Questions.

We question of the silence vast,
Of souls that people distant spheres;
What of their future and their past.
Have they our sorrows, joys and fears?
Do the same flowers make glad their sight?
The same birds sing? On their great seas
Do ships like burs with canvas white,
Move stately, answering the breeze?

Have they their Christ, their Christmas day?
Know they Mahomet? Buddha? One,
Or all or none? And do they pray?
And have they wrought as we have done?
We cannot guess; 'tis hard, indeed,
Our own orb's tale of its dim past
Through centuries untold to read,
And who its future shall forecast?

We know the hand that holds in check
The whirling worlds, each in its course
And saves the universe from wreck
And peril. This tremendous force
Hold likewise all our little lives;
The suns and stars do all obey
His bidding; never planet strives
To swerve from its appointed way.

The dangerous boon alone to us
Is given to choose 'twixt ill and well,
Rebellion or obedience; thus
To build our heaven or dig our hell.
But one great thought our strength upholds—
Nothing shall perish! Though His rod
Smites sore. His mercy still enfolds
His own! God's souls are safe with God.

Unselfishness.

I love my neighbor as myself;
I love his horse, his house, his pelf;
His pelf, I should have said before,
Means his arabog, his Lewis door.

I love my neighbor, oh, so well,
That with my nose I'd have him smell;
With my own eyes I'd have him see,
And with my mind think thoughts like me.

I love him so, his ways I'd fix
In trade, religion, politics;
His thoughts, his deeds, his aims, in fine,
I'd shape to harmonize with mine.

Ah, would he let me love him so,
How smoothly all our plans would go;
In everything beneath the sun
I and my neighbor would be one.

But oft times, when I sit with him,
And note his humor, sweet or grim,
With disappointing heart I see
My neighbor is in love with me.

—ROBERT J. BURDETTE.

A DIAMOND WOOING:

A NOVEL

(BY THE AUTHOR OF "GARTH.")

When we reached the court the brass band had established itself in the little pagoda erected there for its accommodation and was just striking up, and there, sure enough, were a table and chairs awaiting us beneath the trees. But neither of us was in a humor to face a crowd of people; and, by a tacit agreement, we turned to the left, and, crossing the little plank bridge which spanned the narrow stream that skirted the hotel grounds, we found ourselves in the high road leading up the valley. Along this we walked for some distance, both of us silent. At length the opening of a path presented itself, which climbed by a zigzag route to the summit of the pine-clad hill. Into this we turned, and in a few moments were out of sight of alien eyes amid the thick-growing hemlocks. The ascent was steep and at the first turning in the path my beautiful companion paused for breath.

"Will you take my arm now, Kate?" I said.

With a faint smile she complied.

"Just for this once," I heard her murmur, seemingly speaking to herself. "Never again—but this once I will."

"Now, Kate," I said resolutely, bending forward so as to catch her eye, "let us have done with mysteries. No more 'never agains' and 'just this onces,' if you please! First, I want you to tell me whether you love me."

She drew her breath hard.

"I can tell you nothing, Mr. Gainsborough——"

"You shall not call me 'Mr. Gainsborough.' If you can't call me 'Tom,' call me nothing; but I will never be 'Mr. Gainsborough' to you again!"

"I thought we were to have no more 'never agains?'" she rejoined with a passing sparkle of the old playfulness in her air.

"None of yours, I meant."

"I will call you 'Tom,' if you please, on one condition."

"What condition?"

"That you let it be 'just this once.'"

"Kate, do you love me?"

"Oh, you are cruel!" she cried with passionate emphasis, slipping her hand from my arm and facing me with glowing looks. "I wish I could say I hate you! You are a man of the world, and I a poor girl from a convent, who knows nothing. I am trying to do right, and you oppose me—you make it hard and bitter to me. If you loved me as I—as I would love if I were a man, you would not press me so. I tell you, it must not be."

"What is, shall be, Kate! Dear Kate, we love each other, and who in the world shall prevent it or forbid our being married?"

"Hush, hush!" She came a step nearer to me and caught my sleeve with her little hand, as a timorous child might do, glancing nervously over her shoulder as if something fearful were hidden among the trees. "Did you hear nothing?" she whispered. "Did not some one call me?"

"Only I have called you, dear. I called you 'Kate,' and now I want to call you 'wife.'"

She continued to stand motionless, with that frightened, listening expression still on her face, and yet my words had apparently passed unheard. What was it, then, that her ears were strained to catch? To my sense, the forest was full of shadowy stillness, tempered only by a faint whisper of leaves, and now and then a bird-note high overhead.

Gradually the strange preoccupation left her. Her breathing, which had been irregular and labored, now came evenly and gently once more. She glanced sidelong at me for a moment, then, with a swift, tender movement, she came yet a trifle closer and laid her other hand upon my arm.

"Tom—Tom, dear, I will say it, for we shall be parted soon, and then, if I am alive, I shall be comforted a little to think that I did say it. Listen—Tom, dear, I love you! Never forget that I said it—Tom, I love you."

