

### HIGHLAND PARK LITERARY SOCIETY.

Among the many good things I find in Highland Park, the "Lyceum" seems to me the best. Although closed for the season, a word in regard to its origin, use and purpose, may not be amiss.

Historically the Lyceum is one of the oldest educational institutions. The academy alone is older. Socrates founded the academy about 400 years before Christ. Aristotle, the Lyceum about 50 years later. "Philosophy" in its elements was the idea of both. Locally the Lyceum was a grove, near Athens, sacred to Apollo, God of light. "Apollo Lyceus" was another designation from *lykos*, wolf, as the god had cleared the country of that pest.

Thus we stand connected by names, with the past for more than 2,000 years. "The academy," was named from the place, Academia, and Academia, from Academicus, a hero of a preceding age. The name Academy now pervades all Europe and America, 2,500 years after Academicus. Lyceum is more used now to designate public buildings of art and literature.

The old Lyceum was not for the people, as the modern is. One old master would receive none but good looking pupils; and none of those old fogies would teach females. The Grecian Academy under Socrates and Plato, wrought on moral problems. Scholars affirm, that there has been no advance in "Logic" from Aristotle of the Lyceum, 300 years before Christ, to the present century.

These men were the teachers of the ages. Their views modify the thinking of all Christendom to-day. Platonism is a "bone" in theology now, in Europe and America! Aristotle was the precursor of Bacon in the inductive philosophy. Nothing escapes the keen eye of this penetrating philosopher.

Although it is very fashionable to depreciate these majestic thinkers, yet I doubt, whether much, if any, true light has been thrown upon the subjects which they treated of. When I remember that Euclid is the father of mathematics, Zeno and Plato of metaphysics, Socrates and Plutarch of morals, and that Aristotle ruled the scholastic world for a thousand years, I am often amused at the manner wherewith modern divines, sermon writers, and writers of religious tracts, speak of the old philosophers! How gravely they babble about the "darkness" of these luminaries who shone in the Ancient Firmament!

For my own part, I would rather hear Diogenes in his freest humor, than any of these pious hypocrites. For manliness is better than godliness, when godliness is not manly!

The modern Lyceum embraces some of the old, but is really another. When the modern came into vogue in its present form, is uncertain. During the latter part of the past century, the Lyceum became a very popular institution under the patronage of Dr. Franklin. It consisted of lectures, debates, recitations and compositions.

The lecture system grew out of the Lyceum. Debates inside, and only a lecture! Up went Plato and Aristotle right at the people.

The lecturers deemed themselves the only teachers of the people; they to receive not to debate. The lecturer was Mogul. The pulpit was antiquated, and little use left for the "Press" but to re-echo the lecture! Up went charges from fifty to two hundred dollars or more. "Star" lecturers were in great vogue. The returning good sense of the people, however, will no doubt restore order in the mental world.

There is talent in every town which may be developed by the Lyceum. Every citizen should feel a pride in listening to a fellow citizen who has made himself able to impart wholesome instruction in this way. Give the "Stars" an occasional hearing if you will, but never depend on them, never ignore home talent.

The Lyceum diffuses knowledge among the people. Where there is a Lyceum no one mind can lead in religion, science, literature or politics. The Lyceum compels leading men to consult the people.

A word on the proper use of the Lyceum. The old world is antiquated of course. The earlier forms of the modern may not be the best for to-day.

Culture, in its general sense, is probably the best idea as to object. A Lyceum is a school. Very helpful it ought to be to the young, as a theme to talk about in the social and family circle. A Lyceum should be a fruitful theme of profitable conversation. Entertainment is also proper. Witticisms are wholesome stimulus. The point of most danger to a Lyceum lies in the debates. Civility should rule ever. A manly consideration for another's argument should be shown. Never try to disparage. Repartee, refined wit, are capital. Sarcasm does not belong to Lyceum debate.

It adds much to the character to see its business and debates carried on in Parliamentary order. Let the constitution and by-laws be easy and liberal, but let them be a law. The Lyceum, as a deliberative body, should be next to the legislature.

### EUTHANASIA.

AN ESSAY.

It is now somewhat more than thirty years since an adventurous man was carrying on the manufacture of Pearl Ashes in a retired situation in a sparsely settled section of the then new State of Ohio.

This chemical, afterwards used in making soap and other kindred products, is made by first leaching out the alkaline parts of wood ashes into what is technically called lye. This lye is then reduced to a commercial form; quoted in the familiar market reports as "ashes," by being brought to a solid state, by being boiled with intense fires until all the watery parts are passed off in the form of vapor. The familiar illustration of the reducing of the sugar maple sap into its more tangible form of maple sugar will well illustrate the process. The kettles used in the place now described were some ten or twelve feet across the top, and proportionately deep, and were conveniently arranged for the contents to be dipped into cooling vats near at hand. A small staging was arranged some distance below the top of the kettles to escape the risk of the fumes of the vapor constantly rising from the boiling mass, and also to avoid any scattering drops which might fall while the red hot fiery product was being transferred to the cooling pans.

