

A LETTER.

As we are very liable in common with the letter-writing world, to fall behindhand in our correspondence, and a little more liable because, in consequence of our editorial function, we receive more epistles than our individual share, we have thought that we might clear our account by writing a quarterly catholic letter to all and several who have honored us in verse, or prose, with their confidence, and expressed a curiosity to know our opinion. We shall be compelled to dispose very rapidly of quite miscellaneous topics.

And first, in regard to the writer who has given us his speculations on Rail-roads and Air-roads, our correspondent shall have his own way. To the rail-way, we must say, like the courageous lord mayor at his first hunting, when told the hare was coming, "Let it come, in Heaven's name, I am not afraid on 't." Very unlooked for political and social effects of the iron road are fast appearing. It will require an expansion of the police of the old world. When a rail-road train shoots through Europe every day from Brussels to Vienna, from Vienna to Constantinople, it cannot stop every twenty or thirty miles, at a German customhouse, for examination of property and passports. But when our correspondent proceeds to Flying-machines, we have no longer the smallest taper light of credible information and experience left, and must speak on *a priori* grounds. Shortly then, we think the population is not yet quite fit for them, and therefore there will be none. Our friend suggests so many inconveniences from piracy out of the high air to orchards and lone houses, and also to other high fliers, and the total inadequacy of the present system of defence, that we have not the heart to break the sleep of the good public by the repetition of these details. When children come into the library, we put the inkstand and the watch on the high shelf, until they be a little older; and nature has set the sun and moon in plain sight and use, but laid them on the high shelf, where her roystering boys may not in some mad Saturday afternoon pull them down or burn their fingers. The sea and the iron road are safer toys for such ungrown people; we are not yet ripe to be birds.

In the next place, to fifteen letters on Communities, and the Prospects of Culture, and the destinies of the cultivated class,—what answer? Excellent reasons have been shown us why the writers, obviously persons of sincerity and of elegance, should be dissatisfied with the life they lead, and with their company. They have exhausted all its benefit, and will not bear it much

longer. Excellent reasons they have shown why something better should be tried. They want a friend to whom they can speak and from whom they may hear now and then a reasonable word. They are willing to work, so it be with friends. They do not entertain anything absurd or even difficult. They do not wish to force society into hated reforms, nor to break with society. They do not wish a township, or any large expenditure, or incorporated association, but simply a concentration of chosen people. By the slightest possible concert persevered in through four or five years, they think that a neighborhood might be formed of friends who would provoke each other to the best activity.

They believe that this society would fill up the terrific chasm of ennui, and would give their genius that inspiration which it seems to wait in vain. But 'the selfishness!' One of the writers relentingly says, What shall my uncles and aunts do without me? and desires to be distinctly understood not to propose the Indian mode of giving decrepit relatives as much of the mud of holy Ganges as they can swallow, and more, but to begin the enterprise of concentration, by concentrating all uncles and aunts in one delightful village by themselves!—so heedless is our correspondent of putting all the dough into one pan, and all the leaven into another. Another objection seems to have occurred to a subtle but ardent advocate. Is it, he writes, a too great wilfulness and intermeddling with life,—with life, which is better accepted than calculated? Perhaps so; but let us not be too curiously good; the Buddhist is a practical Necessitarian; the Yankee is not. We do a good many selfish things every day; among them all let us do one thing of enlightened selfishness. It were fit to forbid concert and calculation in this particular, if that were our system, if we were up to the mark of self-denial and faith in our general activity. But to be prudent in all the particulars of life, and in this one thing alone religiously forbearing; prudent to secure to ourselves an injurious society, temptations to folly and despair, degrading examples and enemies; and only abstinent when it is proposed to provide ourselves with guides, examples, lovers!—

We shall hardly trust ourselves to reply to arguments by which we would too gladly be persuaded. The more discontent, the better we like it. It is not for nothing, we assure ourselves, that our people are busied with these projects of a better social state, and that sincere persons of all parties are demanding somewhat vital and poetic of our stagnant society. How fantastic and unrepresentable soever the theory has hitherto seemed, how swiftly shrinking from the examination of practical men, let us not lose the warning of that most significant

