

**THE YALE LITERARY
MAGAZINE, VOL.
XXVII, NO. VII,
JUNE 1862, PP. 210-250**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649181704

The Yale literary magazine, Vol. XXVII, No. VII, June 1862, pp. 210-250 by Various

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.

Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

VARIOUS

**THE YALE LITERARY
MAGAZINE, VOL.
XXVII, NO. VII,
JUNE 1862, PP. 210-250**

THE
YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXVII.

JUNE, 1862.

No. VII.

EDITORS FOR THE CLASS OF '63.

E. B. BINGHAM,

S. W. DUFFIELD,

J. H. BUTLER,

C. W. FRANCIS,

J. P. KEENOCHAN.

Machine Prost.

O, he's as tedious

As is a tir'd horse, a railing wife;

Worse than a smoky house:—I had rather live

With cheese and garlic, in a windmill, far,

Than feed on cates, and have him talk to me,

In any summer-house in Christendom.

It is said of the slovenly, though brilliant Christopher North, that his finest literary efforts were the product of night-labor. It was his custom to divest himself of his coat, collar, and cravat, and with arms bared to his work, to write all night. He composed at first slowly, but as his giant mind warmed with his subject, and the "furor" came upon him, he seemed like one inspired; his pen moved with dashing rapidity, and in the small hours of the morning the spattering of ink on the paper before him was as distinct and continuous as the patter of rain drops. He was a man who could do nothing in accordance with stiff and cramping rules. His habits, both of body and mind, were peculiar and irregular. Even in public his manner of dress was at the farthest remove from care and neatness. He could write only when then spell was on him, but at such times his efforts were Herculean. His mind, so far from resembling in its action some uniform force in nature, was rather volcanic—now slumberous, and anon break-

ing forth into wonderful exhibitions of power. He was, in brief, a man who, in anything he did or said, could never be charged with being mechanical.

As another instance of a writer who possessed this same characteristic, may be mentioned Washington Irving. Irving was very unlike North in general mental cast, but like the great English author, he also was accustomed to wait for the moments of inspiration to aid him in the labors of composition. His writings are charming beyond description, and their charm depends very much on their naturalness. In reading them we feel sure they were not called forth in response to the demands of the printer, of poverty, or of habit. Irving always wrote at the dictation of that within himself which told him he *must* write. He would often rise at dead of night, seat himself at his secretary, and fill page after page with his beautiful and inimitable periods, well aware that at the moment the treasure was within his reach, and that with the morning's light it would have fled away.

We speak thus in the outset of these two writers, because in these days of books and book-makers, and speeches and speech-makers, when everybody writes and orates in order to be in fashion, it is refreshing to turn the attention from lifeless, or, on the other hand, overstrained productions, to the works of the true author, whose pages glow with the unmistakable fire of genius. Besides, we thought that the contrast, so strong and at the same time so pleasing, might assist us in the conception and definition of our subject.

Machine prose, or prosing, is indeed difficult of definition. Every person who is of a disposition at all sensitive, knows, or rather feels, what prosing is, and abhors it as he does a plague; but to dissect the monster, and show the nature of the several parts, and their relations to each other, is by no means an easy process. A certain "proser" has suggested, that as machine poetry is rhyme without reason, shadow without substance, so machine prose may be best defined by a combination of negatives. It is *un*-pleasing, *un*-profitable, *un*-satisfactory, and *un*-endurable. He would term it the "*monstrum horrendum*" of Virgil, and consider its character to be most accurately set forth in the phrase, "*cui lumen ademptum*."

It can of course be nothing but the want of light and life, which renders composition dark, and dull, and dead. And it is true that all utterance, whether by word of mouth or by word of pen, whether in verse or otherwise, unless it partake in some degree at least of the spirit of true *poetry*, will be in general prosy and unbearable. Language itself is, so to speak, the translation of nature, and nature is

full of poetry. All the varied sights and sounds that gladden earth, have in them an element of beauty, or of sublimity, which may be called poetic. This element we are or may be capable of appreciating and enjoying. The sense of the beautiful is as much a part of our nature as the sense of the true, or of the right. We should expect, then, that there would be many poets and but few prosers. Wordsworth has finely expressed the thought, that the true poet is not necessarily a versifier. He says,—

“Oh, many are the Poets that are sown
By nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
The vision and the faculty divine:
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse.”