I was taken deliciously by surprise. You must not expect me to tell how I felt or what I said. I can only remember that I took her in my arms and kissed her. The bird that warbled over our heads seemed to utter the ecstacy that I felt.

Presently we began to move on again. I don't know why I didn't speak. Perhaps I thought that our kiss had been the seal of her surrender, and that therefore words were for the moment impertinent. By-and-bye the converse would be renewed from a fresh basis. Besides, my thoughts were flying too fast just then for speech to overtake them. I was thinking how singular had been the manner and progress of our acquaintance. It was scarcely in accordance with what I believed to be my normal temperament and disposition to plunge so abruptly and almost recklessly into a new order and responsibility of life. I had fancied myself too cautious, too cool-headed for such an impulsive act. But it was done and the fact that Kate's feelings had responded to my own seemed to justify the apparent risk. We were meant for each other and had come together in sheer despite of all combinations of circumstances to keep us apart. Knowing, as we did, scarcely anything of each other as worldly knowledge goes, we had yet felt that inward instinct and obligation to union which made the most thoroughly worldly knowledge look like folly. What would my mother say to it? How would the news be relished by her father? I cared not. I foresaw difficulties enough in store, but none that appalled me. After all, an honorable man and woman, honestly in love with each other, are a match against the world, or superior to it. Union is strength, and the union of loving hearts is the strongest strength of all.

"And do you want to marry me, really, Tom?"

We had gained the summit of the steep hill and were now pacing along the ridge. The narrow, winding valley lay sheer beneath us on the right, with the white road and the dark stream lying side by side at the bottom of it. The crest of the opposing hill-side seemed but a short stone's-throw distant; the aroma of our privacy was the sweeter for the pigmy drosky, with its mannikin inmate, which was crawling along through the dust so far below. We commanded the world, while we were ourselves hidden from it.

"I should rather think I did, Kate!"

"I thought Englishmen only married as a matter of business; that they married settlements, and dowries, and rank, and influence, and added women merely as a matter of custom and politeness."

"I am satisfied to marry for love; if that's un-English—so much the better for me!"

"You would take me without anything but just myself?"

"What is worth having compared with you?"

"Oh, Tom! But, then, you cannot have just myself alone. Nobody in the world is independent of everything—not even an American—not even an American girl who has lived seven years in a convent! I may not be able to bring you anything good—anything that would make me more acceptable. But what if I were to bring you something bad—something terrible—something that would make you shudder at me if I were ten times as loveable as you say I am?"

"Why, then, I should have to love you twenty times more than ever, I suppose, that's all," I answered with a laugh.

"You don't mean what you say—at least, you don't know what you say. You are not so brave as you think you are, sir. What do you know of me?" She spoke these sentences in a lower, graver tone than the previous ones, which had been uttered in a vein of half-wayward, fanciful playfulness. Almost immediately, however, she roused herself again, as though unwilling to let the lightsome humor escape so soon.

"Well, let us pretend that you have married me, for better or worse, and that it is all settled. Now, where will you take me to, first?"

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Oh, it must be somewhere where nobody could come after us!" she exclaimed with a curious, subdued laugh. "Nobody that either of us have ever known; neither your mother, nor my father, nor—nor anybody! And there we must stay always; because, as soon as we came out we should lose each other and never find each other again. And that would be sadder than never to have met, wouldn't it?"

"But, my darling Kate," interposed I, laughing again, "where on earth, in this age of railways, and steamboats, and telegraphs, and balloons, are we to find such a very retired spot? Unless we took a voyage to the moon, or could find our way down to the centre of the earth, we should hardly feel safe, I fear."

"Oh, well, you must arrange about that; only it is as I tell you; and you see marrying me is not such a simple matter, after all. Well, now, suppose we have reached the place, wherever it is—what would you give me for a wedding present?"

"What would you like?"

"No—you are to decide that. It wouldn't be proper for your wife to choose her own wedding-present, you know."

"I believe such a thing does sometimes happen, though, when the people are very fashionable and aristocratic."

"But I am not aristocratic; I am an American. Now, what will you give me?"

"What do you say to the diamonds?"

"Well, I think I will take the diamonds," she said meditatively, as though weighing the question in her mind. "Yes, papa said I might wear diamonds after I was married. But might not your mother object?"

"Not when she knows whom they are for; and, at any rate, she is going to leave them to me in her will."

"Oh! And you expect that the news of our marriage will kill her?"

"It ought rather to give her a new lease of life. But you shall have the diamonds all the same. Will you try them on, now?"

"Why, have you got them with you?"

"Certainly; I always carry them in this pocket."

"How careless! You might lose them."

"No; the pocket buttons up—see!" and, turning back the flap of my coat, I showed her how all was made secure.

"But what if robbers were to attack you?"

"Then I should talk to them with this," I rejoined, taking my revolver from another pocket and holding it up.

"Oh, that's a Derringer! They have those in America. What a pretty one! Let me look at it."

