

1873.]

*Idiosyncrasies.*

197

A presence, strange at once and known,  
 Walked with me as my guide;  
 The skirts of some forgotten life  
 Trailed noiseless at my side.  
 Was it a dim-remembered dream?  
 Or glimpse through aeons old?  
 The secret which the mountains keep,  
 The river never told.  
 But from the vision ere it passed  
 A tender hope I drew,  
 And, pleasant as a dawn of spring,  
 The thought within me grew,  
 That love would temper every change,  
 And soften all surprise,  
 And, misty with the dreams of earth,  
 The hills of Heaven arise.

*John G. Whittier.*

IDIOSYNCRASIES.

**WEBSTER** defines the word "idiosyncrasy" thus: "A position; if they have a moderate number of friends, and are not too painfully affected from the impress of extraneous influences or agencies."

Ninety-nine people out of a hundred, or, perhaps, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, know nothing of idiosyncrasies, save that the word is in the dictionary; the thousandth is the victim of these "peculiarities of susceptibility" before he can spell words of three letters, and beyond a doubt continues so all his life.

Idiosyncrasies are to the mind what nervous diseases are to the body,—incomprehensible to those who never experienced them, but to the unfortunate persons who suffer from their effects very real afflictions. The vast majority of our fellow-creatures are so constituted that they are reasonably happy if they have none of the troubles which are admitted by the human race as such; that is, if they are not de-

To such unpleasantly impressionable persons little things are of vital importance; anything that contents their capricious notions of beauty and propriety affects them as the sound of a music-box affected Mr. Theorem.—the sun; while anything that crosses

1873  
 Atlantic Monthly; a Magazine of Literature, Art and Politics 31 (184): 187-201  
 Feb,

When you are out of spirits, tell your friend you have neuralgia, and he will pity you. Tell him that a barren, sandy road and a bare field, that you see from the window, is worse than neuralgia to you, and he will simply think you are a subject for an insane asylum. Tell your family you moved your study to the other side of the house because you could see to write longer at twilight, and don't hint that you did it because six cottages all erected alike were being erected before the windows of your ancient sanctum.

Idiosyncrasies have first - cousins.

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Idiosyncrasies have first - cousins.

Why is it that I cannot enter certain houses, or talk with certain people, without becoming suddenly and inexplicably miserable? And why is it that the mere sight of another face, the mere passing by a particular apple-tree, or a half-hour's row on the river, sets autumn has turned red, may be pieces of inestimable good fortune. Coarseness in material or color, a picture that makes some pet aversion enduring, a combination of purple and light blue, certain peculiar dispositions of furniture, certain houses, streets, and prospects, communication with certain individuals, may produce the most depressing effects and, for the time, darken the horizon of life.

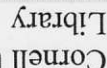

I know that another definition of "idiosyncrasy" is, "a morbid and fastidious fancy"; and I admit that it is the general opinion that fancies can be cured by a small dose of common-sense; but fancies are born with the one's favorite hill, or woods; one may sit down and read a French *comédie* or *wanderviel*. At one time the "Arabian Nights" was my sovereign specific, at another an open fire.



It is an excellent plan for an "oddy" to get himself, innocently, if he can find out how; for it is nearly impossible to defy nature, and an insignificant line of poplars may bring back all the features he ever witnessed, in succession; an odor of cabbage may prevent him from finishing a poem; a dismal gate-post may upset a mathematical calculation, in spite of his utmost efforts to the contrary.

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 Page 198  
 (Image 204 of 770)  
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Cornell Making of America

1873-]

*Idiosyncrasies.*

199

The cousin most widely known is Sune-  
 line digits *will* ascend in a straight  
 line before my mind's eye, and the  
 larger numbers *will* slant off at a queer  
 angle, thus: —

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20 etc.

What connection is there between  
 an obtuse angle and the Arabic signs?

A young lady of my acquaintance  
 cannot pass over the Common, without  
 remembering with almost painful vivid-

ness a verse in Victor Hugo's poem  
 "Gastibelza." She has seen that Com-

mon since she was a child, and she  
 read the poem three years ago when  
 she was miles away; but recently the

place and the poem have become one,  
 so to speak, and cannot be divided.  
 Yet it seems strange that a square en-

closure, bordered by a hotel and com-  
 muniplace houses, should suggest the  
 verse,

"Vriment, la reine est, près d'elle, et l'ide,  
 Quand, vers le soir,  
 Elle passait sur le pont de Tolède  
 En coquet noir;  
 Un chapelier du temps de Charlemagne  
 Ornit son cou. —  
 Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne,  
 Me rendra fou!"

