Of late we have seldom picked up a paper that did not contain a literary department made up from the tables of contents of the various magazines. The items are strung along in some such way as this: "The ——— for March contains an excellent article on —— —— by the popular author —— ——; also" —and so on to the end. If it is a book that is to be noticed, the form is changed to this "The public will be interested to learn that ——— has recently published a very valuable book bearing the title of ———. We predict for it a hearty appreciation and large sale." Now we have been in the habit of reading such columns in the hope of finding some hint that would be useful in directing our reading, but so far we have had our labor for our pains. We hope no one else has been fool enough to go diamond hunting in the same clay. This is a kind of literature for which the world has no use, and we wish it would cease to occupy space that might be turned to account in saying a few of the many good things that are waiting to be said. Criticism is one of the most useful of the useful arts, but this that we are talking about is not criticism. But those who write this sort of nonsense are not the only ones who have mistaken their calling. There are others who imagine that they are the most able of critics merely because they happen to be troubled with dyspepsia. Now it is our belief that true criticism does not have its origin in the stomach, as might be supposed, but in the brain. Sometimes things are published that cannot be too severely censured, but certainly prejudice should never be felt against an article before it is read. It seems useless to make such an axiomatic statement, but what ought to be self evident has surely dropped out of the minds of some of the professional critics. It may be that those in question are trying to follow in the footsteps of Carlyle. If this is the case they have fallen far behind their leader. Carlyle had brains as well as dyspepsia, and, at least until we have further light on the subject, we must continue to regard brains as essential to a critic.

LITERARY.

DeQuincey wrote few better things than "Murder as a Fine Art." In many places his wit is heavy, but throughout this article his style appears at its best. I am irresistibly tempted to quote two of the good things in it. He says, "As the inventor of murder and the father of the art, Cain must have been a man of first rate genius. All the Cains were men of genius. Tubal Cain invented tubes, or some such thing." And again, "If once a man indulges in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing, and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once begin upon this downward path, you never know where you are to stop. Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder or other that perhaps he thought little of at the time." Then to get a slight idea of the versatility of the man read the "Dream Fugue" in the same volume.

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Among the recent additions to the American literature department of the University Library is a set of Charles Brockden Brown's works. These have an especial interest from the fact that Brown was the first American to devote himself to literature as a profession; and perhaps an additional interest from the promise we here find of a coming Hawthorne. One can readily allow his judgement to be softened in a measure towards the forerunner of our American men of letters and in fact one must lay aside the ultra-critical spirit to enjoy these works.

"Wieland," the first of the series is about as characteristic as any—illustrating Brown's liking for themes which savor of the supernatural. In this line it is good and one is generally surprised, at the end of the novel, to find the supernatural occurrences all explained by the combination of an ability to imitate voices, with inherited insanity. The father of the hero dies a in mysterious way and his daughter and son hear at short intervals strange voices and warnings. These result in the terrorizing of the family and finally in the death of the son, his wife, child, and sister successively.

The very apparent improbability of the story never occurs to a reader until the end is reached, because he thinks of it as a regular ghost story. It must be very gratifying to all unbelievers in ghosts to have the novel closed with such a commonplace explanation but I must say—even if I have to admit an unusual amount of gratification on this very score—that the effect is somewhat of an anticlimax, and I think Brown would have done better to leave the explanation out and allow the work to stand as pure romance.

"Clara Howard" is by far the most reasonable of the set in plot. It consists entirely of letters and is consequently of some interest—for an author of any ability can't help making letters interesting. This novel is quite short and merely a love story.

"Arthur Mervyn" is perhaps the best of the set. It is a memoir of the year 1793 in Philadelphia and gives an excellent account of the plague of that year. If American cities need any warning in regard to epidemics this, I think will furnish it. Arthur Mervyn is an ingenuous country youth who goes to Philadelphia and falls under the influence of a successful swindler and counterfeiter. This novel needs no sentimental consideration for the author, to recomend it, but will easily stand on its own merits. There are a few rather amusing traits in Brown as an author. In "Ormond" he says: "The character of Ormond deserves to be studied above all others." Of course an author may, if he wishes, insist that he is going to depict the greatest character in existence, but quite a number, perhaps, of his readers will smile incred-