"No," said I replacing it in my pocket, "it has a hair trigger and every barrel is loaded. You shall look at something much prettier and not dangerous at all. Here—sit down on this stump and take off your hat and I'll put them on for you."

The stump of which I spoke stood at the end of the path we had been following and within a few rods of the brink of a precipitous gorge, which entered the side of the steep mountain spur nearly at right angles. Across the gorge (which, though seventy to one hundred feet in depth, was scarcely more than half as wide at the top) a wooden bridge had formerly been thrown, but age or accident had broken it down until only a single horizontal beam remained, spanning the chasm from side to side, and supported by three or four upright and transverse braces. The beam itself was scarcely nine inches in width, and the whole structure was a dizzy thing to look at. My nerves were trained to steadiness by a good deal of gymnastic experience, but it would have needed a strong inducement to get me across that beam on foot.

Kate sat down on the stump as directed, but her manner had become languid and indifferent; the brightness and sparkle of her late mood were gone. As she looked up at me her level eyebrows were slightly contracted, and the corners of her mouth drooped. Her hands were folded listlessly in her lap. She was dressed in some soft white material, through which was visible the warm gleam of her arms and shoulders; the skirt was caught up in such a way as to allow freedom in walking; she wore a broad-brimmed white hat over her black hair; a yellow sash confined her waist; and her hands were bare. I untied the ribbons of her hat, she permitting me to do so without resistance; and then, kneeling before her, I unbuttoned the diamonds from my pocket, and laid them, in their case, upon her lap.

"Now, dear, shall I put them on you or will you do it yourself?"

She opened the case and the gems flashed in the checkered sunshine that filtered down between the leaves of the trees. The sight seemed to rouse her somewhat. A faint spot of color showed in either cheek, and she drew in a long breath.

"They are splendid!" she said. "I never saw anything like them. No, your mother would need to die before giving up these."

"They won't look their best until you have put them on. Come!"

"Oh, I'm afraid! What if——"

"Afraid of what?"

"What if some one were to come and see——"

"Nonsense, my darling! There's no one within half a mile of us; and if there were they would only see a lovely girl looking her loveliest."

"How nicely you talk to me! Well, then, you put them on me. I won't touch them myself."

The *parure* consisted of a necklace and a pair of ear-rings. I lifted them flashing from the case; clasped the necklace round her throat, she sitting motionless, and hung the ear-rings in her ears. A light that matched their marvellous gleam seemed to enter into her eyes as I did so.

"You and these diamonds were made for each other!" I said, and bending forward, I kissed her on the lips.

For more than a minute she sat there quite still, I kneeling in front of her; we were looking straight into one another's eyes. Then all at once a troubled, anxious look came into her face. She rose with a startled gesture to her feet.

"Hush, hush! Did you hear?"

"What's the matter?" cried I jumping up in surprise.

"Hush, some one calling—calling me!"

Again that strange fancy! What did it mean? I could not repress a certain thrill at the heart as I gazed at her. It was very weird and strange.

As I gazed, a singular change crept over her. Her face was now quite colorless and its pallor was intensified by the blackness of her mystical eyes. Those eyes slowly grew fixed—immovable, as if frozen. The lids trembled for a moment, then drooped, then lifted again to their widest extent and so remained. Her lips, slightly parted, showed the white teeth set edge to edge behind them. The rigidity descended through her whole body; she was like a marble statue. She breathed low and deeply, as one who is in profound slumber.

"Kate, what has happened to you?" I cried in alarm, putting my hand on her shoulder. Her arm was fixed like iron, she seemed to hear nothing, feel nothing. She was as much beyond any power of mine to influence her as if she had been dead. The diamonds that glittered on her bosom were not more insensible than she.

I must confess that I was somewhat unnerved by the situation. Kate was evidently in some sort of trance. But what had put her into that state, and how was she to be got out of it? For aught I knew it might be the prelude to a fit or other seizure of that nature, involving consequences dangerous if not fatal. In the bewilderment of the moment the only remedy that I could think of was cold water. To dash her with water might be of use and could scarcely make matters worse. About thirty paces from where we were standing a small rill meandered among the roots of the trees and trickled at last in a tiny cascade down the rocky side of the gorge. Toward this I ran, and, stooping down, attempted to scoop up some of the refreshing element in the crown of my straw hat.

Rising with the dripping hat in my hands, I turned to go back, but the sight that then met my eyes caused me to drop everything and spring forward with a gasp of horror.

Moving as if in obedience to some power external or at least foreign to herself, as a mechanical figure might move, steadily, deliberately and yet blindly, Kate had advanced directly toward the narrow chasm, and when I first beheld her she already seemed balancing on the brink. Before I could cover half the distance that separated us, she had set foot on the long beam which spanned the abyss and had begun to walk along it. By the time I had reached the hither end she was half-way over, stepping as composedly and securely as if she were on an ordinary sidewalk, though the slightest deflection from a straight course would have sent her down a hundred feet to the jagged boulders below.