I have been thus particular in describing the process of manufacture and the position of the staging used in transferring the reduced, although still fluid lye, to explain why the fact was noticed upon a particular morning, that the man who was to dip out one of these immense kettles had reversed the custom, and was dipping from the top instead of the side of the Kettle. He had, for some unexplained cause, placed a plank across the top of the kettle, and was using the customary long-handled ladle while standing upon it. The fact was merely noticed, and the observer, a fellow-workman, passed to his labor, a short distance from the furnaces. In a moment afterwards the man last mentioned heard, or thought he heard, an unfamiliar sound in the direction of the kettles. It was so slight that he scarcely turned his head, and as he saw nothing he was about to resume his work, when the thought occurred with startling distinctness, that the man he had seen a moment before standing upon the plank, was not there. Instantly he comprehended that he might have fallen into the lye. Terrified by the thought he ran hastily back, but could see nothing unusual. Still his fellow-workman, visible but a moment before, was nowhere to be seen. He seized, almost mechanically, a long iron rod and ran it to the bottom of the kettle, and as he drew it up from the red and lurid mass it brought to view a few bones which made the framework of a skeleton. These fell off the rod and quickly disappeared, and a second attempt brought nothing to the surface. The man had fallen in and had been almost instantly consumed, and but for the merest chance he would have disappeared as completely as though he had passed into thin air. What at one moment had been a wondrous combination of body and soul with all its pulsating life, clothed with flesh, and instinct with passion and desire, with the fine organization of the senses, at the next was resolved into its original elements.

What though this man had been given to the too free use of exhilarating drinks, his clothing coarse and poor, his hands hard with toil and his thoughts and aspirations most lowly, still the question, which so darkly presses upon each and all of us is brought up most vividly: What is the nature of the change which this man had met, and what, if any, is its unsolved problem.

Sudden and complete as was the destruction in this case described, it brings no more vividly home the deep and solemn questions than do the mummies of Egypt, preserved through forty centuries against the corroding influences of time. The dry, flexible, yellowish skin, with teeth, hair, eyebrows and form well preserved and remaining uninjured and unchanged, exist but as memorials to testify to the instant and mysterious change which had once overtaken them, quite as completely as it had, the now forgotten settler of the wilds of Ohio.

Two thousand years ago a most acute observer of physical phenomena, recorded this of the appearance of death: "The forehead wrinkled and dry, the eye sunken, the nose pointed and bordered with a dark or violet circle, the temples sunken, hollow and retired, the ears sticking up, the lips hanging down, the cheeks sunken, the chin wrinkled and hard, the color of the skin leaden or violet, and the hairs of the nose and eyelashes sprinkled with a yellowish white dust." Thus writes Hippocrates, the Grecian, and his description is only too true to-day of that wonderful physical change which all the living in one form or another are destined to encounter. This dark problem then, most of any, engrosses man's thoughts from age to age and from generation to generation and is our present theme.

After taking a sober, careful view of it, may I mention most generally, without undertaking to cover a thousandth part of the subject nor touching upon the deeper spiritual views of the question, that death has been, and is, so far as our senses are concerned, universal—that it is most kind in its operation—that it is painless and indeed but a new sensation of pleasure when life's sensations are exhausted, and also that created life is upon the eve of a complete revelation of this hitherto so dark mystery.

Geology tells us that in the oldest of the sedimentary rocks the remains of animals occur in vast numbers. No one of ordinary intelligence will doubt but these relics once constituted living beings. Through a whole series of rocks, six miles in thickness, we find similar remains, even increasing in number as we ascend, telling the tale of successive generations existing through unnumbered ages of the past. In proof that death is the universal law, the clear and convincing argument drawn from the present and former existence of the carnivorous tribes of animals may be adduced. Such animals subsist almost wholly upon others whom they make their unwilling prey. Exactly similar tribes, and in a like proportion, are found among the fossil animals. They were not always the same tribes, but when one class of carnivora disappeared, another was created to take its place, the proportion being wisely planned to keep down the excessive multiplication of other races. We have the curious evidence of the remains of one animal enclosed in the body of another, by whom it had been devoured and both now converted into imperishable rock.

We also have the same succession of life and its close in the vegetable kingdom conveying the invariable lesson of the universal law. To carry the point a little

further we question how could the herbivorous tribes feed upon plants without destroying as they now do, multitudes of minute insects and animals. It is obvious too for a variety of reasons, that the multiplication of animals, including man, must somehow be arrested or over population and its consequences would result. Hence death becomes as beneficent as life.

