OBSERVATIONS

BY SARAH B. HARRIS

The Compensations of Poverty

ONE hundred boys in the John Worthy school, a reform school in Chicago, have had their teeth attended to for the first time in their lives. Pupils of the school consider it a distinction to have their teeth pulled and they hop into the dentist's chair and stand in line for the privilege. One boy went back from the hospital with six teeth clutched fast in his poor little fist and smiling triumphantly. It is very bad form to groan and if one of these little Indians allows an expression of pain to escape him, the boys lined up against the door of the operating room hear him and he loses caste. The boy with six teeth was like an Indian with six fresh scalps. The waifs love distinction as much as the rest of the world, and would have all their teeth pulled out to attain it. The dentists receive nothing for their work. They are senior members of the Chicago Dental college and do the work on the waifs for the practice. The treatment is better than neglect, which is the only alternative. The pampered boys who have to be bribed by gifts and threatened with severe punishment before they will submit to dental repairs should be made to feel what a luxury it is to have their teeth extracted. But pampered sons of wealthy parents receive demonstrations with incredulity. In the society of other boys who thought it bad form to whine or show any signs of pain, they would learn quicker than under the gentle pity of a mother who would bear the pain herself if she could, forgetting that pain is one of the best agents in character building.

* * *

The Railroad Mystery

Very likely a few railroad and finance experts like Mr. James J. Hill or Mr. J. P. Morgan understand just what has been accomplished and on what basis in the recent railroad deal. The people consult their current encyclopedias, the newspapers, and the information is so mixed and contradictory that few, however clever, know exactly what arrangements have been perfected; and no one, not even the parties who consolidated the three great railroad systems, know what effect the conjunction will eventually have upon the freight and passenger traffic, or upon other business. Though, strictly speaking, there is no business not directly connected with railroads.

A recent editorial in the New York Sun headed "The Meaning of the Great Railroad Agreement" attracted my attention. The Sun's editorial writers are mortal even as you and I, but the paper is an institution of antique origin for America; and reputation, once attained, is long-lived. New writers come and go upon the Sun as upon other papers, but the new inherit the authority and the reputation for lucidity the dead and gone ones earned.

The title of the editorial referred to indicates that a subject which has been debated by the sacred vocal organs of Messieurs Hill and Morgan, while their owners sat behind the closed bronze doors of a New York office was about to be exhibited and elucidated in daylight. Instead of explaining in words of one syllable the present status of the railroad mystery, the article should have been entitled "The Effect of the Great Railroad Agreement."

If the man who occupies the first editorial column of "The Sun," the paper old and famous, writes about the effect after he has denominated his subject "The Meaning of the Railroad Combination," it is certain that Nebraska, fifteen hundred miles away from the center of the consolidation, will lose time and energy if she stops to puzzle out what chemical change has taken place in the Union Pacific or the Burlington by mixing the two with the Great Northern.

If the three are really one and the union is complete and permanent of course there will be no more western rate wars, which are as bad for patrons as for the competing roads. Elevator men and rival stock dealers or merchants will hereafter have no just cause to complain of rebates to favorites. Where there is no other public carrier, why should the railroad company return a part of the standard rate to a grain or stock dealer? There will be no reason at all, and there being no reason or profit in it, the railroads, which have been under the disadvantage of an unjust suspicion for so long, will be relieved of an unpleasant onus. It has been proven that the economic advantage of the steel trust to the people is tangible and growing more so every day. At the present time there is an overwhelming demand for steel rails and for steel beams and frames for building; under former conditions the price would have risen steadily. Under the direction of one corporation the price has remained stationary. And when the demand slackens the bottom will not drop out from the market, there will be no panic and no iron workers will be laid off to nurse hatred for the institutions of this country and especially for steel manufacturers. The steel trust sells to all comers at the same rate. There are no cut rates to anyone. The Sun says:

What has taken place in the world of iron and steel has, by the great railroad treaty just ratified, occurred in the Northwestern railroad world and, very probably, throughout the entire west. The radical difficulty in the western railroad situation has been rate-cutting. This is usually spoken of as a money loss solely affecting the railroads themselves and their stockholders. But the worst evil about it was its damage to the business interests of the country. No merchant could ship goods or pay for their shipment to him with the slightest degree of certainty that he was not paying more for the same service than was his neighbor.