Standing on the hither verge, every nerve so tensely strung that I seemed to hear the blood humming through my brain, I watched the passage of those small feet which I had admired that morning as they peeped coquettishly from beneath her dress in the railway carriage—I watched them pass, step after step, along that awful beam. I suppose the transit must have been accomplished in less than a minute, but it seemed to me that I was watching it for hours. I uttered no sound, lest it might rouse her from her trance and insure the catastrophe that else she might escape. I did not attempt to overtake her, fearful lest the beam should fail to support our united weight. I saw her pass on, rigid, unbending, but sure of foot as a rope-dancer; and at last I saw her reach the opposite side and stand once more on solid earth, preserved from death, as it seemed, by a miracle. I have no distinct recollection of how I followed. I only know that a few seconds afterward I was standing beside her with my arm round her waist.

I led her forward a few paces out of sight of the ravine, the mere thought of which now turned me sick, and brought her to a plot of soft turf beneath a tree with low, spreading branches. The trance was evidently passing away; her limbs no longer had that unnatural rigidity, her eyelids drooped heavily and her jaw relaxed. A violent trembling seized upon her; she sank down on the turf as if all power of self-support had gone out of her. At that moment I fancied I heard a slight crackle among the shrubbery not far off; I looked quickly up and saw—or thought I saw—a short, ungainly figure obscurely stealing away through the underbrush. Almost immediately he vanished amid the trees, leaving me in doubt whether my eyesight had not after all played me false.

As I turned again to Kate, she was sitting up against the trunk of the tree, the diamonds flashing at her throat and ears, and a puzzled, questioning expression on her face.

"What makes you look so strange?" she murmured. "Where is your hat? How did we come here, Tom? I thought——"

She stopped abruptly and rose slowly to her feet. Her eyes were cast down shamefacedly and she bit her lip. She lifted her hand to her throat and felt the diamonds there. Then with an apprehensive, almost a cowering glance, she peered stealthily round through the trees, as though expecting to see something that she dreaded. Finally she turned again appealingly to me, but said nothing.

I thought I partly understood the significance of this dumb show. She was subject to these somnambulistic trances and was ashamed of them. She knew not, on this occasion, what extravagance she might have committed in the presence of me, her lover. She feared the construction I might put upon it, yet was too timid—or, it might be, too proud—to speak. But her misgiving did me injustice. Shocked and grieved though I was, I loved her more than ever.

"You were faint, my dear, that's all," I said cheerfully and affectionately. "I brought you under this tree and now you're all right."

She shook her head with a piteous smile. "I know what has been the matter with me, Mr. Gainsborough," she said with an attempt at reserve and coldness in her tone. "I had hoped I might have parted from you before you knew, but—it was not to be so! It is very good of you to pretend to ignore it, and I thank you—I thank you. Here," she added, nervously unclasping the necklace and removing the ear-rings, "I have worn these too long. Take them, please."

"Kate, you shall wear them forever!" cried I passionately.

"I must not begin yet, at all events," she returned more firmly. "Take them, please, or you will make me feel more humiliated than I do now." She put them in my unwilling hands. "And now we'll get our hats and go back to the hotel," she continued, with a smile which was pathetic in its effort to seem indifferent and unconstrained. "Where are they? Ah!"

She had just caught sight of her white hat lying beside the stump on the farther side of the gorge. The suppressed scream and the start indicated that she now for the first time realized by what a perilous path she had come hither. She remained for a moment gazing at the beam with a sort of fascination, then, moving forward to the brink, looked down the sheer precipice to the rocks below.

"I wish I had fallen!" she said almost beneath her breath; "or," she added after a short pause, in a tone still lower, but of intense emphasis, "I wish he had!"

"You wish I had?"

"I did not know you were so near," she answered, drawing back from the verge. "No, no—not you! Come, we must walk round this place. Tell me," she said facing me suddenly, "did you see any one?"

"I think not. I fancied I heard——"

"We must get back to the hotel," she interrupted excitedly, "at least, I must get back. I don't like to be here. I wish you would leave me. I would rather say 'good-bye' to you here than there."

"I never mean to say 'good-bye' to you at all, Kate. If this is the trouble you hinted at, you overrate it entirely. Why, two people out of every seven are somnambulists. It is as common as to have black hair. Besides, you will outgrow it in a few years. It is only a nervous affection which any doctor can cure."

"It is not that; you don't understand," she said with a sigh.

"Whatever it is, I'm determined not to lose you. I shall tell your father when I see him that I love you, and that wherever he takes you I shall follow. No one can or shall keep us apart."

The resolution with which I spoke seemed to impress her somewhat. "You can speak to him if you will. But, oh, it is no use! It cannot be; you don't understand. Let me go; good-bye! No, do not come with me; please do not! I have a reason for asking it. I will see you once more—to-morrow, before we leave. But let me go alone now, if you love me."

She went, walking quickly away through the wood. I watched her for a few moments and then returned to the grass plot beneath the tree and threw myself down there in a very dissatisfied frame of mind. The sun had set before I returned to the hotel.

CHAPTER V.

