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THE LITERATURE OF THE

## Abolition Yankee.

AN ADDRESS Delivered before the Keystone Club of Bedford, Pa.,

MONDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 20, 1865, BY JAMES F. SHUNK, Esq., of York, Pa.

Correspondence. Bedford, Pa., Nov. 23, 1865.

JAMES F. SHUNK, Esq. Dear Sir—The undersigned having been appointed a member of the Keystone Club of Bedford, Pa., to request publication a copy of your truly delivered, delivered before that association, on Monday evening, 20th inst., take this mode of performing that most agreeable duty. Hoping that you will not fail to favor us with the desired copy, we remain, respectfully yours,

O. E. SHANNON, W. T. DAUGHERTY, Committee. N. J. LYONS.

YORK, Pa., Nov. 28, 1865. To O. E. Shannon, W. T. Daugherty and N. J. Lyons, Esqs., Committee. GENTLEMEN—The copy of my lecture before the Keystone Club of Bedford, which you requested in your note of the 24th inst., is herewith placed at your disposal, with sincere thanks for the kind words which dictated the request. Very truly and respectfully yours, JAMES F. SHUNK.

I propose, to-night, to discuss, as fully as I can, within the limits of an hour, the *Literature of the Abolition Yankee*. The subject is almost a novel one. We have had no time and been in no mood during the past five years, to examine the structure of the Yankee's prose, to count the feet in his couplets, or to discuss the merits or the morality of either. He has given us reading of another and heavier kind, which could not be put off. He has entertained us with tax-bills which took away our money, and proclamations which stood in stead of our laws, has diverted our attention from the light and demoralizing literature of the stalls, to the perusal of healthy tracts, showing to our delighted minds the blessings of a national debt and the joys of an early death in the arms of Conscription. To suppose a people with such pressing literature as this thrust into their hands, capable of reading anything else, is to give mankind credit for an amount of industry and a deal of competence which is not theirs. There is no writing in the English language so thrilling, or which excites such lively personal interest in the reader, as the notice that he has been drafted and has ten days allowed him in which to prepare for glory or death.

The hard prose of the Conscription Act, has shaken hearts with a mightier touch than the loftiest lines of Shakespeare or the tenderest melody of Burns, precisely in the proportion as it is sadder and more tragic for a human creature to read his own doom than to dream over the woes and tears of visionary men and women, or of generations that are in the dust. Nor is the tax-collector a better friend to study than the provost-marshal. It is impossible to read poetry with satisfaction when you are engaged in estimating the comparative advantages of being shot or starved, conscripted or sold out of a home. Odes, ballads, plays, histories, novels, are alike impotent to engage the attention of the citizen, who is listening to the breathing of government spy at his keyhole, waiting for the rap of a provost-guard at his door, or watching from his window for the approach of the bayonets which are to stimulate his patriotism. Since, then, the awful scenes of the years just past, have afforded us no time to charm our minds with the fancies of the world's wisest men, it is not likely that we should have given many midnight thoughts to the scribbles of the meanest race that ever read books or wrote them. Hence it is that my subject is not a hackneyed one.

Before we go further it is well to understand that by the *Abolition Yankee* I refer, and refer solely, to that band of malignants who now dominate over New England, and, as has been most truly said, "rule us for their pleasure and plunder us for their profit." There is a Democracy in the Eastern States which we must all respect and cling to, not merely because they are one with us in devotion to the constitution of our country, one with us in their contempt for the "higher law," one with us in the determination to preserve this government as a heritage for white men and their children, but because they bravely, steadfastly, and year by year, cast votes utterly hopeless for present effect, in the calm belief that God will bring us better days, and that, in any event, it is better to be right than to be popular." Every word that we can utter in denunciation of the cruel and corrupt abolitionists is a word of praise to the noble men who have stood up against him in his home, and who have fearlessly sought to wipe from their own states the stigma of his crimes and to redeem the rest of the land from the curse of his rule. The names of such men as Pierce and Toucey and Seymour and the Curtises are three dear to us because they have proclaimed the truth and stood steadfast to it in the face of the most ferocious and lawless majority that ever held a land under its heel.

I have said that my subject is a novel one. It is, nevertheless, one of the most important that can engage your attention. It is impossible to overrate the power of books, or of reading of all kinds. A printed word is the most potent influence on earth. The speech of an orator, no matter how eloquent he may be, no matter how much his music may charm the ear of those who hear him, dies out of the mind. You are delighted with it; you repeat it; you chat about it with your friends. But time weakens the impression. The words begin to fail and to be forgotten; new sights and sounds crowd them out of recollection. But a printed book is another thing. It addresses itself persistently, constantly and forever, to the eye and to the mind. Children read it although it may be but the rubbish of a library. It fastens its impression on young minds and old, with a firm, sharp touch which is beyond the power of spoken words, and which, if it begins to fade, can be deepened and renewed as often as you take up the forgotten pages. It never dies. Everywhere in the land you will find books, written by inconsiderable and even contemptible men, bought by chance and preserved by accident, which have influenced the minds of the millions who make up the people. To ignore such an influence, or to attempt to slight it, is as idle an undertaking as to seek to stay the flow of the tides or stop the sun in his rising. You must accept it; you must recognize it—the only thing you can do is to regulate it, and divert a flood which cannot be checked into channels from which you and your children may draw the water of life.

