

POST-DINNER ORATORY.

BOTTLED; ELOQUENCE UNCORKED AT BIG MEETINGS.

A Tiresome Experience for the Average Citizen—Brilliant Post-Prandial Speakers Are Always in Demand—The Danger of the Wall-Flowers Being Bored.

We have come upon an age of dinners and oratory, and the inclination to mix the two is leading to interesting consequences. It is a matter of easy calculation to show that from the first of November to the first of June the public dinners given in this country average more than a hundred a night, and as there are at least six speeches at each, the total is usually impressive. At many of these dinners, says Frank Leslie's Weekly, the same stories are told; a speaker who originates a happy illustration or a successful bon mot is reechoed wherever his performance is known. "I wish I had said that," said Oscar Wilde to Whistler, after one of Whistler's best epigrams. "Oh, but you will say it," responded the mercurious James. It is largely that way with after-dinner oratory, and we may well inquire where the fashion is going to end unless it is more judiciously directed.

There is an awful suspicion that the people who buy ten dollar and twenty dollar tickets, and who simply eat and drink and listen, may get tired of being bored. It is one of the disadvantages of the growth of total abstinence that it makes the after-dinner audience more critical. When under the full inspiration of unnumbered bottles the banqueter cares very little about the quality of the speeches. All that he hopes to do is keep his eyes open, his body steady, and occasionally to pound the table by way of showing those around him that he is the soberest man in the company. It is easy for a prosy speaker to work off moss-covered anecdotes upon an intellectual condition of the kind. And it is still easier for the victims of the evening to sing "For he's a jolly good fellow," whether they really think he is or not. But nowadays, intemperance, even at banquets, is distinctly unfashionable. The many wines are tasted more than they are drunk. The quality is praised, while the man who "goes in" for mere quantity is set down as a vulgarian. There are exceptions, of course, and there are many dinners which end in mental fog and physical uncertainty. But the great majority of the banquets are sober affairs, and the post-prandial orator finds before him a hundred or more of clean, keen and intelligent faces that measure him at his own height, and do not magnify his size or his words through an alcoholic atmosphere. The increase of sobriety, therefore, distinctly threatens to bring after-dinner speaking down to a practical basis on which a bore will be recognized as a bore and a plagiarist as a plagiarist.

At best a banquet is a tiresome experience for the average citizen, and if the people who support banquets should make up their minds to revolt, what is to become of the numerous gentlemen who are assured in their own minds that they are very happy as after-dinner speakers, but who sometimes fail to prove the facts to those who hear them? A mania of this kind is practically incurable. Heretofore it has existed upon the good-natured tolerance of friendship, and in years to come, as there may be a necessity of finding a way to handle it, there will doubtless arise a post-prandial audience agency, which will supply on short notice to orators of this kind a brilliant and appreciative assemblage, who will applaud at the right time and with the fervor of real enthusiasm.

There is another thing. The really brilliant post-prandial speakers are besieged with applications all through the year. There are so few of the really good ones in proportion to the demand that they cannot begin to accept a third of the invitations that are extended to them. Now, all this means work, and the men who are worth listening to are generally men who work hard in their profession or in their business. More than one of them has sacrificed a part of his life for after-dinner speeches, which at best could only be fleeting in their interest and results. The dinner with us has not yet come to an occasion for the promulgation of important principles of policies. The speeches are most successful when most fragmentary; but the strain is there just the same. As the world grows older every leading business man becomes more engrossed in his particular work. We have not yet succeeded in cultivating leisure. But among the men who bear the honors in the different walks are many who begin to see that they must conserve their energies, and that they have yet to learn that sitting six hours at a table eating and drinking a lot of things which the human stomach does not especially want is a poor way to take care of health. Perhaps these gentlemen may revolt from banquets and leave the field to the great army of mediocrities, who mean well, but who do not love their fellow-men as much as they should. Perhaps there may be a way out of the difficulty through the phonograph and the kinesiograph, but that has yet to be developed. It is certain that the giving of banquets will go on, and that there will be need for speech-making. We must look at the question fairly, and then do what we can to reform it. The first great step should be for the listeners to put down the stupid orator, and the next great step should be for the bright orator to avoid the stupid listeners.