I saw nothing more of Kate that day, but I came across Slurk several times and there was a peculiar look on the fellow's countenance which made me renew my longing to chastise him. I was anxious to know whether Mr. Birchmore had returned, but, as I could not bring myself to make any inquiries of this valet, and did not care to let him see me asking any one else, I was obliged to remain in ignorance. However, as I sat out under the trees at dusk, a tall figure, with a lighted cigar in his mouth, appeared in the doorway of the hotel, and, on my saluting him, he sauntered up to my table and complied with my invitation to sit down.

The waiter brought us coffee, and under its stimulus I ventured to introduce the subject which lay nearest to my heart to Mr. Birchmore's notice. No doubt I put my best foot foremost and spoke as eloquently as was consistent with my downright earnestness and sincerity. Mr. Birchmore heard me almost in silence, only giving evidence by an occasional word or interjection that he was giving me his attention. Once or twice, too, I was aware of his having given me one of those sharp, icy glances for which he was remarkable. When I had spoken, he fingered the pointed beard on his chin meditatively and puffed his cigar.

"This is a very fair and honorable offer that you make, Gainsborough," he said at length. "I liked you before; I like you better now. You take it for granted, I suppose, that I am pretty well off. There, you needn't say anything—I've no doubt of your disinterestedness—but these matters would have to be mentioned, sooner or later, if the affair went on. I say 'if,' because—I may as well tell you at once, it will save us all pain—because it can't go on; it must stop right here; and I can only regret, for both your sakes, that it has gone so far."

"Mr. Birchmore, I cannot take this for an answer. You have given me no reasons. If you want confirmation of my account of myself, I can——"

"I want nothing of the sort—on the contrary, I feel complimented that you should accept us, not only without confirmation, but without question. But you can't marry my daughter, Gainsborough, much as I like you and much as I dare say she does. When you are older, you will understand that men cannot always follow that course in the world which appears to them most desirable."

"However young or old I may be, Mr. Birchmore, I am old enough to know my own mind and to require good reasons for changing it. If you have any such reasons I wish you'd show your liking for me by telling me what they are."

"Do you remember a talk we once had in Paris, when you hinted that I should accompany you on your jaunt? I told you then that the past life of a man sometimes had a hold over his present, constraining his freedom, whether he would or not. And can't you imagine that those circumstances, however cogent they may be, or, very likely, just because they are so cogent, might be very inconvenient to talk about? To speak plainly, Gainsborough, I don't see how your loving my daughter obliges me to tell you all the secrets of my life."

"I don't want to know your secrets, sir; I wish to marry Miss Birchmore."

Mr. Birchmore laughed.

"Well, you're a pretty determined wooer," said he. "I can't give my consent to the match because—well, because I cannot; but, if you won't take 'no' for an answer, nor profit by the warning I hereby give you, I'll tell you what I will do; I will allow you yourself to discover and acknowledge the causes which make your marriage with Kate impossible. You must not blame me if the discovery gives you pain and the acknowledgment causes you mortification. I have given you fair warning. And I will only add, sir, that the pain and mortification won't be all on your side. I could not give you a stronger pledge of my friendship and liking for you than in thus letting you find out what has hitherto been hidden from all the world. And I only demand one condition—that you promise, when you have made your discovery and left us, never to mention to any human being what our secret was."

"I give that promise with pleasure. As to my leaving you of my own free will, that is—begging your pardon—impossible and absurd."

He laughed again and shot another of his startling looks at me.

"Very well, young sir, I have nothing more to say. Come with us to the farm-house to-morrow; there's plenty of room there, and they are used to being accommodating. Stay with us until you're satisfied and then—don't forget your promise."

He rose as he finished speaking and flung away the remains of his cigar.

"Good-night," he said, holding out his large, well-shaped hand.

"Good-night, and thanks for your confidence, which you will never regret, Mr. Birchmore."

"Qui vivra, verra" was all his answer as he walked away with his hands in his coat pockets and his singular short steps.

He was an enigma, sure enough, and yet my belief in him was as intuitive and inalienable as in Kate herself. His mysterious hints and warnings were powerless to disturb me. I trusted in the ability of us three combined to overthrow any antagonist. I sat late beneath the trees, smoking and brooding over my passion, as young men will, and ever and anon glancing up at a certain window, behind the lamp-illumined curtain of which I had reason to suppose my darling was. Was she thinking of me now? Even as I asked myself this and gazed upward, a shadow fell upon the curtain, it was pushed aside and the window swung back on its hinges.

With a throb of the heart I sprang to my feet and wafted a kiss from my finger-tips toward the face that peeped out upon me. Stay! Was it Kate's face, after all? The arms and shoulders now appeared and the form leaned upon the window-sill. A lucifer match flashed and I had the pleasure of beholding the sinister visage of Mr. Slurk lit up by a sulphurous gleam as he leisurely lit his pipe and stared down at me.

"Sehone gute nacht, Herr Gainsborough!"

(To be continued)

The crops in the Western States are turning out better than anticipated.