dream. How joyfully we have felt the admonition of larger natures which despised our aims and pursuits, conscious that a voice out of heaven spoke to us in that scorn. But it would be unjust not to remind our younger friends that, whilst this aspiration has always made its mark in the lives of men of thought, in vigorous individuals it does not remain a detached object, but is satisfied along with the satisfaction of other aims. To live solitary and unexpressed, is painful,—painful in proportion to one's consciousness of ripeness and equality to the offices of friendship. But herein we are never quite forsaken by the Divine Providence. The loneliest man after twenty years discovers that he stood in a circle of friends, who will then show like a close fraternity held by some masonic tie. But we are impatient of the tedious introductions of Destiny, and a little faithless, and would venture something to accelerate them. One thing is plain, that discontent and the luxury of tears will bring nothing to pass. Regrets and Bohemian castles and æsthetic villages are not a very self-helping class of productions, but are the voices of debility. Especially to one importunate correspondent we must say, that there is no chance for the æsthetic village. Every one of the villagers has committed his several blunder; his genius was good, his stars consenting, but he was a marplot. And though the recuperative force in every man may be relied on infinitely, it must be relied on, before it will exert itself. As long as he sleeps in the shade of the present error, the after-nature does not betray its resources. Whilst he dwells in the old sin, he will pay the old fine.

More letters we have on the subject of the position of young men, which accord well enough with what we see and hear. There is an American disease, a paralysis of the active faculties, which falls on young men in this country, as soon as they have finished their college education, which strips them of all manly aims and bereaves them of animal spirits, so that the noblest youths are in a few years converted into pale Caryatides to uphold the temple of conventions. They are in the state of the young Persians, when "that mighty Yezdam prophet" addressed them and said, "Behold the signs of evil days are come; there is now no longer any right course of action, nor any self-devotion left among the Iranis." As soon as they have arrived at this term, there are no employments to satisfy them, they are educated above the work of their times and country, and disdain it. Many of the more acute minds pass into a lofty criticism of these things, which only embitters their sensibility to the evil, and widens the feeling of hostility between them and the citizens at large. From this cause, companies of the best educated young men in the Atlantic states every week take their departure for Europe; for no business that they have

in that country, but simply because they shall so be hid from the reproachful eyes of their countrymen, and agreeably entertained for one or two years, with some lurking hope, no doubt, that something may turn up to give them a decided direction. It is easy to see that this is only a postponement of their proper work, with the additional disadvantage of a two years' vacation. Add that this class is rapidly increasing by the infatuation of the active class, who, whilst they regard these young Athenians with suspicion and dislike, educate their own children in the same courses, and use all possible endeavors to secure to them the same result.

Certainly we are not insensible to this calamity, as described by the observers or witnessed by ourselves. It is not quite new and peculiar, though we should not know where to find in literature any record of so much unbalanced intellectuality; such undeniable apprehension without talent, so much power without equal applicability, as our young men pretend to. Yet in Theodore Mundt's* account of Frederic Holderlin's "Hyperion," we were not a little struck with the following Jeremiad of the despair of Germany, whose tone is still so familiar, that we were somewhat mortified to find that it was written in 1799.

"Then came I to the Germans. I cannot conceive of a people more disjointed than the Germans. Mechanics you shall see, but no man; priests, but no man; thinkers, but no man. Is it not like some battlefield, where hands and arms and all members lie scattered about, whilst the life-blood runs away into the sand? Let every man mind his own, you say, and I say the same. Only let him mind it with all his heart, and not with this cold study, literally, hypocritically to appear that which he passes for, but in good earnest, and in all love, let him bet that which he is; then there is a soul in his deed. And is he driven into a circumstance where the spirit must not live, let him thrust it from him with scorn, and learn to dig and plough. There is nothing holy which is not desecrated, which is not degraded to a mean end among this people. It is heartrending to see your poet, your artist, and all who still revere genius, who love and foster the Beautiful. The Good! They live in the world as strangers in their own house; they are like the patient Ulysses whilst he sat in the guise of a beggar at his own door, whilst shameless rioters shouted in the hall and ask, who brought the rag-gamuffin here? Full of love, talent and hope, spring up the darlings of the muse among the Germans; come seven years later, and they flit about like ghosts, cold and silent; they are like a soil which an enemy has sown with poison, that it will not bear a blade of grass. On earth all is imperfect! is the old proverb of the German. Aye, but if one should say to these Godforsaken, that with them all is imperfect, only because they leave nothing pure which they do not pollute, nothing holy which they do not defile with their fumbling hands; that with them nothing prospers; because the godlike nature which is the root of

* Geschichte der Literatur der Gegenwart. 1842. p. 86.

all prosperity, they do not revere; that with them, truly, life is shallow and anxious and full of discord, because they despise genius, which brings power and nobleness into manly action, cheerfulness into endurance, and love and brotherhood into towns and houses. Where a people honors genius in its artists, there breathes like an atmosphere a universal soul, to which the shy sensibility opens, which melts self-conceit,—all hearts become pious and great, and it adds fire to heroes. The home of all men is with such a people, and there will the stranger gladly abide. But where the divine nature and the artist is crushed, the sweetness of life is gone, and every other planet is better than the earth. Men deteriorate, folly increases, and a gross mind with it; drunkenness comes with disaster; with the wantonness of the tongue and with the anxiety for a livelihood, the blessing of every year becomes a curse, and all the gods depart.”