But, although there are more poets than the world dreams of, there are yet more prosers than there should be. We meet with them in books, in business, and in conversation. The conversational prosers are probably one of the worst types, because he has access to most victims. It is this genus which the ingenious writer to whom we have already referred, divides into several species. He enumerates fierce, gentle, dull, lively, sensible and born prosers. To these may be added yet another class, prosers of the melancholy sort. The eyes of a man in the jaundice, says Watts, make yellow observations of things. So there are many people to whom all things appear not yellow, but black. For them life has no sunshine, no flowers. They are like dead trees in the forest, deriving no sustenance from the invigorating influences which nourish and strengthen their fellows. They are, we must believe, among the most terribly prosy people in existence. Their work is mechanical, and, what is worse, it is endlessly so. They never tire of relating their physical complaints, their heart-ails and soul-struggles. To be cornered by one of them is worse than being caught in a rain-storm. Think of such persons betaking themselves to book making! If a man passes his whole life in the midst of the dreariest and most melancholy prose, can we hope that he will manifest in his writings (if he attempt to write,) anything of the “divine afflatus?”

It was not, however, our intention to notice particularly the different classes of prosers, since this has already been done by others; but we would like to inquire into some of the causes that lead to the perpetration of machine prose.

First, then, prosing is often due partly to habit. It is always easier to form bad habits than good ones. Drowsiness, laziness, and stupidity, after long indulgence, become, as it were, normal conditions of

the mind. Similarly the mental powers can be exercised in a strained, unnatural way, until the practice becomes habitual, and may seem even natural. For example, some persons delight in oddity. They possess qualities common to other men, but they can be satisfied only with what is unusual and distorted. Hence they are full of queer thoughts and still queerer expressions. If they converse, their manner is abrupt and disagreeable. In writing they aim at quaintness—at Carlyle-isms and barbarisms. All this comes at length to be second nature, so that eventually, even if they make an honest endeavor to think and act like other people, they find the thing impossible. The confirmed oddity is therefore a bore from habit. Just so the veritable prosier, of whatever species. Take a prosy sermonizer. Who is more the slave of habit than he? He imagines that his hearers *expect* him to be wearisome, and takes his cue accordingly. He usually succeeds admirably—*so* admirably that his sermons acquire gradually a soporific character, and in the end he is able to write none other.

Byron says there are millions of men who have never written any book, but very few who have written only one. This sentence contains a lamentable truth. Many men, doubtless, with sufficient care and thought, and condensation, might write *one* readable book, and yet they never do it. They prefer, we may suppose, that their only positive quality should be diffuseness. Their choice is an unenviable one. A remorseless determination to compose, indiscriminately, on all sorts of subjects, treatises which nobody will ever read, cannot be esteemed a valuable possession. Endlessness is anything but human. It is a principal ingredient, however, in every variety of machine prose. We met, during vacation, a very old gentleman, who told us a story,—he called it a saddle story,—which was positively six hours long by the clock. We learned, on inquiry, that story-telling was a habit he had formed in early life. It had “strengthened with his strength,” and had not left him in his old age. Assuredly, if any one has acquired or is acquiring the habit of prosing, and has reason to presume that by opium-eating, or any like indulgence, he can catch even the faintest glimpses of the glorious visions of De Quincey, and thus be enabled to forsake his tediousness and platitudes, he is warranted in making the experiment.

But another cause for prosiness, particularly in writing, is want of truth. We have the right to demand of an author, or essayist, grace, perspicuity, force, and above all, entire truthfulness. The three former are the dress, the latter is the soul of literature. History without truth is but a corrupt mass: poetry cannot live without it. The same

rule applies in literature which obtains in art. The sculptor or painter must copy nature with unerring nicety, or his work will be condemned. An author, through fear of incurring the charge of simplicity or bluntness, may lay aside honesty of purpose and directness of expression, and adopting puerile sentiments, and an inflated, pompous style, may hope in this way to succeed; but his fame, if he achieve any, will be ephemeral. Forced productions, whether by the pen or the pencil, are like exotic plants; their life is precarious, and is often only a passing breath. The songs of Homer and Virgil, written thousands of years ago, when nature furnished the only inspiration and the only standards of taste for the poet, are yet the admiration of the world. Their immortality is owing simply to their conformity to the real and the true. Among modern authors there is one who is universally beloved on account of his straight-forward truthfulness, and whom we cannot forbear mentioning. We refer to Dr. Goldsmith. Goldsmith never prosed. His beautiful pictures of rural life and scenes never weary the patience, and rarely offend the taste. True, he speaks sometimes in a homely, but never in an uninteresting manner. All he says seems the spontaneous outflowing of a rare, genial, truthful spirit. As has been well said, Goldsmith himself gave the key to his peculiar genius, when he penned the lines.