WESTMINSTER IN DANGER.

A Plea to Save the Historic Abbey from Decay and Ruin.

(Liverpool Post.)

The whole country will learn with distress and anxiety that Westminster Abbey is crumbling away into a condition of dangerous ruin. The process has been going on for many years, and we may well believe is now progressing more rapidly than ever. There is something terribly destructive in the London atmosphere. Into it are poured daily vast volumes of destructive gases and vapors, besides the smoke and dirt from a million household fires. As the great metropolis grows, this evil grows too, and the progress of civilization, the increase of industries, and the developing wealth and comfort of the inhabitants appear to make matters worse instead of better. Stone and metal are not strong enough to resist the disintegrating influence to which they are subjected in London. Every one knows that many old churches and historical buildings, hidden away in quiet quarters, are silently crumbling into dust for want of attention and of money to preserve them. The bronze and stone statues of ancient date scattered throughout the metropolis are found to be honeycombed, and many of them have been taken down and destroyed. This is a matter of small regret, inasmuch as there are very few statues in London worth the space which they occupy. Most of them are inartistic atrocities. The atmosphere in eating them away is really performing an æsthetic service. Unfortunately, Westminster Abbey cannot be saved by chemical washing. Time has converted its venerable stones into dust and has eaten away its mortar. Only by extensive repair and rebuilding can it be saved from actual destruction. Its dangerous condition has been known for a good many years, and Mr. Pearson, the distinguished architect, in 1882 reminded the dean and chapter that the process was going on with alarming rapidity. The capitular body, however, possess no means of dealing with the evil. Their revenues are small, and they have done what little they could to keep the historic trust which is in their charge in reasonable repair. Now the question has come before Parliament and a Bill has been promoted giving powers to the ecclesiastical commissioners to defray the cost of the necessary work. The commissioners have drawn very large sums each year from the Cathedral endowments, and it is only right that they should devote some of them to the maintenance of the fabric. Westminster Abbey is the heritage of no Church and no denomination. It is the possession of the nation. Every stone in it, every inch of its hallowed pavement speaks to Englishmen of the making of their country, of the growth of their liberties, of the progress of their arts, of the formation of their literature. It is a holy fabric not merely because the voice of prayer has sounded daily within its walls for 800 years, but because it contains the dust and enshrines the memory of the best and greatest men which the country has produced. Among its clustering columns, under the shade of its soaring arches, and in the glory which falls from its ancient windows, the best emotions are touched, and the highest aspirations are kindled. He who within its walls fails to feel that it is a privilege to be an Englishman, and to share in the service of freedom and justice and truth which England has rendered to humanity, who does not remember that still there is room for devotion and zeal and trust, must be an unworthy being. There is no other spot in the world round which such glorious memories cling. Rome and Greece, with their hoar antiquity, cannot boast a record of nobler lives, of better deeds, of holier dead. Let the people, then, bestir themselves to save this sacred structure, and we are convinced that men of all creeds, and men of no creed, all of whom have alike bent the knee with reverence in the abbey, and drunk in its associations with benefit, will unite in protesting that, whatever the cost may be, the work must be undertaken without any further delay.

"Gross Darkness."

A "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself" is by no means confined to those who fill high stations and are born to power and dignity. It may show itself in the cobbler as well as the king. An amusing example was recently given by a member of a rural School Board. A laboring man, illiterate and poverty-stricken, sought the suffrages of his fellow-ratepayers as a people's candidate for a seat in the local educational parliament. By a freak of fortune in the shape of the cumulative vote, he was elected. The honor proved insufficient to allay his thirst for fame and for the conscious exercise of authority. He must needs conduct an examination on the following lines:

"Now, you lads, before you go any farther with the reading of this chapter, let me know if you knows the meanin' of the words you have read. It says something here about 'gross darkness.' Now, what is that? What is gross darkness?"

A chorus of youthful voices—some not without an inflection of scorn at the insult to their intelligence, conveyed in the putting of so simple a query—makes answer: "Great darkness, sir."

The inquisitor shakes his head triumphantly—"No—o," he says, "not exactly. What's darkness, boys?"

The unexpected and bewildering rebuff seems to have inaugurated a temporary reign of silence. When the forward path discloses mysterious pitfalls, it is well to walk with circumspection. But at last a solitary, piping treble, ventures a highly original definition.

"Please, sir, it's what there is after the sun sets and before the lamps are lit."

"Well, yes," as if condescendingly considering, "you're right. Now, what's a gross?"

The response comes with great volume and more assurance. This, at last, is solid ground of mathematical fact.

"Twelve dozen, sir."

"And how many is that?"

"One hundred and forty-four, sir."

"Right again. Now listen, you lads. 'Gross darkness' is darkness 144 times as great as that which the scholar over against the middle desk yonder described for us. Don't you forget what gross darkness is in future."—*Cassell's Family Magazine.*

Fun at the Store.

"Did you hear that, Mr. Denims? Listen! Wasn't it awful?"

