

SOME PHILADELPHIA MEN OF LETTERS.

BY EDWARD ROBINS, M.A.

The late Governor Pennypacker, who was perhaps prouder of being President of this Historical Society of Pennsylvania than he was even of occupying the executive chair at Harrisburg, frequently complained to me that many Pennsylvanians who achieved things would have received much more credit for what they did had they lived in some other state than ours, and particularly so had they lived in New England. He thought that Pennsylvania had not been awarded all the praise due her for the part she had played in the American Revolution as well as in the Civil War, and I must confess that I had to agree with him. I can recall myself how, when a boy, I read enthusiastically about the events of the Revolution, and came to the conclusion—a conclusion which was dissipated by later reading—that the struggle for Independence had been conceived, fostered, launched, carried on and successfully ended, almost altogether by New England, and that Pennsylvania and the Southern states had only supplied a respectable accompaniment to the heroic solo played by Massachusetts. And now, when I have been refreshing my memory about Philadelphia's literary history, so that I may briefly revive its memories this evening, I am reminded of Governor Pennypacker's plaint, because I realize, as I never did before, what noble contributions our city has made to American literature, and yet how poorly, as a whole, the true value and significance of those contributions have been recognized.

Dr. Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, in his really monu-

mental work on Philadelphia authors, seems to appreciate this when he says: "The city has had its statesmen, soldiers, jurists, scientists and its literary men—poets, philosophers and novelists. It is still contributing its fair portion to the literature of the country. But with the spirit of the place, what its people have done may be forgotten in the rivalries of Boston and Indiana, and Philadelphians themselves, although inwardly convinced of an honorable history, may sometimes lack exact knowledge of the cause of their secret boast. . . . It is everywhere agreed that Philadelphia was the focus of literary interest in this country during the later colonial time, the Revolutionary period, and subsequently, until the capital was removed to the city of Washington for which axemen had laboriously hewn a place in the new District of Columbia. It is commonly forgotten that in the first half of the nineteenth century Philadelphia was the principal American publishing centre, both for books and periodicals, if its native writers were fast being eclipsed by those of New York and New England. This was the time when Poe, Whittier, Lowell and other authors were led to the city to swell today the interesting memories of its literary past."

I might go further than this quotation from Dr. Oberholtzer and name some Philadelphia authors now living who are keeping the Quaker City on the literary map—I might say that one of the greatest of modern essayists is a Philadelphian—that the most charming life of Whistler was written by Philadelphians—that the greatest American authority on Dr. Johnson is a Philadelphian—that—but I must go no further, for I will reserve the living for another time. To-night I am dealing only with the dead—some of whom, I am glad to say, still live in their works. And even with the dead I can only deal most briefly, and, indeed, with but a very few of them. Did you ever stop to think of a

few of the literary achievements for which Philadelphia is, or should be, famous?

The greatest of all American historical documents, the Declaration of Independence, was drafted, adopted and promulgated in Philadelphia.

The Constitution of the United States, which some people think should be amended out of all semblance to the original, was drafted and adopted in Philadelphia.

The most astute real estate publicity agent of this or any other age was the head of Philadelphia's first family, in a place where "first families" still have some importance. I refer to William Penn, who knew how to "boom" Pennsylvania and sell land with a skill that would have put any modern real estate operator to shame. And let me remind you that the land which he sold was good, honest land, and he never took undue advantage of the buyer.

The shrewdest advertiser of a later generation was a Philadelphian. For Benjamin Franklin not only did big things but he knew how to give them publicity, and he made the name of Philadelphia famous throughout the world of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the fact that he was born in Boston may account for the theory he always practised, to the effect that a city should never hide its light under a bushel. William Penn was a literary man as well as the founder of a mighty commonwealth, and although his writings may no longer be read by the average reader, they are still worth preserving, as my friend, Mr. Albert Cook Myers, could tell you. As to Franklin, he has become one of the classics of literature, and his "Autobiography" still finds many admirers, as it deserves. Would that all self-biographies were as frankly written.

A pamphlet that played a great part in the Revolutionary struggle was written and published in Phila-

delphia, to wit, Tom Paine's "Common Sense," although Paine was not a Philadelphian.

The Non-Importation Resolutions of October 25, 1765, which had an important bearing on the movement finally leading to Independence, were drafted in Philadelphia, and are not without literary interest. The original manuscript is in the possession of the Historical Society, having been presented to it in 1854 by William Bradford.

The first American play was written and produced in Philadelphia, namely, the "Prince of Parthia," by Thomas Godfrey, the younger, and the first American opera was given here as well. Of these I will speak later.

The poem of "The Raven" was written by Edgar Allan Poe while he was working in Philadelphia for *Graham's Magazine*, although candor compels me to add that this masterpiece was published in New York. Poe was not the first or last author who did some fine writing in Philadelphia that had to seek a market in New York. However, be it remembered that his picturesque poem of "The Bells" first saw the public light in Philadelphia in *Sartain's Magazine*.

The first American edition of Shakespeare was published in Philadelphia (Bioren and Madan, 1795 et seq.) and the first American edition of the Bible in English was likewise printed in Philadelphia (Robert Aitken, 1782). This was after the publication in Germantown of the Christopher Sower Bible in German.