Another locates whatever scenes are  
 described in the romance or history  
 she reads on the farm where she lived  
 when a child. The Newcomes lived

on this farm, the Punic wars were car-  
 ried on there, and Thermopylae is a  
 narrow strip of grass between a  
 ploughed field and an orchard wall;  
 which is about as ridiculous as my  
*petit homme gets* from a grasshopper,  
 or to think of Vienna without seeing  
 flowers in the window.

Many places in foreign lands, that I  
 have long wished to see, are situated

In writing of these, I must still take  
 my illustrations mainly from my own  
 experience, supplementing them with  
 what I have read and what has been  
 told me.

To begin with myself, I did not learn  
 my letters from a pictorial alphabet,  
 and I have only seen one dwarf in my  
 life; but I can never look at a capital  
 "B" without seeing a dwarf as plainly  
 as I see the character; or at an "S,"  
 without straightway beholding an over-

dressed lady with a toilet-glass in her  
 hand. "I" is inseparable from a mil-  
 stone, and "Q" from a serpent. The

eccentric connections of thought and  
 involuntary movements of the mind.  
 There are other cousins, christened  
 subject.

amples of it. Superstition is a fruitful  
 start on a journey on Friday, are ex-

to commence a pair of shippers or to  
 your friends and mine who do not care  
 when he left the house in the morning,  
 foot on a certain scam in his doorstep

would be unlucky if he failed to set his  
 lawyer who was sure the day's work  
 brown stuff gown, the distinguished

The learned doctor who could not think  
 clearly unless he had on an especial  
 person "with not a *bit* of nonsense  
 about him" is a fable. It may be hard

to find the nonsense, but it is there.  
 mon since she was a child, and she  
 read the poem three years ago when

she was miles away; but recently the  
 place and the poem have become one,  
 so to speak, and cannot be divided.

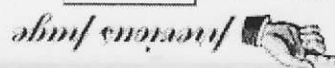
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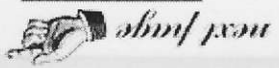


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(Image 206 of 770)

Page 200



Go To: First Page

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200

*Idiosyncrastics.*

[February,

on the banks of the river that runs through my native town. Venice is where the water is smooth, partially shadowed, with only little decks and bars of sunshine upon it, and so shallow that rocks rise above it in dry seasons. Every rock is a castle. A hill, used for pasturing sheep, and clothed with hemlocks on the side that slopes abruptly to the river, is my Alps,—fully as satisfactory to me as the real ones, I have no doubt. The Jura Mountains are two or three little knolls one can see farther down the stream. Paris is a sunny marsh, bordering flat fields, across which one can see the town, where the scarlet cardinals and nod gaily together. Marselles is a sandy strip with white pebbles scattered over it. I can trace the connection here. Dickens has shown Marselles as it is at noon in summer, all one broad, white glare. Rome is under the wide, stone arches of a picturesque old bridge, and the Campagne is a flat, ready space near by. London is where the stream is narrow and boats are moored. Athens is a pile of rocks, sunny ledges in the cliffs. A hollow beneath the exposed roots of an oak-tree is the gallery in the Pitti Palace where hangs the portrait of Jerome Savonarola, and I am uncomfortable when the water covers it in spring. Camelot is six miles down the river, and Spain is on its south branch. A willow covered with grape-vines is my Notre Dame, a broken-down oak is Kenilworth Castle, and I am always making Milan Cathedral out of single tiles.

I cannot imagine what led me to locate the places as I have. Of course they originated in vague and unprofitable fancies. But they are grown facts, and I can no more dispute them than deny that the sun is shining while I write.

If I may multiply illustrations, there is a path in the town that is, to me, the place where Mr. Longfellow took his "Walk in Winter"; there is a meadow where Mr. Lowell's "Dandelion" grows, and his "Birch-Tree" is in the woods; I have seen Bryant's "Water Fowl" fly over; there is a place in the garret that means nothing but Molière and *Les Prestiges d'Arctur*; I have gathered Wordsworth's "Daffodils" and Rose Terry's "Arbutus"; there is only one place, too, where, with Bayard Taylor, I have seen, "The winds, that take the whineweed, roll Faust and Margaret live in a fire once in a while; Mr. Emerson's "Humble Bee" flies through my garden, and the "Sands of Dec."

