

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

Dr. Frederick Peterson discusses in the last number of the Popular Science Monthly the very astonishing special aptitudes exhibited by many idiots who have become notable as "musical prodigies," "lightning calculators," and the like. He designates them in the title of his paper as "Idiot Savants," and shows that their peculiar powers, due chiefly to extraordinary memory, visual or auditory, and facility in imitation, go with the lowest order of general intellectual ability marking the congenitively defective and the degenerate. Of course, a notable example of such special aptitude is "Blind Tom," the Georgia "musical prodigy." He was born blind and his intelligence was confined to sound. He learned to repeat words readily, but they had no meaning to him, his own spontaneous language, according to Dr. Peterson, being little more than inarticulate sounds. His musical faculty was purely imitative. He could imitate any sound and "play on the piano from memory any piece of music, no matter how intricate, note for note, after hearing it but once." The same aptitude was displayed by Helat, called La Folie Lucide also congenitally blind, who excited so much attention that Liszt and Meyerbeer visited her; and by other idiots described in treatises on idiocy.

All classes of idiots are peculiarly susceptible to rhythmical sounds, and hence a musical aptitude in them is not so astonishing as the arithmetical. This arithmetical faculty, due to a phenomenal memory and to imitation, has been displayed chiefly in an astonishing power of reckoning or of calculation only. Seven examples of idiots possessing it are adduced. There was, for instance, Zerach Colburn, born in Vermont in 1804, who at the age of six was a mathematical prodigy, though he was without even ordinary intelligence in other directions, and was a degenerate, with supernumerary digits, on both hands and feet. Tom Fuller, a Virginia "lightning calculator" of the last century, was an illiterate native African of prodigious power of calculation. Asked how many seconds in a year and a half, he responded in two minutes, 47,304,000; how many seconds a man had lived who was 70 years, 17 days, 12 hours old, he answered in a minute and a half, 2,210,500,800. Dase, an otherwise extremely dull-witted German, was "a mathematical genius" who, for example, "multiplied correctly in fifty-four seconds 75,582,853 by 98,758,479." Examples of extraordinary aptitude for mathematics in men of intellectual eminence are Ampere, Gauss, Archbishop Whately, George Bidder, Safford, and Wallis; but as contrasted with them, that of the idiots is of a low order, consisting "entirely of excessive powers in simple calculation." This aptitude "is observed only in the congenital variety of idiots."

As a striking example of remarkable artistic faculty in an idiot, Dr. Peterson refers to the case of Godfried Mind, an imbecile who died in 1814, and many of the examples of whose paintings are in European art galleries. He achieved distinction in the drawing and painting of cats, and became known as the cat's Raphael. Aptitude for games, and special powers of memory have been displayed by idiots; for instance by an imbecile who "could give immediately the days of birth and death and the principal events in the life of any celebrated personage mentioned to him." In all the cases of special aptitudes in idiots, strongly as these stand out in contrast to their general feeble-mindedness, there is no originality, no power of invention, or spontaneity. It is all mere imitation, mere memory. "The idiots savants," says Dr. Peterson, "are mere copyists in music, modelling, designing, or painting," and "as a rule, the aptitudes are precociously developed, and are frequently lost before reaching adult life." He finds the cause in the "precoious perfection of the cerebral organization in certain areas, together with a true hyperplasia of tissue," or excessive cell reproduction "in such regions, and a tendency of early degeneration." He deems it possible that an "unequal distribution of the structures underlying psychological processes will be found to account for the extraordinary talents" of these notable idiots.

AN AWAKENING.

Blind people's first experiences of sight are curious. An old man who was born blind received his sight by the removal of a cataract. When the bandage was removed the patient started violently, and cried out as if with fear, and for a while was quite nervous from the effects of the shock. For the first time in his life he looked upon the earth. The first thing he noticed was a flock of sparrows. In relating his experiences he said that he thought they were teacups, although a few moments afterward he readily distinguished a watch which was shown to him. It is supposed that this recognition is owing to the fact that he heard it ticking. The blaze from a lamp excited the most lively surprise in his mind. He had no idea what it was, and when it was brought near wanted to pick it up.

THEORY AND PRACTICE.

A man may tell you he can cook just as well as his wife, but if you watch him for a while you will find that he doesn't offer to do it.

LOVE AMONG THE LOWLY.

(An Incident of London Street Life.)

She was a thin slip of a girl, with pale, sallow cheeks, and a figure as fragile as the flowers she carried in her basket.

It was her eyes and her hands which marked her off from the common herd. Had these been of regulation pattern, there was nothing to distinguish her from any dozen of her companions. But her eyes, which were brown in color, were large and lustrous, and had a provoking habit of drooping the lashes when she looked at one. Whether calculated coquetry or native-born man was "fetching" few men would have puzzled an expert to decide. That it was "fetching" few women would have ventured to deny. Her hand, small and well-shaped, boasted the taper fingers and filbert nails generally associated with birth and breeding.

She sold flowers in Cheapside. Her station was the steps of the Peol statue; and every morning, week in and week out, as the clocks of the city were striking ten she would deposit her basket at the foot of the column and prepare for the business of the day.