"I didn't hear anything, Mr. Floorwalker; what was it?"

"Crash in the towel department, sir. He, he, he!"

The old man walked sternly away, stopping at the book-keeper's desk to relieve his pent up feelings by confiding to Mr. Doublentry, with a savage glare, that he did hate a fool, whereat the indignant book-keeper resigned on the spot, and Mr. Denims went into his private office in amazement, and asked his partner since when the house of Denims & Jeans had been turned into a lunatic asylum; whereupon Mr. Jeans invited him to step down into the packing department and have it out, if that was what he meant, and it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon before the matter was straightened out, and Mr. Floorwalker was instructed to save his jokes for the cash boys in future. Quiet reigned, and white winged peace, like a cloud of illusion around the chandelier, brooded softly o'er the scene from the package room to the bargain counter.

Johnnie Moore, a Baltimore small boy, found that a toy pistol, carrying a ball as big as a buckshot, was very hard to cock. So he reversed the weapon in order to get a better grip, the hammer slipped, and the ball went through Johnnie's hand and into his abdomen. The boy will die.

CURRENT TOPICS

WITHIN ten months all the Democratic candidates for the United States Presidency since the war, with the exception of Cleveland, have died. Gen. McClellan died Oct. 29th, 1885. Gen. Hancock died Feb. 10th, 1886. Horatio Seymour died Feb. 12th, 1886. Samuel Jones Tilden died Aug. 4th, 1886. And Thomas A. Hendricks died Nov. 25th, 1885. There are two Democrats living who have been candidates for the Vice-Presidency—Pendleton and English.

THE authorities of the city of Scranton are pulling up the cobbles on one of their main streets to put down an asphaltum pavement instead. If the asphalt is properly put down on a sufficient foundation of concrete it will last as long as the city. Asphalt, properly laid, packs, but does not wear out. On streets where the gradient is not too steep no pavement that has yet been devised is as good as asphalt. This has been known since the time when the walls of Babylon were built, but it is astonishing how hard it is to get this smooth, noiseless, water-proof pavement laid in our towns and cities.

DIOGENES won immortality by the aid of his tub, but renown in these days seems to lie in a barrel. Cooper Graham made himself famous by going through the Niagara whirlpool in a barrel, and was the lion of the hour, until two coopers enclosed themselves in like manner and accomplished the same feat, and Graham's star is obscured. Is this sort of thing to go on, increasing the number of coopers and the size of the barrel, until the spectacle is presented of the Heidelburg tun, stuffed full of coopers, rolling and plunging through those seething rapids?

M. MUCHALL, of Berlin, has devised a little appliance for detecting a leakage of gas from house-service pipes. It consists of a small pipe bent twice at right angles and connected with the service before and after the main cock. A small glass bulb, partly filled with a mixture of glycerine and water, is placed on this pipe. A tube dips into the liquid in the bulb, and is so arranged that any gas passing through the small pipe bubbles through the liquid. The bulb is also provided with cocks at its inlet and outlet. If these latter are opened and the main cock closed and the burners shut off, any bubbles in the liquid show a leakage of gas in the pipes or fixtures beyond.

THE silly proposition of a Hoosier banker that the banks of New York should combine to receive deposits and keep accounts exclusively in gold, is commended by the New York *Tribune*, and the banks are blamed by it for not having adopted the plan before. Did it occur to the Hoosier banker and to the writer in the *Tribune* that banks are like shopkeepers, and must take such money as their dealers have to offer, or else get none? Whatever money is generally current throughout the country must be the money of the banks, and if they refuse it new banks will spring up which will be only too glad to take it. Banks are the servants of the public, not its masters, and they cannot dictate to it what currency it shall use.

THE fresh air fund through which the New York *Tribune* has annually sent thousands of poor children into the country from New York city has unfortunately been the cause of some sad results in Onondaga County. The Syracuse *Standard* says that six persons in the town of Clay, in that county, three of them belonging to one family, have just died from diphtheria introduced there by fresh air children from New York. The *Tribune's* movement is one of the worthiest of charities, but great care should be exercised both on the part of its managers and on the part of people who take the children into their families that neither physical nor moral disease shall be conveyed to the households that are generously thrown open to accommodate the city children.

IF the progress of civilization can be measured by the competitive energy of advertisement bureaus, the Hungarian capital can rank with the most advanced cities of the globe. Two rival insurance companies had for years been swelling the advertisement columns of the metropolitan press, when a few weeks ago a junta of new competitors appeared on the scene and promulgated their claims by "private circulars," distributed by a corps of omnipresent canvassers. "The liberality of our terms," says the prospectus "should recommend our scheme to every friend of personal freedom. After the expiration of the fifth year the holders of a policy are at perfect liberty to commit suicide. They may shoot, drown, poison, or hang themselves. They can die in the assurance that even the acknowledged deliberation of the act will not invalidate the claims of the survivors. They may indulge in any desired variety or combination of life-shortening excesses. They may take the risk of perishing in the perpetration of a deed of violence. They may die in a pot-house, in a prison, or even on the gallows. The insurance will be paid all the same. After the expiration of the fifth year death in whatever form, means payment in full. We ascertain the date, the fact, and ask no further questions; and we are confident that liberality such as ours needs only to be appreciated. Competition flees shrieking!"