Well, to anybody else this seems utter nonsense, but everything is in theory, resemblance, and association. Columbines suggest vanity to other people; snow, purity; blue skies are connected with Heaven; and mud typifies a darkened intellect. Whittington was talked to by bells, Paul Dombey by a clock, and so forth. These variations of the mind are queer structures, and their bases are hidden in fog. The idealist can laugh at them, but he must accept them.

As for involuntary movements of mind, there are journalists who go on arranging facts and composing leading articles in their sleep; there are young ladies who solve algebraic problems in their dreams; there are plenty of people whose minds grind on like machines and almost defy control; but one illustration must suffice: A lady read two lines in a poem which did not particularly impress her; they were,

"Go forth upon the long, bright road,  
Tune the city of your God."

To her amazement, these lines appropriated a corner of her brain and lived there. She found herself continually saying them over, and she could not hear any sudden, unexpected noise—the steam-whistle, or the striking of a clock, or the rattle of a cart—without being seized with a preternatural anxiety to say those lines over three times before the noise ceased. The complet

Miss H. R. Hudson.  
 and when we reach the top, we shall know what all hindrances, great or small, meant.

"Celle échelle d'or, qui va se perdre en Dieu."  
 is not upon some round of work. There is no human being who is east with Mr. Jarridge, and go to etc., as a means of grace. Say the wind as possible, and using idiosyncrasies being what we were made to be, as far as possible, and using idiosyncrasies. There is only one comfort; that is, be imagined by the inexperienced. needs more faith and patience than can the real trial of being an "oddy." It There is one word to be said about or woman's — life.

world will be better for that man's — A Recipe for Logical Thinking." The receiving Unpleasant Impressions; or, will entitle a volume "How to avoid the coming man — or woman — who tried metaphysics. I am waiting for tion of the difficulty as any one who has tious Affections" came as near the solu- standings) I believe, privately, that Horse, and if Locke rode on the Under- used to wonder if Youatt rode on the equal to the occasion (I remember I on the Understanding" will not be will not console the afflicted. "Locke Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" endurable as crossed eyes.

they have enough to do to meet their own trials.  
 It is safe to assume that there will be no idiosyncrasies in the millennium. In that happy time, doctors will not pre- scribe mullein-tea and extract of ru- bard, when the patient suffers from one of Edgar Poe's stories, or is fevered with too much Edgeworth. People will not be sent on sea-voyages when they feel that there is a gulf between themselves and the human race, — as ministers are apt to, Monday mornings, — because somebody they live with, who do not see visions, or dream dreams. Mr. Tennyson writes in his "Princess" : —

pic who do, sympathy is pleasant, but mind, care about them? And for peo- movements, and abnormal states of reactions of thought, and involuntary subject. What do people who do not

There is no need to enlarge on the youth, I cannot help it.  
 If this is like the "ash-stories" of our hieroglyphics I could not decipher, as if sights and sounds were strange present, and I find myself wondering, consciousness seems to overshadow the on receiving impressions. Another ing inability to realize what is trans- as far as I can analyze it, to be a pass- ing and unnatural sensation, and seems, really far away in some strange, half- a picture I was looking at, while I was shine and shadow, as if they were in gossipping in the room, and I have seen the faces and voices, the sun- a dress while two or three ladies were safe employment of sewing buttons on- gaged in the practical, economical, pro- seizures," that I have been sitting, en- I can only say, about these "weird

And feel myself the shadow of a dream."  
 I seemed to move among a world of ghosts  
 And while I walked and talked, as heretofore,  
 On a sudden, in the midst of men and day,  
 What!

"Myself, too, had weird seizures, Heaven knows  
 what!"  
 There are, also, abnormal states of mind, or, I ought to say, their begin- nings, which come to sane persons who are not mediums, or seers, or seventh children of seventh children, who do not see visions, or dream dreams. Mr. Tennyson writes in his "Princess" : —

lady is not a lunatic.  
 have formed a contrary opinion, the he gets by! Although the reader may lines of poetry, trying to finish before on the sidewalk was hurrying over six their wagons, if he could know the lady who sometimes pass her, mounted in surprise of one of the sober farmers haunts her in her walks. Fancy the

1873.] *Idiosyncrasies.* 201