a long avenue flanked by many such good times, and sees, beyond them all, his mother—perhaps on earth or perhaps in Heaven, —watching him with sad tenderness—then he curses his bravery and jollity, and wishes he were doing something manly in the world. And slowly stealing on his memory, like—only more distinct—the prayer he used to say at evening, comes the recollection of his classmate's present life—modest, faithful, generous; and for the moment he holds himself unworthy even to salute him.