From ten to six she plied her wares diligently, pushing the sale with all the tact which a life's experience had taught her and all the wiles which a woman's wit could suggest. But each evening when the weary city was fast emptying, and the bells of the great cathedral was still echoing overhead, her eyes would sweep the long length of crowded asphalt with searching glances; and as she scanned the teeming multitudes pouring westward a spot of crimson would suddenly show in the wan, white cheeks, and the dark brown orbs would flash and kindle with a curious, mystic light.

He always contrived to be in Cheapside between six and half-past. It was their custom to walk together down Queen Victoria street to Blackfriars Bridge. At this point they separated—she crossing to the Surrey side, he taking a "turn" through Fleet street and the Strand before following in the same direction. They had commenced the practice in midwinter, and now they had reached midsummer.

From afar she could distinguish his barrow among the throng of vehicles which filled the thoroughfare. When he had "doubled" the corner and got into the comparative "slack water" of the churchyard she crossed over and joined him. A nod that was almost imperceptible, answered by a smile that was bright and sunny, was all the recognition that passed between them. The girl's glance wandered involuntarily to the barrow. It was the season for cherries, and she noticed the long array of empty baskets.

"Been 'avin' a good day, Joe, ain't yer?"

"Middlin' like."

"W'y y'ain't on'y one 'molly' left."

"Praps I been givin' 'em away."

The tone was unmistakably surlly. For the next thirty yards they walked on in silence, the girl watching the man furtively, the man pushing the barrow languidly, and staring strenuously at nothing.

"Ha' yer thort on wot I tole yer?" he said, presently, as the girl stepped off the pavement to avoid collision with a parrel boy.

The light that had lighted them died out of her eyes, the color which had come into her cheeks forsook them, her mouth grew hard, and her face lost at once its youth and animation.

The man continued to stare into vacancy and walk mechanically after his barrow.

"I can't do ut, Joe. I can't do ut. I ain't got no rest these two nights—but I can't do ut."

The words came with difficulty, and the voice palpitated with emotion.

The man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Wot's the good uv 'im, eh? A dod-rin' ole lunatic. Wot's the use uv 'im ter anybody? He orter been dead years ago."

"He's me father, Joe," she murmured, reproachfully.

"Father be blowed. He's dun a loud fer you, ain't he? Y'ort ter feel proud uv 'im, didn't yer? P'raps 'is gal's money—drinkin' 'till he's got the 'de-vis' an' talkin' 'tommy rot' 'bout bein' a gentleman an' the son uv a gentleman. W'y he ain't got no more decency 'an a pig. When he can't gorge hisself no longer a pig'll lie in the swill trough, and when your gentleman father's had a skintful he'll snore by the hour 'longside a quart pot."

He stole a glance at the girl out of the corner of his eye. The busy, bustling life of London eddied around them; the roar of the great Babylon was in their ears; but not Strephon and Chloris in the sweet seclusion of idyllic lanes could have been more oblivious to the passing moment than this pair of city lovers in the hot and crowded streets.

"Praps he ain't as good as he might be. But there's wuss about, an'— he warn't allays so, Joe."

"Oh, if you likes to put up wiv 'im, Liza, so do. 'Tain't no concern o' mine— is it?" he added, moodily.

"I can't sen' 'im to the workus, Joe."

"But yer can sen' me to the devil!" he snapped sharply; and an ugly look leaped out of his eyes.

They passed under the railway bridge which spans the lower end of Queen Victoria street and reached the point where they usually parted. The girl stopped, but the man went on.

"Aren't yer goin' to sell out, Joe?" she queried, timidly, as he turned in the direction of the river.

"Wot for?"

The tone and the manner puzzled her more than the words.

For the moment they stood confronting each other, the face of the man working convulsively, and the girl's features contracted with pain.

Blackfriars Bridge was crossed in silence. Turning into Stamford street she whispered hoarsely:

"I'm sorry for yer Joe; but if it's

hard on you it's rough on me. Anythin' as you arsd' me to do, Joe—anythin' as I c'od do o' meself like—I'd do ut, mate, without sayin' why or wherefore. But sen' the ole man to the workus—I can't do that, lad. I know yer think I orter; but I can't Joe—I can't do ut."

"A pretty fool yer made o' me now, ain't yer? I giv' up booze an' cut tomnies w'en tuk up wiv you, Liza; but you'd see me at blazes suner 'an giv' up that drunken ole waggone wot lives on yer, an' perverts yer havin' a man as au'd be good to yer."

"It 'ud break me heart, Joe, ter 'ave 'im die in the workus."

"Yer thinks a bloomin' sight more uv a wrong un than yer does uv a right un," said the man surlily.

She gave him a look which must have convinced him of his error; but blinded by passion, he refused to see.

"Well," he smiled, "one of uz 'as got ter scoot—him or me. There ain't room fer two."

The girl made no reply, and they went on.

But silence was too oppressive and stifling. Near Waterloo station the man spoke again.

"How much yer tuk, 'Liza?"

The question was abrupt, but the tone was friendly. It indicated a change of feeling.

"Savin' an' three."

He extended his hand. She put the money into it without a word.