Bill Stumps, His Mark.

Mr. Pickwick's pleasant incident of finding the stone at Cobham, with the Bill Stumps inscription, was, I have always suspected, an actual incident that occurred during the year 1836 or 1837. He says, indeed, that it was submitted to the Royal Antiquarian Society—or Society of Antiquaries. One of the same kind was described in Scott's "Antiquary," where Edie Ochiltree explains the mystery of the letters. It is, however, a "common form" of jest, and we find an instance in the memoirs of Beaumont, which Dickens may have seen. There was one dug up in the quarries of Belleville, near Paris, a stone with these letters:

I. C.
L.
E.
C. H.
E. M.
D. N.
S. A. N. E. S.

It was taken to the Academicians, who could make nothing of it. Savants were consulted without result. At last the bundle of Montmartre chanced to see it, and at once read it off. "Tel le chemin des anes"—that is, the path for the donkeys who are tried away the sacks of plaster from the quarries.—Gentlemen's Magazine.

AGE OF THE EARTH.

Scientists Are Puzzling Themselves Over This Interesting Question.

It is more than thirty years since Lord Kelvin pointed out that there must be an ascertainable limit to the antiquity of the earth, and that from the data at that time available the limit could not be fixed at less than 20,000,000 or more than 400,000,000 years. He based this calculation on the thermal conductivity of the globe. Afterward returning to the subject, he placed the limit within 100,000,000 years; and still more recently, reviewing the question in the light of the arguments from tidal retardation and the age of the sun's heat, he has brought down the period of the earth's antiquity to about 20,000,000 years.

Geologists have not been slow to admit that they were in error in assuming that they had an eternity of past time for the evolution of the earth's history. They have frankly acknowledged the validity of the physical arguments which go to place more or less definite limits to the antiquity of the earth. In vain they have protested that there must somewhere be a flaw in a line of arguments which tends to result so entirely at variance with the strong evidence for a higher antiquity, furnished not only by the existing races of plants and animals. Scientists have insisted that this evidence is not mere theory or imagination, but is drawn from a multitude of facts, which become hopelessly unintelligible unless sufficient time is admitted for the evolution of geological history. They have not been able to disprove the arguments of the physicists but they have not contended that the physicists have simply ignored the geological arguments as of no account in the discussion.

So here the matter has rested for some years, neither side giving way, and with no prospect of agreement. Prof. Perry, feeling that, after all, the united testimony of geologists and biologists was so decidedly against the latest reduction of time that it was desirable to reconsider the physical argument, has gone over to them once more. He now finds that on the assumption that the earth is not homogeneous, as postulated by Lord Kelvin, but possesses a much higher conductivity and thermal capacity in its interior than in its crust, its age may be enormously greater than previous calculations have allowed. The question being subjective, we must wait until it is settled. But there seems at present every prospect that the physicists will concede not merely the 100,000,000 of years with which the geologists would be quite content, but a very much greater extent of time.

Pranks of Florida Wood-Rats.

The latest narrative of the queer doings of the Florida wood-rat comes from Mrs. C. F. Latham of Mico, Fla. Previous to the destruction by fire of the old Oak Lodge, year before last, it was often visited by a pair of very sociable and quite harmless wood-rats, who nested in a palmetto hut near by, and made it their home until some cats came into the family. The wood-rats were big-eyed, handsome creatures without the vicious look of the common rat, with fine, yellowish-gray fur, white feet, and white under parts. Inasmuch as they never destroyed anything, save a pair of Mrs. Latham's shoe-strings, which they had to cut in order to get them out of the eye-let holes, they were tolerated about the premises, and here are some of the queer things they did.