The abolition Yankees were the first people in the country to recognize this power. They deny everything else—take away from them all the virtues to which they have no claim, honor, patriotism, common honesty—you must still concede to them the craft which selects the fittest means for a chosen end. They know the value of types and ink, the power of newspapers, the might of books, the witchery of words which address the eye and which speak to a people in their homes, by their hearthstones, and all the time.

It is hardly necessary to say anything to a Pennsylvania audience, especially if there are any middle-aged persons among it, of *Yankee cunning*. The time is even within my recollection, when the vendors of tin-ware, clocks and split-leather boots, swooped, summer by summer, from the recesses of the North through the peaceful defiles and valleys of this innocent old State, on their annual pilgrimage of swindling. Thousands of the innocent were seduced, and their purses were emptied, and their hearts were vexed out of all patience by those deceptive pots and kettles which glittered so fair in the sunshine, and lost their bottoms with such provoking alacrity when they were set upon the fire. Thousands of stalwart men, not old enough now to escape the grasp of a Conscription Act, have had their toes peep out and their feet go bare through those boots which the enticing eloquence of the wagon-man would not suffer them to refuse. Clocks are still standing on the mantel-piece of many a country homestead whose moveless hands, although unable to tell the time, speak loud enough of the rogue who brought them from the East. The yeomanry of Pennsylvania purchased their knowledge of the Yankee, dearly, with hard cash, and with a good deal of it. But they have the knowledge, and, if they remember it and apply it now, they have driven no hard bargain.

The tin-ware, the split-leather, the clock-business, have all passed away. The gentlemen who vended those valuable commodities have retired upon their fortunes. Some of them have become saints, and are preaching the gospel; some of them Senators and are doctoring the Constitution; some of them contractors, and have set their squadrons on the field armed with cut-iron sabres, mounted on skeleton horses, and clad in picturesque rags of shoddy; some of them poets, and are tuning their lyres in praise of John Brown and the noble black; but all of them—Senator, saint, shoddy-contractor and tuncful warbler alike, are simply clock and tin-peddlers in a new disguise.

Their lyrics and their essays are of a piece with their kettles and their shoe-leather. They are a sham. The artist who has spent his early years in the contrivance of mechanical cheats is not likely, when he turns his attention to poetry, to forsake his old tricks, or establish any very close correspondence with the Muses. His saucy-pans and his similes, his shoe-pegs and his metaphors, are equally ingenious frauds. He is alike a dishonest tinker, whether he wields the pen, or holds the lap-stone.

Hence, the Abolition Literature is not the out-cropping of spontaneous genius, nor even the result of honest and patient labor. It is made to sell, to cheat, to deceive, not to improve or instruct. Its histories are artful and malicious inventions, designed to varnish the injustices which have blackened the whole history of the Party of Negro Emancipation, and to defame the Party of the constitution which held these States in firm and glorious Union as long as the reins of power were in their hands. Its theology has nothing in it of the spirit of Christ and the Apostles, or of the long-line of worthies of all ages, of which each sect and sub-division of the Church can claim its share, whose patient, innocent, prayerful lives were given to seeking a clearer knowledge of God and bringing aliens and wanderers into closer communion with him. On the contrary, it is a kind of mixed, mad nonsense, made up of a series of inco-

herent interpretations of the Gospel, or strictures upon it, by insolent exhorters who rate their own belongings higher than the thunders of Sinai. No two of them precisely agree in the portions of the Sacred Book which they scout and defy; in the exact texts which are to be cast out and rejected; but they are beautifully united in scolding and sneering at all of it which does not accord with the schemes, the passions, or the aggrandizement of each.

The songs of this Abolition Literature by no means suggestive of the trill of birds which sing because song is their natural speech. The nasal pipe of the Puritan has nothing of the warble of the woods about it. His attempts to chirp after the fashion of Nature's born minstrels afford no pleasure, it is true; but it is the pleasure of a down-right, hearty, shaking laugh at the ludicrous failure of the poor devil, who fancies, because he has counterfeited nutmegs with success, he can manipulate melody, and cheat you as readily in song.