The most famous American comic poem, "Hans Brietmann's Party," was written by a Philadelphian, Charles Godfrey Leland, and first printed in this city.

And his intimate friend, George Henry Boker, Philadelphia poet and diplomat, was the author of one of the best American dramas yet written. I mean the drama of "Francesca da Rimini," which Lawrence

Barrett produced so brilliantly and which deserves a revival.

The most accomplished American commentator on Shakespeare was a Philadelphian—the erudite and lovable Horace Howard Furness, who gave the world the “*Variorum Edition*” of the poet—a work which is being carried on in scholarly fashion by his son.

The “*History of the Inquisition*,” a work of vast learning and enormous research, was written by a Philadelphian, Henry Charles Lea. One could devote a whole evening to Mr. Lea alone, for he was among our most brilliant men.

One of the most delightful novels of its day, which was a “best seller” and charmed hundreds of thousands of readers, came from the pen of a distinguished Philadelphia physician, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell.

The patriotic anthem of “*Hail Columbia*” was the inspiration of a Philadelphian, Joseph Hopkinson.

Philadelphia had a library when subscription libraries were practically unknown, and it is a pleasure to feel that the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded by Franklin, is still with us, as is also Franklin’s yet lusty child, the American Philosophical Society.

I suppose I might go on all night making more claims for our city! I might even claim Walt Whitman as a Philadelphian, for, although he lived in Camden, he escaped from there every morning, at least when he was in good health, and came over here to spend the day. But I will only put forward one more plea for the city of Penn as a literary centre. How many of you know that the immortal classic beginning

“Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,”

was the effort of another Philadelphian, Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, a well-known litterateur in her day? Little could she have realized how that poem was to

go down to posterity, and how many parodies were to be evolved from it. It is the first poem I remember of my infancy, but in my later years it always called up the variation beginning:

"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
She took it to Pittsburgh one day,
And then—oh, my!"

I wonder if the lamb would fare any better in Philadelphia these days, with the smoke and dust of the town—no longer the fair green country town of our forefathers, who knew neither motors, nor telephones nor "Mitten Men and Management," but, who nevertheless, were quite happy. As for Mary's lamb, one of my aunts married Mrs. Hale's grandson, so I feel as if I could claim some sort of unworthy relationship to this spotless and highly virtuous animal.

How I wish there was time this evening to say something in detail about all these worthies, but that is impossible. I cannot even stop to dwell on many I have not named, such as Dr. Allibone, compiler of the wonderful "Dictionary of British and American Authors," or of Henry Reed, or of Charles Brockden Brown,* the novelist, or William Duane, Joseph Dennie and his Portfolio, George Lippard, the Careys, Robert Montgomery Bird, Charles Heber Clark or a host of others.

Just let me touch on a few side lights. Do you know that the Historical Society possesses two copies of a "Project of Universal and Perpetual Peace" printed at Passy in French, by a great Philadelphian, in the year 1782, and discussing the establishment of what would now be called a League of Nations? The publisher was Benjamin Franklin, and the writer was a French schoolmaster, one Pierre André Gargaz, of

* An interesting article might be written about Brown, who has been described as the "veritable forerunner of the psychic fiction of today." His novels are full of weird power and subtle imagination.

Theze, who had had the misfortune to serve in the galleys for twenty years on a charge of assassination, of which he claimed to be innocent. Of course the idea of a union for perpetual peace did not originate with Gargaz, who had read Sully's account of the Great Design of Henry the Fourth (doubtless the work of Sully himself) and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's "Project to Produce Perpetual Peace in Europe," and possibly he had read another treatise on the same subject by Cruce, published as far back as 1623. We see that a League of Nations is no new theme. But the theme was set forth by the ex-galley-slave in a new way, and enlisted the interest of Franklin, who was then living in France and enjoying, as was but his due, the adulation and intellectual petting of the most brilliant and high born of the men and women of Paris. We may imagine Franklin, with his native shrewdness, reading over Gargaz's plan and sympathizing with it, yet detecting therein certain elements of the impracticable. For in an autograph draft of a letter addressed "to whom it may concern," owned by the American Philosophical Society, he says: "The bearer, Pierre André Gargaz, is author of a very humane project for establishing a perpetual peace. This has interested me much in his behalf. He appears to me a very honest, sensible man, and worthy of better fortune. For tho' his project may appear in some respects chimerical, there is merit in so good an intention." And here is where that common sense, which was the supreme virtue of our Philadelphian, comes to the fore. I can fancy him analyzing the modern League of Nations and deciding that while the intention was admirable, the world was by no means ready for such an idealistic institution—not, at least, until human nature had become angelic. Probably some of my listeners may not agree with me, and Franklin will never come back to tell us of what he thinks of the

conferences at Geneva, in which the richest country in the world takes no official part.

The "Project" of Gargaz proposed that there should be established in the city of Lyons a perpetual "Congress," composed of one mediator for each sovereign of Europe and one for each of his neighbors who shall be pleased to enter into the universal union. As soon as there shall be ten mediators at Lyons they shall there pass judgment, by a plurality of votes, upon all the differences of their masters. . . . The mediators will be chosen by the sovereigns, and will be, without doubt, the most pacific, the most enlightened and the most upright that they are able to find among their councillors; consequently this august assembly will be the elite of Europe, and all the allied sovereigns will doubtless be proud to have them for Councillors and to acquiesce in their decisions.