"To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm than all the gloss of art."

While we are admiring this prominent excellence in Goldsmith's life and writings, let it not be imagined that his is an exceptional case. Truth is very generally a characteristic of genius. The really great man is above chicanery and low cunning. False colors, artifices, and cheating tricks, betray the littleness of their author. Nor is there to be found a more prosy or disagreeable character than the man who is constantly essaying to conceal the defects of his head and heart by pretending to be what he is not. We are disgusted at seeing him always wearing borrowed plumes.

A third reason for the use of "artificial enginery" in composition, we have already hinted at. It is to be found in the mania for authorship which is now-a-days so prevalent. What is the origin of this mania we are unable satisfactorily to determine. An author is often a much-abused individual, who experiences hard work and rough fare. The homage he receives from men is rarely such as to recompense him for his toil. Indeed, driving the quill is not of necessity a more honorable or honored employment than driving the plough, or follow-

ing any other respectable avocation. It is hard, however, for us to recognize this fact, and so many a good farmer, or first-class mechanic, is undoubtedly spoiled by dabbling in literature.

Now, these pseudo-authors, i. e. book makers, can be no great comfort to themselves or anybody else. What an eternity of misery it would involve to be condemned to read everything that everybody writes! We have often wondered what the world is coming to, for it will soon be incapable of containing all the "books that shall be written." But suppose every aspirant for literary honors were allowed to put in print no thought which was not exclusively his own, what a decimation our rapidly growing libraries would suffer in their contents. Must we not, then, consider all this superfluous lumber an infliction? If it is indispensable that the thousand and one obscure authors of each succeeding generation should scribble for the sake of personal improvement, it is still reasonable to require that their productions shall never see the light. They will thus themselves escape the imputation of prosiness, and save society at large a deal of trouble.

It may, to be sure, be argued that the desire for posthumous fame is a strong incentive toward one's making an attempt to embalm himself in a book, but it must not be forgotten that the very existence of such a desire may and frequently does imply the lack of ability to gratify it. The born writer is not chiefly and unbecomingly eager to gain a name and reputation among men. He forgets self in the midst of the grand thoughts that stir and pervade his whole being. He, therefore, unlike the ambitious prosier, can no more become tedious and stupid, than the torrent can become a streamlet, while the source of its power is yet in no degree exhausted.

We have thus spoken of prosing, and some of its causes. If we were to make practical application of the subject, we should say that "we students" are much exposed to the danger of becoming too mechanical. We are a part of the great college-machine, which is wound up regularly three times a day. The length and character of our lessons is fixed by an unvarying standard, and too often, as a consequence, we prepare the lessons themselves *solely* for the purpose of recitation. To illustrate our manner of writing, notice the system of prize compositions. What can be more unnatural than the arbitrary preparation of a given number of pages, on a given subject, within a specified time? Of one thing we may be certain; such a process, when applied, must extinguish all poetic yearnings. If there were no other proofs of this, the recent experience of the "Committee on National Songs," would be sufficient evidence. Among twelve hundred effu-

sions, conceived under the stimulus of a five hundred dollar prize, scarcely one was found worthy the name of poetry. Now is it surprising that young writers in college, following this same method in which even the experienced fail of success, should become artificial and prosy? We wonder whether the Rhadamanthus who decides on these prize efforts of ours, does not expect to find prosiness a leading quality in the essays submitted to his inspection. And we wonder, too, whether he does not often become "weary in well doing."

But it is time to close our prosy *mélange*. As an apology for the weakness of this and future efforts, we request our readers to remember that an editor is often compelled to write, whether the "fit is on him" or not. In our conduct of the *LIT.* for the ensuing year, the present Board do not propose to do anything new or startling. We only promise right intentions and earnest endeavors. We are but few among many, and without support and sympathy success is of course impossible. We trust, therefore, that all those who feel that they have *something to say* which will be of interest to the reader, and aid in making the Magazine what it should be, will send us an occasional contribution. Any such favor will always be gladly and gratefully received.

E. B. B.

Confidence.

Most young people are bashful. On this account, we say, they appear awkward, do what they ought not to do, and leave undone what they ought to do. Perhaps one reason why they are bashful is, that they feel that they are awkward and ignorant of social observances. The multifarious requirements which society makes upon its members appall the child. They are very far from the promptings of his simple nature, and he finds it a tedious task to learn them. New vexations beset him daily. Habits and customs as old as Adam intrude upon him like sour schoolmasters. With little confidence in himself, and with the shadow of a theology hanging over him, which taught that a man's self was his own worst enemy, and that the only way to