To affect a thorough acquaintance with everything the Abolition Yankee has put into print, would imply an immense amount of leisure and a very small amount of taste on the part of the person who might set up such a claim. As it is not necessary to drink perpetually of the waters of the Nile, or even to take more than a single glass of it to taste its flavor and judge its quality, so with the tide of literary trash which, year by year, rolls from its New England fountains through ten thousand channels over all the rest of the land. It is as monotonous a mass as the current of the great "Father of Waters," and, I may add, quite as muddy. Indeed, one of the most amazing things about the productions of these people, is the sameness of their modes of thinking, their habit of looking at a subject and their fashion of discussing it. Their minds seem to be cast in one mould. Intellectually they are as much alike as little pigs are physically. They are all equally incapable of soaring for one moment above the bleak area of the sheep-walks and onion-patches on which they were born. They are all alike possessed with the idea that New England is not merely the centre of American civilization, literature and art, but that she holds all that we have of these things within her borders. Their admiration of one another is in proportion to their contempt for everybody else. Of course they are not above plundering and cheating each other, and the *smartest* man among them has not yet failed, have been vexed out of all patience by those deceptive pots and kettles which glittered so fair in the sunshine, and lost their bottoms with such provoking alacrity when they were set upon the fire. Thousands of stalwart men, not old enough now to escape the grasp of a Conscription Act, have had their toes peep out and their feet go bare through those boots which the enticing eloquence of the wagon-man would not suffer them to refuse. Clocks are still standing on the mantel-piece of many a country homestead whose moveless hands, although unable to tell the time, speak loud enough of the rogue who brought them from the East. The yeomanry of Pennsylvania purchased their knowledge of the Yankee, dearly, with hard cash, and with a good deal of it. But they have the knowledge, and, if they remember it and apply it now, they have driven no hard bargain.

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Hence, the Abolition Literature is not the out-cropping of spontaneous genius, nor even the result of honest and patient labor. It is made to sell, to cheat, to deceive, not to improve or instruct. Its histories are artful and malicious inventions, designed to varnish the injustices which have blackened the whole history of the Party of Negro Emancipation, and to defame the Party of the constitution which held these States in firm and glorious Union as long as the reins of power were in their hands. Its theology has nothing in it of the spirit of Christ and the Apostles, or of the long-line of worthies of all ages, of which each sect and sub-division of the Church can claim its share, whose patient, innocent, prayerful lives were given to seeking a clearer knowledge of God and bringing aliens and wanderers into closer communion with him. On the contrary, it is a kind of mixed, mad nonsense, made up of a series of inco-

herent interpretations of the Gospel, or strictures upon it, by insolent exhorters who rate their own belongings higher than the thunders of Sinai. No two of them precisely agree in the portions of the Sacred Book which they scout and defy; in the exact texts which are to be cast out and rejected; but they are beautifully united in scolding and sneering at all of it which does not accord with the schemes, the passions, or the aggrandizement of each.

The songs of this Abolition Literature by no means suggestive of the trill of birds which sing because song is their natural speech. The nasal pipe of the Puritan has nothing of the warble of the woods about it. His attempts to chirp after the fashion of Nature's born minstrels afford no pleasure, it is true; but it is the pleasure of a down-right, hearty, shaking laugh at the ludicrous failure of the poor devil, who fancies, because he has counterfeited nutmegs with success, he can manipulate melody, and cheat you as readily in song.

To affect a thorough acquaintance with everything the Abolition Yankee has put into print, would imply an immense amount of leisure and a very small amount of taste on the part of the person who might set up such a claim. As it is not necessary to drink perpetually of the waters of the Nile, or even to take more than a single glass of it to taste its flavor and judge its quality, so with the tide of literary trash which, year by year, rolls from its New England fountains through ten thousand channels over all the rest of the land. It is as monotonous a mass as the current of the great "Father of Waters," and, I may add, quite as muddy. Indeed, one of the most amazing things about the productions of these people, is the sameness of their modes of thinking, their habit of looking at a subject and their fashion of discussing it. Their minds seem to be cast in one mould. Intellectually they are as much alike as little pigs are physically. They are all equally incapable of soaring for one moment above the bleak area of the sheep-walks and onion-patches on which they were born. They are all alike possessed with the idea that New England is not merely the centre of American civilization, literature and art, but that she holds all that we have of these things within her borders. Their admiration of one another is in proportion to their contempt for everybody else. Of course they are not above plundering and cheating each other, and the *smartest* man among them has not yet failed, have been vexed out of all patience by those deceptive pots and kettles which glittered so fair in the sunshine, and lost their bottoms with such provoking alacrity when they were set upon the fire. Thousands of stalwart men, not old enough now to escape the grasp of a Conscription Act, have had their toes peep out and their feet go bare through those boots which the enticing eloquence of the wagon-man would not suffer them to refuse. Clocks are still standing on the mantel-piece of many a country homestead whose moveless hands, although unable to tell the time, speak loud enough of the rogue who brought them from the East. The yeomanry of Pennsylvania purchased their knowledge of the Yankee, dearly, with hard cash, and with a good deal of it. But they have the knowledge, and, if they remember it and apply it now, they have driven no hard bargain.

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