"This worthy and judicious Congress, by its integrity, by its ability and by the full liberty that it will have of speaking without fear of displeasing any one will, infallibly, by its just and impartial deliberations, exercise a moderating influence upon all the Councils of the Courts, which are, for the most part, too much attached to the imaginary interests and honors of their own countries to the prejudice of other nations."

This is the basis of the scheme, and you will observe that it presupposes, for its ideal enforcement, a vast amount of brains, virtue and disinterestedness on the part of everybody taking part in it. But it is amusing to see the objections urged against a plan which had for its main object the abolition of war. I will only cite two. One was: "War is a scourge of God, necessary to his justice, consequently the sovereigns cannot avoid it, they are even obliged to make it, for the punishment of the nations."

The other objection is a truly illuminating illustration of the reverence in which the French aristocracy

was held before the Revolution that sent so many of them to the guillotine: "War is useful to the nobility in procuring for them employment in the military service and retiring pensions capable of supporting them in a state appropriate to their birth."

The moral of this objection is: "Let us have war that the nobility may prosper."

But I will not detain you further with a recital of this Project, and my chief reason for mentioning it is that it was printed by a Philadelphia man of letters because the author was too poor to print it himself. In passing let me add that Franklin was a believer in the efficacy of arbitration for the future, and in this connection I am glad to point out that another Philadelphian who came later, the late Thomas Balch, did much in his essay on the "International Courts of Arbitration" to promote the cause of arbitration as a practicable preventive against war. It has been well said of him that he "was perhaps the one man most instrumental in securing arbitration as the means of settling the Alabama claims," the instrument, indeed, "by which peace between the two great English speaking peoples was maintained when a deadly and destructive war was otherwise certain to occur." It is related that when Mr. Balch visited Abraham Lincoln in November of 1864 the President observed that the idea of settling the Alabama question by arbitration "was a good one, but that in the then existing temper of the American people it was neither possible nor popular." In fact, Lincoln added, "We were not near enough to the millenium for such methods of settling international quarrels." Yet this international quarrel was settled in the way that Mr. Balch suggested, and not by force of arms. So I say all honor to Thomas Balch, another Philadelphian of whom we should be proud.

As to Benjamin Franklin, he was, without being in any sense a professional author, one of the world's

greatest men of letters, for whenever he wrote, he was able to set down, in clear, lucid language, the thoughts of a superior intellect. He had the simplicity in writing of Lincoln, and, like Lincoln, he could produce the strongest literary effects without pomposity or apparent effort. Yet in his own city, I think, he was more valued for what he did than for what he wrote. I do not say this in scorn of Philadelphia, but rather because Philadelphia has never placed halos on the heads of its authors as London does, and Boston, and even, sometimes, New York. This is why some of our authors are not as well known abroad as they should be. There was a time, indeed, when upper-class Philadelphia was not quite sure that Literature was really *comme il faut*. When George H. Boker was beginning as author a friend warned him that if it were known that he wrote it might interfere with his social prestige. But we have gotten bravely over that. We are like the rest of the world; we do not look down on a man or woman who writes for money; on the contrary, we are apt to gauge their success by the amount of shekels that they can extract from their public.

It is fitting, speaking of Boker, that he should have added the art of playwriting to his other talents, for Philadelphia was a centre of dramatic life in his early years and long before, from the time when Hallam and his English company came to Philadelphia and when many good citizens looked upon actors as vagrants and thought the entrance to a theatre was but the vestibule leading to the infernal regions. The first American play to be presented on any American stage was given in Philadelphia in April, 1767, at the theatre in South Street, the same theatre in which the ill-fated Major André and his fellow British officers acted during the Revolution, and for which André painted a drop curtain. This first American play was a tragedy written by Thomas Godfrey, Jr., a poet of

no mean ability, and the son of the Thomas Godfrey who either invented or improved upon the quadrant. The younger Godfrey, who was born in 1736, was apprenticed to a watchmaker in early life, but paid more attention to poetry than he did to watches, and soon became, through his literary cleverness, the intimate friend of Francis Hopkinson and Benjamin West, then a young painter of promise who was afterwards to become President of the Royal Academy in London. Where locomotives shriek and factories belch forth smoke on the banks of the Schuylkill there was once a scene of sylvan beauty, and here West and Godfrey were wont to ramble, talking of their ambitions and how they hoped to succeed in life. West did succeed beyond all his youthful dreams, but fate was not so kind to Godfrey. He fought as a lieutenant in Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne, and after that spent most of his time in the South, and died in North Carolina, from a fever, in 1763. He was only twenty-three when he wrote the "Prince of Parthia," but he never lived to see his tragedy produced. I saw the play admirably revived several years ago by a company of college students. It belongs to the old-fashioned school of tragic drama and is typical of the time when every young author who wrote for the stage sought to imitate Shakespeare, but without getting within sight of him. The "Prince of Parthia" is not to be sneered at, yet it is as far away from the modern drama as is "Uncle Tom's Cabin" from a fantasy by Maeterlinck.