They carried some watermelon seeds from the lower floor, and hid them upstairs under Mr. Baxter's pillow. In the kitchen they found some cucumber seeds, and of these they took a tablespoonful and deposited them in the pocket of Mr. Baxter's vest, which hung upstairs on a nail. In one night they took eighty-five pieces of wood from a box of beehive fixtures, and laid them in a corn box. The following night they took about two quarts of corn and oats, and put it into the box from which the beehive fixtures came. Once Mrs. Latham missed a handful of pecans, and they were so thoroughly hidden that she never found them. About a year later the rats realized that Mrs. Latham had "given it up," and lo! the pecans suddenly appeared one day upon her bed!—W. T. Hornaday, in St. Nicholas.

Shoe Superstitions.

When you buy a pair of new shoes never put them on a shelf higher than your head, unless you want to bring bad luck; and then if you blacken them before you have had both shoes on you may meet with an accident, or even have a sudden death. This is an old Irish superstition. The Scotch girls believe that if they drop their shoes before they are worn trouble will ensue, while a French lady losing her heel is sure of a disappointment in love, and a German mother in the same predicament feels that she will soon lose one of her children. You must not put your right shoe on your left foot or your left on your right, nor must you put your left shoe on before the right unless you want bad luck. This superstition dates back to one of the emperors of Rome, who, it is recorded, put on his left shoe first one morning, and came near being assassinated during the day.

A Ring Cut Out of a Single Diamond.

A ring so cut was exhibited at the Antwerp Exhibition, where it was the admiration of the diamond cutters and merchants, being the first successful attempt to cut a ring out of a single stone. There are a great many difficulties in this method of cutting diamonds, as the stones have a certain cleavage and particular veins, all of which have to be carefully studied in order to prevent the splitting of the stone just as success seems within reach. After several unsuccessful attempts and three years' labor, the feat was accomplished by the patience and skill of M. Antoine, one of the best known lapidaries of Antwerp. The ring is about six-eighths of an inch in diameter. In the Marlborough cabinet there is a ring cut out of one entire and perfect sapphire.

Costly Perfumes.

Mignonette, that at the moment is a perfume greatly in favor for its delicate and refreshing fragrance, is compounded as well from some of this regular stock in the perfumer's laboratory, and even violet extract is two-thirds of it due to the sweetness of cassie, orris and attar of almonds, though violet is the most popular perfume. The true extract of the purple flower is made in France, is costly and only to be bought at a few places in New York. Its rare sweetness is expressed from the violets that grow at Cannes and Grasse, where the mignonette attains what to American eyes is unbelievable perfection of size, color and odor, and where the roses owe their sweetness chiefly to the bees, who sprinkle into their hearts the pollen from the blooming orange trees.

CHEAP TRIP TO EUROPE.

BUT IT HAS ACTUALLY BEEN ACCOMPLISHED AT THE FIGURES.

Doing the Continent in a Most Interesting and Inexpensive Manner—Dinner in Cardinal Richelieu's Palace for Thirty-five Cents.

Think of going to Europe and back—not in a hurry, either—on the half of \$300 or less!

You can cross the ocean for \$10 in the steerage, of course. When on the other side you can do your touring on foot, as Lee Meriwether did, and the cost will be fifty cents a day!

Mr. Meriwether wrote a book on the subject of his travels on a cheap trip over the Continent. Beginning with Sicily and the southern part of Italy, where first-class hotels only charge thirty cents to forty cents for rooms, he says, "the price increases little by little, until in Belgium and Holland, countries immediately across the channel from England, sixty cents to eighty cents is the charge by second or third rate inns. Hotels that are frequented by Americans and English charge English and American prices—\$2 a day. Hotels of the same class frequented by Italians charge from eighty cents to \$1 a day, while private lodgings of a respectable character may be had from fifteen cents to thirty cents a night. The item of lodging for a man is very small—four cents if you are willing to room with others, and only fifteen cents where you have a bed and a neat room to yourself. And your food: For three cents you may get a pound of excellent black bread; a large bowl of milk will cost two cents; a plate of macaroni three cents; figs four cents a pound, and a quart of sour wine for from eight to twelve cents. This diet was varied occasionally by an egg omelet or something of that character. While mingling with the working classes for the purpose of studying their condition and general mode of living, my daily expenditure for food in Naples averaged seventeen cents and lodging four cents, making the total cost of living per day in Naples just twenty-one cents.