* * *

Leaves From Arbor Lodge

Longfellow made famous the bridge which was formerly the only one between Boston and Cambridgeport. He celebrated the village smithy and the Cambridge elm, the tall clock which he had from his grandfather, the twilight hour devoted to his children, the pasture across the street from his house where he kept his cow and which afforded him a view of the spires and skyscrapers of Boston. He celebrated many other commonplace things of his everyday life, which on reflection will occur to those familiar with his works. He was not a poet like Byron or Shelley or Keats. The supernal beauty of Keats' phrasing and the strong flights which bore him into regions of ineffable beauty whenever he chose, or at least whenever the spirit of poetry descended upon him, were alike unknown to Longfellow. He is not a poet's poet and Keats is. Whether is it better to be read of a few finicky poets, or to be the beloved of the multitude, to thrill the heart of childhood, to linger on the passionless, wise lips of old age, to be learnt by heart by the young and innocent and chaste, to be kin to sunlight and meadow flowers and to have a heart of gold that mirrors all the things one writes about? For Longfellow did not write down the birds and flowers, marshes, bridges and clocks as they are, but as he saw them in the golden mirror. He stood on the bridge at midnight and the pageantry of life passed before him as the clock was striking the hour. Thousands of men and women had stood where he stood and dimly felt the wings of time and the garments of the multitude, but no articulate expression of their emotion, no souvenir, remained. Read a poet of passion or of powerful imagination and his expression and experiences make the usual and the recurring experiences of life seem mean and ignoble. Read a poet of the household, wholesome sort like Longfellow and the duties and environment of our everyday life are dignified by the reflection from a distinguished mind. It is a noble mind which perceives and interprets for the uninspired the beauty of common things.

Miss Mary French Morton, the author of "Leaves from Arbor Lodge," is an interpreter of nature. In invariably correct and musical rhythm she repeats the messages of nature delivered to her by the slow river, the ravines and the old, tall trees of Nebraska City. Perhaps nothing in the old town has been abused more than the slow street cars dragged by mules. Car and traction are perhaps twenty years old, and the citizens resent the old style of both. Miss Morton perceives the beauty of the slow landscape and the ghosts of by-gone things in the old street car.

From out its eastern door we see
  The bluffs that melt away
In distant haze to softly gleam
  With jeweled tints of day;
And toward the wide, out-spreading west
  The peaceful country lies,
With glints of gold, the meadows green
  Curve under azure skies.

Drawn on by mules whose tinkling bells
  Sing out a plaintive air,
Unmindful that the old brown car
  Shows marks of grim Time's wear,
We sit content and dream out dreams
  That come with summer hours
And wonder if a heavenly land
  Can be more fair than ours.

Perchance in thought we see again
  The long, white-canvassed trains
Of pioneers who passed this way
  To cross far-reaching plains.
Like phantoms from the bygone years
  They come and pass from view,—
O, brave hearts journeyed to the west
  When this old town was new.

So back and forth it goes each day
  From flowing river's brim
To haunt of birds in shadowed grove,
  Whose quiet paths are dim.
Through traffic's stir, by hillside still,
  The old car jogs along
And one who sits within may hear
  Life's varied strains of song.

The volume is filled with studies of swaying branches, the moving shadows of foliage, with Indian tradition and the impressions of a race whose lodgepoles less than a century ago were erected on the very prairies where the white man's fruit trees, pines and firs now grow. Their foot-falls were noiseless and they have left few remains. Arrowheads, soapstone pipes, decorated buffalo hides (very rare), moccasins and some bead and feather ornaments are all that tangibly remain of the Indians in Nebraska. But a ghostly presence still stalks the plains and the sensitive are aware of it. "The Ghost Dance" confesses the effect of remains more personal than any of the articles just enumerated:

The noiseless shadows lurk below
The trees, as their branches sway,
Like lithe, dark forms of Otoe braves
In groups of stealthy foes at bay,
Just where the old field's margin creeps
To new-grown woodland's shading deep.

And long white spaces, moonlit, lie
Like ghosts of the slain in strife,
Wan heroes from the silent band
That trod this prairie soil in life
Like cry and wail of savage love
The wind moans plaintively above.

It sings and sweeps in mournful dirge
Through depths of the curved ravine,
And calls from hilltops where the pines
Approach the sky in sombre green.

The charm of a reserved, gentle, receptive, purely feminine spirit pervades this book of Nebraska poems. Miss Morton has lived for a number of years at Arbor Lodge, one of the most beautiful country estates in Nebraska. She is on the intimate terms with nature that only an acquaintance of years can develop. The volume contains faithful studies of Nebraska landscape. It is illustrated by pictures of the trees and drives, vistas and views of Arbor

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She—It's too important a question for me to decide now.

He—Will you give me my answer in a week?

She—Gracious! I could not wait that long.

*

Lena—What did that Russian nobleman write in your autogroph album?

Mabel—Oh! something unspeakable.

Lena—Goodness gracious! What was it?

Mabel—His name.—Town Topics.