Philadelphia had quite a brood of poets in those days, one of the first being Aquila Rose, a clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly, who also operated a primitive ferry across the Schuylkill at Market Street. He was drowned near this ferry in 1723, and his death was mourned as a public calamity, but whether because he was a poet or because he was a popular ferryman I

do not know. He is forgotten now, as no doubt he deserves to be, but it was predicted when he died that

“his fragrant name
Will last till circling years shall cease to be
And sink in vast, profound eternity.”

Vain boast. When I recall many authors who were famous in my youth and now are completely forgotten, I realize how few names in literature go down to “profound eternity.”

Among our early poets, by the way, was a woman, and a fascinating woman, too. She was Elizabeth Graeme, daughter of Dr. Thomas Graeme, of Graeme Park, a very distinguished man of his day and highly placed socially. Miss Graeme (she afterwards married a Scotch adventurer named Ferguson) was full of eighteenth century sentiment, so much so that her poetry would now be considered stilted. When she heard of the discovery of a new star by Sir William Herschel she wrote:

“Whether the optic’s piercing eye
Has introduced to view a distant planet in the sky,
Bright, wonderful and new.
Or whether we are nearer thrown
To the great fount of light
And from that source each mist be flown
That wrapt that star in night,”

and so on.

Mrs. Ferguson translated Fenelon’s “*Telemaque*” into English verse and made a poetical version of the Psalms of David, which is in manuscript in this Society, and dedicated to Dr. Richard Peters. When she went to England, on one occasion, she was favorably received by King George the Third, and she never forgot how she had basked in the sunshine of royalty. She it was who was the bearer of the famous letter of the Rev. Jacob Duché to Washington, wherein the clergyman urged the future Father of His Country to make pace with the British, and she also delivered to Joseph

Reed the offer of the British peace commissioners, which caused Reed to say that the King of England was not rich enough to buy him and shake his loyalty to the people of America. For this assistance she was accused of being a Tory. But she lived on in this country peacefully until the end, passing the summers at Graeme Park and the winters in Philadelphia, where she held a salon on Saturday evenings that must have been a sort of precursor for our Wistar Parties. Her parties, however, were for both men and women, and it was enthusiastically said of her that at these gatherings "her body seemed to vanish and she appeared to be all mind."

She lies buried in Christ Churchyard, and as she was a wonderful pedestrian, perchance on some moonlight night her gentle spirit walks around Philadelphia to see the changes wrought here in our colonial city since she ceased to shine in it.

Elizabeth Ferguson left no poetry that has survived in popularity. One need not necessarily be a great poet to leave an enduring name; one poem, even though it be not great, may keep the author fresh in the memory of generations who live after him. Let us take, for instance, Thomas Buchanan Read, painter and poet, whom we may almost claim as a Philadelphian because he was born nearby, in Chester County, and once had his studio in a building in Chestnut Street. Most of Read's poems are forgotten, but one (the manuscript, I rejoice to say, is a rare treasure of the Historical Society) will be remembered as long as the literature of our American Civil War shall last. "Sheridan's Ride" is not a work of genius, but it is a classic, none the less, and its martial lines, full of the verve and dash of Phil Sheridan himself, seem destined to go reverberating down the ages.

The accidental manner in which the poem came to be written is worthy of chronicle. Read chanced to be

in Cincinnati during the war when he was handed a copy of *Harper's Weekly* containing a picture, by Thomas Nast, of Sheridan sweeping through the Shenandoah Valley. A relative who was with him at the moment said: "Buck, there is a poem in that picture!"

Read's answer was: "Do you suppose I can write a poem to order, just as you would go to the tailor's and order a coat?" But the suggestion appealed to him, nevertheless, and shutting himself up in a room, and giving orders that he was not to be disturbed "even if the house takes fire," he began "Sheridan's Ride" and finished it in several hours. The poem spread through the North like wild fire, and not only added to the popularity of the author, but helped to enshrine Sheridan in the hearts of the people. I once shook hands with Sheridan, in later days, at a reception given him in the Union League, and the memory of that poetic *tour de force* caused me to approach the General with a feeling of profound awe—although he was a short, unimpressive looking hero, with a cordial manner and nothing awesome about him. It may be of interest to add that although Read died as far back as 1872, his widow is still living, in Bridgeton, New Jersey.

Having mentioned the first American drama, let me mention the first American grand opera, "Leonora," which was produced in this city at the old Chestnut Street Theatre on June 4, 1845. The score was by William H. Fry and the libretto, based on "The Lady of Lyons," by Joseph R. Fry—two talented brothers of a distinguished family of Philadelphians, who were the sons of William Fry, one of the founders, with Robert Walsh, of the *National Gazette*, and an editor who was probably more instrumental than any other citizen in securing the passage, in 1836, of the law which created the public school system in Pennsyl-

vania. Joseph R. Fry, the librettist of "Leonora," was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, a cultured litterateur, and it was he who translated the Italian book of Bellini's "Norma" for its first presentation in America on November 30, 1840, at the Chestnut Street Theatre. He also adapted the libretto of Donizetti's "Anna Boleyn," which was sung in English for the first time in April, 1844, at the same house. In this opera, we are told, was first introduced the air of "Home, Sweet Home," as a part of an operatic entertainment. William H. Fry, the composer of "Leonora," was an accomplished musician and critic, who wrote many pieces for the voice and orchestral music as well. Another talented brother, Charles, who died soon after reaching manhood, was remarkable for the double gift of a fine baritone voice and a falsetto "pure as a soprano," which he could use on occasion with wonderful effect.