In Venice you can find any number of rooms at fifteen cents a day each. Gondoliering is twenty cents for the first hour and ten cents for each hour thereafter. The price is the same for one or four persons.

The cheapest hotels mentioned in any of the guide books for Constantinople charged from \$3 to \$4 a day, but you can find a very nice room not mentioned in the guide books for seventeen cents. I got my meals at a Greek restaurant for three and a half cents, to four cents each, consisting, nearly every time, of a piece of bread and a plate of rice, macaroni or potatoes.

In Berlin I assumed considerable style, occupying a front room on the third floor of a house on Frederick strasse, the principal street of the city. The room was carpeted. There were white curtains at the window. The furniture was plain but neat—all together, it was a very cozy, snug little room, with pretty, rosy-cheeked maids to bring my coffee and buttered rolls, all for thirty-six cents a day. My dinners in Berlin cost twenty cents. There were cheaper places, but I was becoming extravagant. My dinner for twenty-four cents consisted of soup, roast beef, mutton, vegetables, dessert of fruit, and beer or soda water.

In Paris it is possible to live very cheaply. On Sundays I got my dinners in old Cardinal Richelieu's palace, an excellent dinner, with wine, for thirty-five cents, and on week days frequented cheaper and less aristocratic quarters, where I could study the working people of Paris. Connected with one of the largest bazaars in Paris is a restaurant where 3,000 people dine daily at a cost not exceeding fifteen cents each.

The most important item of living in Paris is fuel. I had a cozy little room on the Rue de la Harpe, for which I paid fifteen cents a night. Wood sells by the pound. A single stick costs five cents. I found it much cheaper to go to the theatre on a winter night than to remain in my room. I say Bernhardi for ten cents, while, had I remained in my room, twenty cents' worth of wood would have been required to keep me in comfort.

Below are the figures given by this eccentric traveler as the lowest rates for traveling in Europe. Beginning with the steamer passage across the Atlantic at the present low rate of \$10 we have:

- From New York to Naples, 4,450 miles, \$10.
Railroad fare in Italy, taking in Naples, Rome, Florence, Pisa, Bologna, Venice, Milan, Como, 300 miles, \$11.11.
Railroad fares in Switzerland, \$7.25.
Railroad fares in Germany, taking in Strasburg, Baden-Baden, Heidelberg, Stuttgart, Munich, 393 miles, \$4.30.
Railroad fares and Danube boat fares in Austria, taking in Linz, Vienna, Budapest, \$6.65.
Buda-Pesth to Constantinople from Bulgaria, \$12.65.
Constantinople to Odessa, Black Sea Steerage, \$3.
Odessa to Berlin, taking in Kijew, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, 2,220 miles, \$29.39.
Berlin to Cologne, 204 miles, \$3.81.
Cologne to Paris, 343 miles, \$3.75.
Paris to London, 255 miles, second class, \$10.
London to New York, \$15.
Total cost of transportation from New York and back, \$120.87.
The distance covered is nearly, if not quite, 14,000 miles, 7,000 of which on steamers includes subsistence as well as transportation.

A year's subsistence at half a dollar a day amounts to \$182.50, thus the entire cost of a year's trip, embracing overland from Gibraltar to the Bosphorus, amounts to \$33.37, if you are willing to travel second class and third class and foot it at times.

On the Decay of Paper.

The introduction of wood fibre into the manufacture of paper, its economical production and the attractiveness of the article so produced have combined to tempt the paper maker not to make for "all time," but for the day, and only sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

Modern methods of book illustrations require a paper of fine, even surface, with the property of semi-absorption of printer's ink, and this latter requirement has resulted in the very considerable use of what is known as "half-sized paper, i. e., paper which has but a small proportion of gelatine, or other size, on which the permanent cohesion of the paper depends. Such paper cannot resist the influences of temperature and humidity to which all books are exposed, and thus ultimate decay is probable.—Notes and Queries.