"Meet me at the Garding in the mornin', 'Liza, and I'll stock the basket for yer," said he, returning her nine pence.

It was a curious transaction, but the explanation was probably to be found in the despairing utterance of the woman.

"He's 'ad 'em awful bad agen, Joe. Lars night it wur that dreadful—"

She stopped warned by the cloud that was sweeping up over her companion's brow.

The man's countenance had suddenly darkened, sparks from the nether fires danced in his eyes, the old hard, vindictive look had returned.

"I wish he may die. I wish he wur dead!" he muttered, fiercely.

"Oh, Joe! Joe, if yer love me, dun say thim words!" entreated the girl.

"I say 'em cos I loves yer; cos it's it's on'y 'im wot's keepin' yer from a man as wants ter make a 'appy woman uv yer. I says 'em cos I means 'em. No 'fense ter yer, 'Liza."

"'Tain't a bad sort, Joe," said the girl, turning her swimming eyes full on him; "but yer a bit down on the ole man."

He gave the barrow an unnecessarily vigorous shove.

"I'm goin' inter the 'Cut,' 'Liza, ter finish. No, I ain't dun so dusty"—answering the question the girl had put to him half an hour before. "I started out wiv a dozen, an' this yere's th' on'y one left." He emptied the contents of the basket on the board. "I shall knock 'em in the 'Cut' at freppence. 'Tain't orter they see cherries like them in New 'Cut. They're city fruit, they are. 'I'll look 'roun' arter I clear out."

As he walked away his eyes followed her.

"She thinks a bloomin' sight too much, she do, o' that drunken ole scamp, her father!" he growled, staring after the retreating figure; "but I ain't all a fool, mate. Grit's wuth gold."

THE NEW MOON.

The air is dusk beneath the pines, And fresh from its baptismal dew; A chaste and maiden new moon shines In deeps of far, southwestern blue.

How tender are the evening skies! How pure and bright the slender bow! But sweeter far are Inez eyes, Turned upward o'er her shoulders snow.

She, 'mid the sleepy, dew-wet flowers, Sees 'er right the crescent gleam, And breathes a wish for happy hours. In bright to-morrow of her dream.

For when a maiden moon is born A maiden's wish shall granted be, If it from all of pride or scorn, Or passion's stain be pure and free.

Beneath the shadows of her hair, How tenderly her deep eyes glow, Ah, Inez! Would I, too, might dare To wish beneath the virgin bow, For, were it so, dear, lifted eyes, When e'er I saw the new moon shine, Athwart the stainless evening skies, I'd wish, sweet Inez, you were mine.

—J. M. Montgomery.

A BOOK ON CENTENARIANS.

A book on the subject of old age, published in England some time ago, furnishes some interesting information concerning centenarians. Of the 52 mentioned, 36 were females. Eleven of these were single, 5 were married and 36 widowed. Three only were in affluent circumstances, 23 were comfortable and 19 poor. Nine were fat, 18 in average condition and 20 thin. "Thirty-six had good appetites, 10 moderate and 2 bad. Fifteen were total abstainers, 24 drank a little, 6 were moderates and 1 drank whatever he could get. There were 7 hard smokers, 4 being women. The average time of going to bed was 9 o'clock, and 7 were bedridden. Twenty-four had no teeth and only 4 had artificial teeth.

A SYMPATHETIC EMPLOYER.

Old Gent—And so that is your employer going to the funeral of one of his clerks?

Young Clerk—Not a clerk but a distant relative of one of the clerks.

My! my! I'm sure that is very thoughtful.

Yes, most too thoughtful. Whenever any of us loses a relative and tells him about it, he always goes to the funeral to comfort him!

Eh! And do you object to such kindness of heart?

Tisn't kindness of heart, sir. He goes to make sure that the funeral isn't an excuse for a day off.

A QUESTION OF LUCK.

Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle Have an Argument on the Question.

"I hate to hear people say there's no such thing as luck," remarked the melancholy Mr. Doolittle.

"I don't see why," his wife responded. "Because it isn't true," he returned with asperity. "A man can go on trying and trying and never get along. And some other person will go ahead and tumble into good things without making any effort whatever."

"Hiram, no great man has succeeded without hard work."

"That's the kind of talk you always hear. But nine times out of ten it is all owing to the opportunity that presented itself. Fortune just seems to lie in wait to kidnap some men. Look at Sir Isaac Newton. His name is handed down from generation to generation. And why? Simply because he was sitting under a tree and an apple happened to drop on him. You can't pretend that a man is in a position to claim superior merit simply because, through no action or preference of his own, he gets hit in the head with an apple, can you?"

"No, Hiram."

"Then don't tell me about there not being any such thing as luck."

"It seems to me that you've chosen a poor example in support of your argument. The case of Isaac Newton goes to show that the difference is in the people. If it had been some man that I know of instead of Newton, the first thing they would have done after the apple fell would have been to go into the house and mean for the arnica bottle; then they would have spent two or three hours of precious time talking about their bad luck."

THE CHINESE BRAIN.

The average weight of the brain of the despised Chinaman is larger than that of any other race on the globe, except the Scotch.

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