Prof. Agassiz speaking on a kindred subject in one of his latest letters, thus tersely states: "But this much we know, when life first became possible upon earth, it found expression in forms different from those now existing. These first populations were followed by others distinct from them, and these successive populations were changed again and again, leading at last to the animal kingdom as we know it now, with man at its head."

Death being then so certain, so multitudinous and so exact in its operations, it remains a connected inference, that it must be kind, and it is also susceptible of proof, that the destroyer, (would it not be better to say replacer?) is yet creation's most considerate friend.

A little bootblack, precociously old at twelve years was telling a comrade of his narrow escape from drowning. He explained that after sinking three times he was rescued, insensible. He dilated upon his suffering to the sympathetic ears of his little friend, to his great interest, but the writer of this essay made an interruption by asking if the pain, of which he made much, was experienced while he was sinking and before he lost his consciousness. "Oh, no!" was the reply; "It didn't hurt 'till I was out. It was *dreaming like* when I was in the water." If the little boy had never been rescued, he would not have asserted its claim by its suffering and his last sensations would have been "dreaming like."

Twice has the writer visited the land of forgetfulness. Once by an almost fatal blow, and once by severest pain caused by internal disease, and each time the sensations were most agreeable, being like the little fellow's "dreaming like," although to those about him the presentation was such as to cause a very contrary feeling. It is recorded of the traveler, Livingstone, that being seized once by a lion, he yielded himself to the powerful limbs and jaws of the monster and, as he supposed, to inevitable destruction. Being unexpectedly rescued, he explained his sensations as being those of a happy yielding to his fate, mingled with a fascinated curiosity as to the manner of his departure. The instances might be very largely multiplied. "If I had strength to hold a pen I would write how easy and delightful it is to die," were the words of William Hunter in his last moments. "If this be dying it is a pleasant thing to die," have been the words uttered by many dying persons. Louis XIV exclaimed in his last breath: "I thought dying had been more difficult." In death too by cold, it is only in the preliminary stages that there can be much suffering, the end being accompanied by a condition of drowsiness which precludes the idea of pain. However painful the mortal disease, there is every reason to believe that the moment preceding death is one of calmness and freedom from pain. As life approaches extinction, insensibility supervenes, a numbness and disposition to repose which do not admit the idea of suffering.

Montaigne, in one of his essays, describes an accident which left him so senseless that he was taken up for dead. On being restored however he said: "Methought my life only lay upon my lips, and I shut my eyes to help to thrust it out and took a pleasure in languishing and letting myself go." All the past and buried creation, could it now voice forth its remembrance of what it so much dreaded, would tell of the pleasure of languishing and letting go of life and of the dreamy sweetness of its last expiring breath.

Now being in "the body pent," we only realize

"We are born; we laugh; we weep;

We love; we droop; we die!

Ah, wherefore do we laugh or weep?

Why do we live or die?

Who knows that secret deep?

Alas, not I!"

We have thus far, looked only backward, but who in this matter so bold as to judge the future by the past. All signs point to man as the one supreme creation. He alone sighs for immortality. He alone, living, is conscious of approaching dissolution. He has truly eaten of the tree of knowledge and it has made him wise in the knowledge of many sorrows, but none so deep and sombre as that which tells him that the day he begins to live he begins to die. Hence the plain and cheering inference that the end is near at hand. When creation through its representative, becomes conscious of approaching dissolution, a new law is introduced, which in the nature of things shows that the problem is about to be solved, a new arrangement or law of existence promulgated, and the answer about to be announced; for in its original essence death was painless and death was a beneficent provision. It would be now were we not conscious of "the inevitable hour."

To sum up all, we may truthfully declare that in the *cras* past, when our form of life feasted upon other forms, we have only to allow that the moment of death was a moment of ecstasy, or at least of freedom from pain, to demonstrate the fact that death's existence was an infinite increase of the total of created enjoyment, by means of which each successive life quickly and joyously succeeded the other, though now in these latter days, consciousness is awake and the head and front of all creation, man, trembles and suffers at the thought of his approaching dissolution. He feels the hidden sting of death and its victory over him,—he sighs for relief with that earnestness which is always in the nature of things related.

The solution of this latter day suffering may not come in our brief span of life, but let us at least look and wait for it. If it comes not before our eyes become dim, let us yet anticipate, as members of the physical organization of things, even leaving out those higher anticipations not now discussed, a departure

"As sweetly as a child

Whom neither thought disturbs nor care encumbers,

Tired with long play, at close of summer-day,

Lies down and slumbers."

THEODORE AUDEL.