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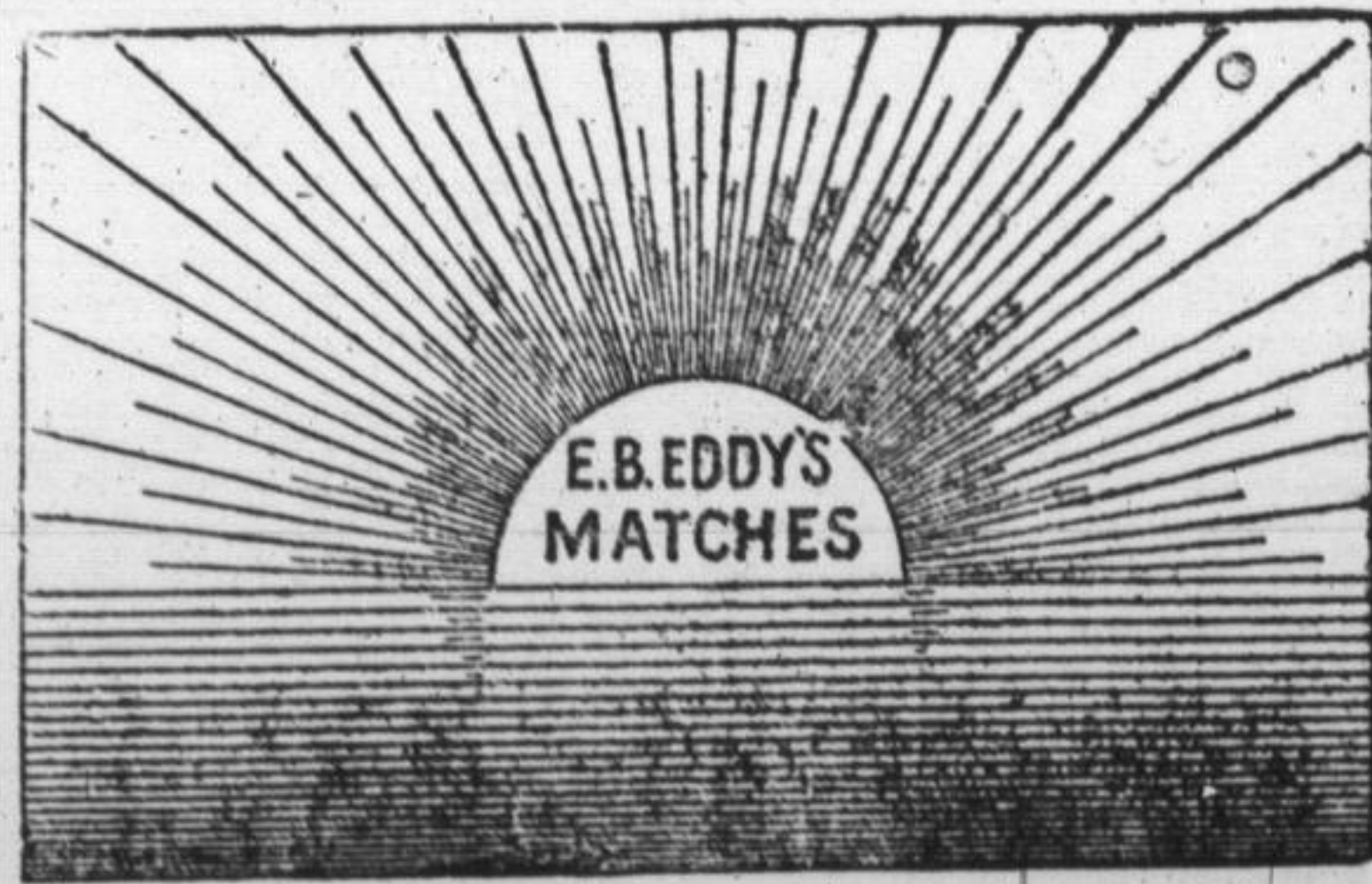
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