The steep antagonism between the money-getting and the academic class must be freely admitted, and perhaps is the more violent, that whilst our work is imposed by the soil and the sea, our culture is the tradition of Europe. But we cannot share the desperation of our contemporaries, least of all should we think a preternatural enlargement of the intellect a calamity. A new perception, the smallest new activity given to the perceptive power, is a victory won to the living universe from chaos and old night, and cheaply bought by any amounts of hard-fare and false social position. The balance of mind and body will redress itself fast enough. Superficialness is the real distemper. In all the cases we have ever seen where people were supposed to suffer from too much wit, or as men said, from a blade too sharp for the scabbard, it turned out that they had not wit enough. It may easily happen that we are grown very idle and must go to work, and that the times must be worse before they are better. It is very certain, that speculation is no succedaneum for life. What we would know, we must do. As if any taste or imagination could take the place of fidelity! The old Duty is the old God. And we may come to this by the rudest teaching. A friend of ours went five years ago to Illinois to buy a farm for his son. Though there were crowds of emigrants in the roads, the country was open on both sides, and long intervals between hamlets and houses. Now after five years he has just been to visit the young farmer and see how he prospered, and reports that a miracle has been wrought. From Massachusetts to Illinois, the land is fenced in and builded over, almost like New England itself, and the proofs of thrifty cultivation everywhere abound;—a result not so much owing to the natural increase of population, as to the hard times, which, driving men out of cities and trade, forced them to take off their coats and go to work on the land, which has rewarded them not only with wheat but with habits of labor. Perhaps the adversities of our commerce have

not yet been pushed to the wholesomest degree of severity. Apathies and total want of work and reflection on the imaginative character of American life, &c. &c., are like seasickness, which never will obtain any sympathy, if there is a woodpile in the yard, or an unweeded patch in the garden; not to mention the graver absurdity of a youth of noble aims, who can find no field for his energies, whilst the colossal wrongs of the Indian, of the Negro, of the emigrant, remain unmitigated, and the religious, civil, and judicial forms of the country are confessedly effete and offensive. We must refer our clients back to themselves, believing that every man knows in his heart the cure for the disease he so ostentatiously bewails.

As far as our correspondents have entangled their private griefs with the cause of American Literature, we counsel them to disengage themselves as fast as possible. In Cambridge orations, and elsewhere, there is much inquiry for that great absentee American Literature. What can have become of it? The least said is best. A literature is no man's private concern, but a secular and generic result, and is the affair of a power which works by a prodigality of life and force very dismaying to behold,—the race never dying, the individual never spared, and every trait of beauty purchased by hecatombs of private tragedy. The pruning in the wild gardens of nature is never forborne. Many of the best must die of consumption, many of despair, and many be stupid and insane, before the one great and fortunate life, which they each predicted, can shoot up into a thrifty and beneficent existence.

But passing to a letter which is a generous and a just tribute to Bettina von Arnim, we have it in our power to furnish our correspondent and all sympathizing readers with a sketch,* though plainly from no very friendly hand, of the new work of that eminent lady, who in the silence of Tieck and Schelling, seems to hold a monopoly of genius in Germany.

“At last has the long expected work of the Frau von Arnim here appeared. It is true her name is not prefixed; more properly is the dedication, *This Book belongs to the King*, also the title; but partly because her genius shines so unmistakably out of every line, partly because this work refers so directly to her earlier writings, and appears only as an enlargement of them, none can doubt who the author is. We know not how we should characterize to the reader this most original work. Bettina, or we should say, the Frau von Arnim, exhibits her eccentric wisdom under the person of Goethe's Mother, the

* We translate the following extract from the Berlin Correspondence of the Deutsche Schnellpost of September.