Joseph R. Fry prepared, and with George S. Pepper, sent out, the first notice of a meeting to be held in February, 1851, to consider plans for the erection of the present Academy of Music. Two of his grandchildren are well-known Philadelphians, namely, Mr. Thomas Ridgway and Mr. J. Parker Norris.

"Leonora" has been described as the first American work worthy to be called an opera. "It was written in the Italian manner, The melodies were expressive and flowing, the concerted music was effective and large in style, and the choruses full of spirit."*

Francis Courtney Wemyss, the actor-manager, in writing his memoirs of this opera says: "Had Mr. Fry selected New York instead of Philadelphia for the first field of his operations, the whole United States would have teemed with praises. The sin he committed

* "Record of the Opera in Philadelphia."

was daring to present the first lyrical drama ever composed in America to the citizens of Philadelphia for judgment, before the New Yorkers had an opportunity of passing upon its merits. Should it be played with success in Europe, how altered will be public opinion in its favor here. Mr. Fry may plume himself upon it as a work of art, to be proudly cherished." And he adds that although the production did not bring fortune to the author, yet Mr. and Mrs. Seguin, who took leading rôles in it, "reaped both money and fame" from the performances.

Let me remind you that on January 12, 1920, nearly seventy-five years after the premier of "Leonora," at the lecture on grand opera in Philadelphia delivered by Mr. John Curtis, in the hall in which we are now assembled, the tenor aria which Fry wrote for the score was sung by Mr. Joseph S. McGlynn. And I might call your attention to the fact that the manuscript of the opera is now a cherished possession of this Society.

Speaking of the production of "Leonora" in Italian at the New York Academy of Music some years after its first performance in Philadelphia Louis C. Elson writes: "While he (Fry) will not rank with the world's great composers, he deserves a monument in America nevertheless, for his criticisms opened a new and high vein of musical literature, his practical efforts in composition unlocked the door to the American, and in every way his life was beneficial to American musical art."

This story of operatic and theatrical production suggests the name of George H. Boker, author of *Francesca da Rimini*," one of the best dramas ever written by an American. Boker was one of Philadelphia's most distinguished men of letters, and I should like to see, but probably never shall see, a monument erected to his memory in the City Hall Plaza. For he was not

only a poet and playwright, but a man of affairs as well, President of the Union League and of the Philadelphia Club, a member of the Park Commission, and at different times American Minister to Turkey and to the Court of St. Petersburg. When Boker left the latter post, to return home, the then Czar (the one later to be assassinated by the Nihilists) was almost inconsolable and let it be known that his successor would not be overly welcome. For the autocrat of all the Russians was devoted to our Philadelphian, and it is said that when they first met the Czar was surprised to find in Boker a personage who so closely resembled the type of European diplomats to which Russia was accustomed. For there was no "shirt sleeve diplomacy" about the new minister. On the contrary, he was of commanding presence, tall, aristocratic looking (indeed, he was called the "handsomest man in Philadelphia"); he spoke French fluently, he was scholarly and cultivated, and a thorough man of the world. He looked like some high-born, all powerful British ambassador, although, strangely enough, his grandparents had risen to success from the humbler walks of life. But Boker had been given every advantage in his youth, including an education at Princeton University, which has been the alma mater of so many distinguished sons, and he had made the most of his advantages, in true American fashion.

It was my privilege, when I was barely grown up, to see much of Boker through my uncle-by-marriage, Charles Godfrey Leland, his most intimate friend. I never tired of looking at him, because he always reminded me, in face and figure, of pictures of Greek heroes of old, and I never tired of listening to him, because, like Leland, he was a fascinating talker, and it seemed to me, in my boyish enthusiasm, as if these two men knew about all there was worth knowing about everything.

Boker wrote a great deal of good poetry, which would now be considered old-fashioned, no doubt, yet one of his Civil War poems, the "Dirge for a Soldier," is still sung, and will doubtless survive. Of the plays that he wrote, "Francesca da Rimini" is the most notable; it is full of action, and has a charming literary flavor, and the subject, taken from Dante's theme, is the embodiment of the very spirit of tragedy. I saw one of the performances of the play when it was given by Lawrence Barrett at the Chestnut Street Opera House, with Marie Wainwright as Francesca, and I had the pleasure of sitting next to Mr. and Mrs. Boker and the Lelands. And there was also in the box,—Boker's daughter-in-law, who first as Edith Wharton and then as the wife of George Boker the younger, played so conspicuous and delightful a part for many years in the social life of the Quaker City. She and her sisters were among the real *grande dames* of their period. Mrs. Boker, indeed, died only a little more than a year ago, and many of us miss her from the gatherings in this hall, which she so often attended.