THE *Novosti*, of Russia, publishes some statistics, showing very plainly what a marked increase there has been of late years in the number of suicides and of insane persons, the total in the asylums of St. Petersburg having more than doubled within the last 10 years, and this increase is attributed by the *Novosti* to the development of pessimism as much as to want. In the 10 years from 1803 to 1813 the number of suicides in Russia was at the rate of 17 to every million inhabitants, whereas it is now 29 per million, while in St. Petersburg itself there are 206 suicides per every million inhabitants, as against 402 in Paris, 170 in Berlin and 87 in London. It is only within the last 20 years that suicides have been so numerous in St. Petersburg, as in 1864 the total was only about 50 per annum. Ten years later the total had just doubled, the increase in the population being only 8 per cent., while the increase in the number of suicides was at the rate of 76 per cent. In the next 10 years the price of meat and of house rent had risen about 30 per cent, while the number of suicides had increased at the rate of 300 per cent. The increase in the number of the insane has not kept pace with that of the suicides, though it is no less than 35 per cent. Classified according to their callings, two-thirds of the persons who commit suicide belong to the working classes, while with regard to age suicide is most frequent among those between 20 and 40.

ELECTRICITY has to do something unique in these days to attract any special notice. It has remained for Jersey lightning to stir up the sensation of the season, to which the TIMES has already called attention. At Plainfield, on July 18th, a flash of lightning made an instantaneous silhouette of the profile of Miss Lillian Paul, a young woman of 18. On a Japanese lacquered tray the lightning left an impression which, while it does not do the young lady justice, is still a creditable accomplishment for amateur and impromptu photography. The young lady, who is now in Canada, does not use slang when she asserts that her picture was taken by Jove. Scientists are becoming much interested in the remarkable occurrence. It is seldom that a tray spot becomes of so much importance. The explanation of the unprecedented effect of the lightning flash is, according to Leo Daft, that the lacquer on the tray contained chemicals which rendered it extremely sensitive to intense light. One strange peculiarity of the impression is that where Miss Paul's eye should be the lacquer is untouched by shadow. The young lady should feel well content, however, that the lightning did nothing worse than put her eye out. Her escape from death was certainly remarkable. It is not probable that lightning photography will become popular. In the present case, however, the result is much more satisfactory than are many photographic efforts on the part of man. There is no doubt that the picture is lacquer.

BRILLIANT CONVERSATION.

He Played Lawn Tennis and Was a Clever Fellow.

The conversations of very young society people denote at times a broad catholicity of culture, a perfection of detail and profundity of thought that cause outsiders to stand off, hat in hand, reverential, awe stricken and intent, writes Blakely in the Brooklyn *Eagle*. A society woman of some position was in a box at the Casino the other night with her daughter. After the first act, a tall, willowy and pale young man, with straw-colored whiskers, feeble eyes and a national reputation as an amateur tennis player, entered the box and said, with great animation and glee:

"Why, deah me! who expected to see you in town?"

"Why, Mr. Pommeroy-Smith!" said both the ladies.

"Te-he," said Mr. Pommeroy-Smith happily. Then the mother turned back to the gentleman at her side while the daughter and Mr. P.-S. rattled on.

"How odd," said she.

"Indeed! I should say so. Thought you were in Newport, and here you are in a new port, te-he, tu-hub, te-he."

"Oh, what a shocking pun, te-he."

"Tuh-huh."

"Bean away 't'all?"

"Orange, Munt Clair, Sten Islan' an' all that, you know."

"Oh, indeed. How charming!"

"Done much tennis?"

"No; 'y'you?"

"Quite a bit. So glad to see you heah in midsummer, te-he."

"Yes. Had to come up to town to see about the fire in our stable. So ridiculous, te-he."

"Too bad. Very glad to have seen you again. Good-by."

A shake of the hand, hilarious smiles, a cordial nod from mamma, and Mr. Pommeroy-Smith backs out of the box.

"What a clever fellow he is," says the mother, gazing after him fondly. "I must ask him down to stay for a week in August."

Fancy spending a whole week in the broiling month of August with Mr. Pommeroy-Smith, and locked up in the same house with him at that.

Imitation

Is sometimes called the sincere form of flattery. This may account for the number of imitations of the original and only positive corn cure—Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor. All such fail to possess equal merit, so when purchasing get the genuine "Putnam's." Safe, sure and painless. All druggists.

A WRITER for the Boston *Herald* says that the construction of the American railways has practically quadrupled the efficiency of the army on the Mexican frontier, and the ability to put the troops into the frontier States—where trouble generally begins—gives the Federal Government a sense of security which was never felt before. The Mexican soldier, though largely recruited from the criminal class by that system of compulsory service based on army enlistment being made the alternative of vegetating in pr