Frau Rath, whilst she herself is still a child, who, (1807) sits upon 'the shawl' at the foot of the Frau Rath, and listens devoutly to the gifted mother of the great poet. Moreover, Bettina does not conceal that she solely, or at any rate principally, propounds *her* views from the Frau Rath. And in fact, it could not be otherwise, since we come to hear the newest philosophical wisdom which makes a strange enough figure in the mouth of Goethe's mother. If we mistake not, the intimate intercourse with Bruno Bauer is also an essential impulse for Frau von Arnim, and we must not therefore wonder if the Frau Rath loses her way in pure philosophical hypotheses, wherein she avails herself of the known phrases of the school. It is true, she quickly recovers herself again, clothes her perceptions in poetical garb, mounts bravely to the boldest visions, or, (and this oftenest happens,) becomes a humorist, spices her discourses in Frankfort dialect by idiomatic expressions, and hits off in her merriest humors capital sketches. For the most part, the whole humoristic dress seems only assumed in order to make the matter, which is in the last degree radical, less injurious. As to the object of these 'sayings and narratives reported from memory' of the Frau Rath, (since she leads the conversation throughout,) our sketch must be short. 'It is Freedom which constitutes the truest being of man. Man should be free from all traditions, from all prejudices, since every holding on somewhat traditional, is unbelief, spiritual selfmurder. The God's impulse to truth is the only right belief. Man himself should handle and prove, 'since whoever reflects on a matter, has always a better right to truth, than who lets himself be slapped on the cheek by an article-of-Faith.' By Sin she understands that which derogates from the soul, since every hindrance and constraint interrupts the Becoming of the soul. In general, art and science have only the destination to make free what is bound. But the human spirit can rule all, and, in that sense, 'man is God, only we are not arrived so far as to describe the true pure Man in us.' If, in the department of religion, this principle leads to the overthrow of the whole historical Christendom, so, in the political world, it leads to the ruin of all our actual governments. Therefore she wishes for a strong reformer, as Napoleon promised for a time to be, who, however, already in 1807, when these conversations are ascribed to the Frau Rath, had shown that instead of a world's liberator, he would be a world's oppressor. Bettina makes variations on the verse, 'and wake an avenger, a hero awake!' and in this sense is also her dedication to read. It were noble if a stronger one should come, who in more beautiful moderation, in perfecter clearness of soul and freedom of thought, should plant the tree of equity. Where remains the Regent, if it is not the

genius of humanity? that is the Executive principle, in her system. The state has the same will, the same conscience-voice for good and evil as the Christ; yet it crumbles itself away into dogmatism of civil officers against one another. The transgressor is the state's own transgression! the proof that it, as man, has trespassed against humanity. The old state's doctors, who excite it to a will, are also its disease. But they who do not agree in this will, and cannot struggle through soul-narrowing relations, are the demagogues, against whom the unsound state trespasses, so long as it knows not how to bring their sound strength into harmony. And precisely to those must it dedicate itself, since they are its integration and restoration, whilst the others who conform to it, make it more sunken and stagnant. If it be objected, that this her truth is only a poetic dream which in the actual world has no place, she answers; 'even were the truth a dream, it is not therefore to be denied; let us dedicate our genius to this dream, let us form an Ideal Paradise, which the spiritual system of Nature requires at our hands.' 'Is the whole fabric of state, she asks, only a worse arranged hospital, where the selfish or the ambitious would fasten on the poor human race the foolish fantastic malversations of their roguery for beneficent coöperation? and with it the political economy, so destitute of all genius to bind the useful with the beautiful, on which these state's doctors plume themselves so much, and so with their triviality exhibit as a pattern to us, a wretched picture of ignorance, of selfishness, and of iniquity; when I come on that, I feel my veins swell with wrath. If I come on the belied nature, or how should I call this spectre of actuality! Yea justly! No! with these men armed in mail against every poetic truth, we must not parley; the great fools' conspiracy of that actuality-spectre defends with mock reasoning its Turkish states'-conduct, before which certainly the revelation of the Ideal withdraws into a poetic dream-region.' But whilst the existing state in itself is merely null, whilst the transgressor against this state is not incorporated with its authorizations with its directions and tendencies, so is the transgressor ever the accuser of the state itself. In general, must the state draw up to itself at least the lowest class, and not let it sink in mire; and Bettina lets the Frau Rath make the proposal, instead of shutting up the felon in penitentiaries, to instruct him in the sciences, as from his native energies, from his unbroken powers, great performances might be looked for. But in order also to show practically the truth of her assertions, that the present state does not fulfil its duties especially to the poorest class, at the close of the book are inserted, 'Experiences of a young Swiss in Voigtland.' This person visited the so-called Family-houses, which compose a colony of extremest poverty. There

he went into many chambers, listened to the history of the life, still oftener to the history of the day, of the inhabitants; informed himself of their merit and their wants, and comes to the gloomiest results. The hard reproaches, which were made against the Overseers of the Poor, appear unhappily only too well founded. We have hastily sketched, with a few literal quotations, the contents of this remarkable book of this remarkable woman, and there remains no space further to elaborate judgment. The highflying idealism, which the Frau von Arnim cherishes, founders and must founder against the actuality which, as opposed to her imagination, she holds for absolute nothing. So reality, with her, always converts itself to spectres, whilst these dreams are to her the only reality. In our opinion an energetic thorough experiment for the realization of her ideas would plunge us in a deeper misery than we at present have to deplore."