Of Leland I need not say much, because I have recently written several articles about him, one of which appeared in the magazine of this Society. He was an author of vast versatility, although it has sometimes seemed to me that this versatility was against his fame. He was a born humorist, as his famous "Hans Breitmann Ballads" testify, and he might have achieved a reputation as enduring as Mark Twain had he remained a humorist to the end. But he had, besides, a scholarly and antiquarian spirit which led him into other walks, such as folklore, gypsies, Indian legends, minor arts and psychology, in all of which he was entertaining. In his later years he hated to be reminded of his "Hans Breitmann" period, and I remember his saying to me once, quite bitterly: "When I was at the Wistar Party last night, I met

that old fool, Blank, who ran up to me and cried, 'Why, Hans, I haven't seen you since you got back from Europe.' "

Leland married Miss Belle Fisher, a great beauty in her day, whom Thackeray admired so much that he called her "the prettiest woman in America." She was the great-grandniece of Cæsar Rodney, the Signer, and the great-granddaughter of General Thomas Rodney. It was to Thomas Rodney that General Charles Lee, that stormy petrel of the Revolution, alleged that he (Lee) was the real author of the "Letters of Junius." Of course Lee was romancing.

One of my early recollections is of seeing Boker, Leland and Walt Whitman talking together at the corner of Broad and Chestnut Streets. That was a sight for the gods; it would have been impossible to get together three finer looking men. Of course my usual glimpse of Whitman was when he was riding on the front platform of the old-fashioned horse-cars, in fraternal conversation with the driver. And I remember how earnest Oscar Wilde was when he described a visit to Whitman's quarters in Camden. Somehow the vision of peripatetic Oscar, crossing the prosaic Market Street ferry to pay a visit to Mickel Street, had something delightfully incongruous about it, but from what Wilde and Whitman afterward said, the meeting was a great success, for each poet offered incense to the other—and what poet will refuse the pungent aroma of incense? Wilde and Whitman had this in common—they both understood that an unconventional personality helps to advertise one's poetry. Lord Byron found out that secret over a century ago.

In reminiscing of Philadelphia literary men and women, I find that I have known not a few of them in my time. One of my most pleasant recollections is of the Davis family, when they all lived their delightfully

interesting lives in the house in Twenty-first street, below Walnut. There were L. Clarke Davis, editor of the *Public Ledger*, and his wife, Rebecca Harding Davis, a novelist of enviable reputation; Richard Harding Davis, that prince of story-writers, Charles Belmont Davis, his brother, and Nora Davis, afterwards Mrs. Percy Farrar. What a charming household they were, all devoted one to another, and none the less charming because they were all a little different from most people. Clarke Davis took the liveliest interest in the drama and its history, and this formed a great link between us when I was the dramatic editor of the *Public Ledger*. It had always been the ambition of Mr. Davis to settle down on a farm and write the definitive life of Edmund Kean, but he never lived to achieve this, for he died in harness, which was really a pity, for with his tastes he should have left a scholarly book behind him to immortalize his love of the stage and its players. He was the intimate friend of Augustin Daly, Ada Rehan, John Drew, the Jeffersons, John S. Clarke and many more Thespians of distinction, some of whom I used to meet at his house. In connection with Augustin Daly, I had rather an amusing experience with Mr. Davis. He asked me, on one occasion when he could not get to the theatre himself, to write a criticism of a new production of the Daly company. "What sort of notice do you want, Mr. Davis?" I inquired. "Oh, a careful, discriminating one," he answered, as he took the inevitable cigar from his mouth. So I went to the performance, which I found rather carelessly done, and in my zeal to follow out his instructions to be "discriminating," I wrote a criticism which, to use an expression then in vogue in journalistic circles "tore Mr. Daly to pieces." I headed my article "A Tale of Two Cities," for I intimated that Daly had one character of performance for New York, and another, not so scrupulously artis-

tic, for Philadelphia. Perhaps my critique was a little too severe, but at any rate I prided myself that I had followed out Mr. Davis's order to be "careful" and "discriminating"—forgetting, however, how intimate he was with Augustin Daly. Some days later I was in Mr. Davis's editorial office, and he spoke of my notice, not without a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"I hoped you liked it," I said modestly, awaiting the praise I fully looked for. "You said you wanted something discriminating."

"Why, Robins," cried Mr. Davis, "so I did, but you were positively cruel, and Mr. Childs tells me that Daly is furious, and I have spent the past few days sneaking down alleyways and byways, to avoid meeting him."

What a shock! But Clarke Davis forgave me, and so, indeed, did Daly, who had not been slow to find out who had written the offending article. He even wrote me a cordial letter praising some work I had done.

Although I was not an intimate friend of Richard Harding Davis, I saw a good deal of him at one time, first when he and I were young reporters, and afterwards at his father's house. I always admired a certain boyishness which never left him and the art he possessed of enjoying life and people. He had the story-telling gift developed to the highest power, and I am sure that his experience as a Philadelphia reporter on the *Press* stood him in good stead when he began his career with "Gallagher" and other stories. A good reporter learns a lot about human nature, even at the risk of being disillusioned. My own experience as a young reporter taught me that some Philadelphians who were supposed to be great men were simply what we would now call "hot-air artists." Of course I am only speaking of persons who have passed on. I should recommend for every embryo novelist a preliminary course in a city editor's office.

Another Philadelphia author whom I remember well and delightfully was Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, who needs no introduction to us here. I saw a good deal of Dr. Mitchell at the Franklin Inn Club, of which he was President, and I was also fortunate in being *persona grata* to him because of my relationship to Leland, with whom he had been on terms of intimacy. Mitchell, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, was the rare combination of poet, novelist and physician, and it would be hard to say in which rôle he was the better known. He always ranked high as a nerve specialist and scientific investigator, but he never received the literary acclaim that was his due until his picturesque novel of "Hugh Wynne" was published. That had a tremendous vogue and an enormous circulation for those days, and it deserves to live, unlike many novels.

Most of us have heard the story (which I believe to be true from something he once said to me) of how Dr. Mitchell once consulted a famous Italian neurologist as to the condition of his nerves at a time when he was suffering from the effects of over-brain work. The Italian, who had not caught the patient's name, observed:

"If you be a citizen of Philadelphia, as you say, and be going back there, let me advise you to call on ze Doctor Vir Mitcheell, ze most great of all neurologists in ze world."

Dr. Mitchell has been accused of egotism. My answer to that is, first, that we are all egotists, more or less; secondly, that any egotism he may have had was justified, and thirdly, that it was so childlike and naive that it rather added to his charm. For like most men of mark he was perfectly simple and unaffected in his personal intercourse with everyone.

Yet another Philadelphian whom I knew in the flesh was John Sartain, the engraver, who is entitled to be called a man of letters because he wrote the "Remi-

niscences of a Very Old Man," which may rank among the best of the world's autobiographies. The house in which he lived for many years still stands in Sansom Street, above Seventh, although much altered, and whenever I pass it I always think of Edgar Allan Poe. For Sartain knew Poe well, when the poet was in Philadelphia editing *Graham's Magazine*, and in which he published his famous story, now a classic, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." For editing *Graham's* Poe received the princely salary of eight hundred dollars a year, but he finally withdrew from his post, owing to a quarrel with Charles J. Peterson, the old friend and associate of George R. Graham, the proprietor of the magazine. Sartain later had a magazine of his own, and in this appeared, in the number for November, 1849, Poe's poem of "The Bells." In its original form the poem was the merest trifle, but Sartain says in his "Reminiscences": "About six months after we received this poem in its primitive form Poe sent it enlarged and altered, but not yet in the final state in which we published it; the latest improvement came a month or so later. It appears that the very last poem he ever wrote was the one entitled "Annabel Lee." We purchased it from him, but before we were ready to issue it we found that he had also sold it to three other publishers."

Sartain vouches for one pathetic incident in the life of Poe in Philadelphia. The poet spent a night in old Moyamensing Prison because he was not quite in a condition to take care of himself, and the next morning was brought before Mayor Gilpin in company with some other victims of conviviality who had also passed the night in durance. When he stood up before the Mayor a spectator called out: "Why this is Poe, the poet!" And he was dismissed without the customary fine.

It was while he was struggling in Philadelphia that

Poe said: "There is one poem of mine that will live and that is 'The Raven,'" and he had the gift of prophecy; as well as *the gift of genius*.

George William Childs, another Philadelphian, of whom I have intimate recollections, was not a "man of letters," but he entertained so many authors, and through his editorship of the *Public Ledger* had association with so many literary people, that I seem warranted in mentioning him, however briefly. Mr. Childs did a great deal of good that no one outside of his office ever knew anything about, and I happen to know that there were several impecunious but deserving authors whom he practically supported. There were many young people whom he aided, and he made the career of more than one Philadelphian afterwards to become distinguished. His house was a Mecca for literary stars from Europe, and for some in America, as for instance, Longfellow, and, of course, he entertained many of the heroes of the Civil War, not forgetting his intimate friend, General Grant. When he and Mrs. Childs went to Europe in the late sixties they were the guests at Gadshill of Charles Dickens, and I have always regretted that I never asked Mr. Childs to give me his personal impressions of the great novelist. I might so easily have done so, for I saw much of Mr. Childs when I was writing dramatic and musical criticism for the *Ledger*, and when I would often be called down-stairs to his office to meet some visiting player or musician. He was so kindly of heart that I had difficulty in writing a frank critique about a performance, for fear it would offend the artists and so upset my chief. I remember on one occasion writing a notice about Madame Janauschek, in which I commended her acting, but abused the poor play in which she was appearing. The next day I had a summons to Mr. Childs's office; I found him sitting at his desk in embarrassment while Janauschek was

reclining on another chair bathed in tears. Of course I had to apologize!

It was the custom of Mr. Childs to give out souvenir teacups and saucers to visitors who came to his sanctum at Sixth and Chestnut Streets. Some people smiled at this as a weakness, but I always thought it a delightful custom, particularly as I managed to get a cup and saucer myself from time to time, and they were good china, too.

About every six months or so Mr. Childs would give me a word of advice. "Never be ashamed," he would say, "to carry a bundle in the street. I often do." Another thing he would say to me was this: "When you are writing up anything for the *Public Ledger* I would rather have you walk or ride ten miles than spell a man's name wrong. People like to see their names in the paper, if they are spelled right!"

I wonder if Mr. Child's axiom still holds good? Do people still like to see their names in the paper?

Many of the literary and artistic men, whom I remember, as well as many before my time, could be seen and heard at the famous Wistar Parties, which are happily still with us. The house at the southwest corner of Fourth and Locust, in which they first started with Dr. Caspar Wistar as their host, still stands and is in reverent hands. The Wistar Parties are a peculiar Philadelphia institution and shed about us a distinction and an air of culture of which even ancient Athens might have been proud. Several years ago it was my good fortune to attend the centenary of these gatherings, in this hall and to listen to the interesting history of the Wistar Parties in a paper read by our scholarly President, Mr. Carson.

In speaking of Wistar Parties there comes to mind—and a delightful remembrance it is, to be sure—the charming personality of our great authority on Shakespeare, Dr. Horace Howard Furness, a shining

member of a talented family which has helped so nobly to add literary *éclat* to Philadelphia. As a boy I recall his brilliant father, the late William H. Furness, the Unitarian divine; as a man it was my good fortune to meet, on occasion, Horace Howard Furness, and a more lovable person I never encountered. He was so full of the grace of life, yet so unassuming, that it was hard to realize what a marvelous scholar he was, for your scholar is sometimes pedantic, or repellent, or uninteresting to the general. But Dr. Furness was so great a savant that he could afford to be natural and cordial even to the young fellow that I was then, while all who met him quickly came under the spell of his charm. It would be idle for me to dwell on the vast fund of learning that made his "Variorum" editions of Shakespeare what they are; for we are all more or less familiar with that work, which has become, and will remain, a Shakesperean classic so long as the poet is read, acted or annotated, and that will doubtless be as long as English-speaking civilization lasts. But let me emphasize the fact that Dr. Furness was, unlike some students, possessed of wonderful breadth of mind, for although his Shakesperean researches involved a wealth of detail, he never lost the true perspective of the plays he was exploiting. This quality, so free of the narrowness of the pedant, is admirably illustrated in a quotation from the Appendix to the "Merchant of Venice" (edition of 1888, page 277).

"Since it is impossible," he says, "to know, with unquestionable certainty the year in which the play was written, it is pleasing to reflect that no single line of it depends on this knowledge for its wisdom or its wit. Nevertheless, great stress is laid on the importance of the investigation, and much learning and time have been expended in its pursuit. It is not easy, I think, to take interest in knowledge thus barren, for

granting that our calculations could be made with such nicety as that we would discover even the month, and the day—what would it avail us? Would it add charm to Portia's "quality of mercy" if we knew that it was written in 1594—in August—on the fifth day—on Wednesday—in the afternoon—at twenty minutes past three o'clock? Would it not be quite as profitable to speculate on the quality of the paper on which it was written? Is it any tribute to Shakespeare's genius that we should busy ourselves over what is not even the setting of the gem, but no more than the jeweler's case in which it is sent home? It is not by such facts as these that we may hope to find out the man, Shakespeare. If he is *not* to be found in the plays themselves he is *not* to be found in the dates when he wrote them. And he is not in the plays themselves—if he were, the plays would fall to the level of Ben Jonson's or Francis Beaumont's. It is because Shakespeare *is not* there that his plays are heaven-high above the plays of all other dramatists. Shylock, is Shylock, he is not Shakespeare behind a mask, dressed up as Shylock. Could we at any instant catch a glimpse of Shakespeare himself peeping through the divinity that hedges his creations, that instant there will be revealed a flaw in that creation. Are there any such flaws? . . . His genius, his intellect, is everywhere, in all and through all, from the first line to the last; but he, the man, the individual, is nowhere. He went out of himself and into his characters, leaving age, and sex and idiosyncrasies behind. Therefore, in prefixing this or that date to any of these plays, what else is it but rearranging that chronological table which, by courtesy, we now call a Life of Shakespeare, and which he who knows more about it than all the rest of us styles, as modestly as truthfully, merely outlines. Of the real Life we know absolutely nothing, and I, for one, am genuinely thankful that it is so, and

gladly note, as the years roll on, that the obscurity which envelops it is as utter and as impenetrable as ever."

This quotation from Dr. Furness is a beautiful example of literature, in itself, and no one would have given it more praise, could he have read it, than Shakespeare.

I recently asked his son, Horace Howard Furness, Jr., who has so finely carried on his father's work, what was the latter's favorite Shakespearean play? The reply was: "My father was often asked that question, and he always answered 'my favorite play is the last one I have been reading.'"

It is pleasant to know that Philadelphia has a unique memento of Shakespeare in his gloves, which are carefully treasured, together with many of the printed plays, folios and quartos, by the present Dr. Furness. These gloves have a wonderful history, for among those who possessed them at different times were David Garrick, Sarah Siddons and Fanny Kemble. It is worthy that they should find at last a home in Philadelphian which has itself contributed so nobly to Shakesperean criticism.