Susan Archer Talley, Virginia’s Greatest Female Poet.

JOHN MONCURE.

Why has not Virginia produced a great literature? Why have New England and the North outstripped the South in the gentle arts, as they have in the industrial? The reason is not far to seek. It is not because the North and the outer world have failed to appreciate or to do us justice. It is a noteworthy fact that the Southern writers who have attained to any eminence have been more warmly applauded in the North and across the water than on their native soil. It is not because social conditions were not propitious; it is not that the spirit of the people was clogged and shackled by slavery. All these things were most favorable to the genesis and development of a great literature. We were a people of great soul, of strong individuality, of noble traditions, of romantic temperament, patriotic, sentimental, and, what is equally to the point, possessing the leisure and necessary appurtenances.
There were in Virginia, in colonial days, many excellent private libraries. While the straight-laced Puritans were delving in metaphysical speculations, drawling out their long-winded, sulphurous homilies and chanting their "Bay Psalm Book," our gentlemen were inditing love ditties and making elegant translations of Homer, Virgil, and Ovid. Our statesmen were drawing up great documents and our orators were making great speeches. Our young men were sent to Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburg, and later to the University of Virginia. Why, then, have we had no literature? Why is the field a barren waste? The fault lies with ourselves. We were too busy deifying our military and political heroes to place a wreath upon the brow of the hero of a no less honorable field, the hero who had shed his soul's blood for our country.

"The Virginia literary prophet is without honor in his own country, wherever else he may receive it," I recently remarked to Mr. B. B. Minor, who, in 1847-'49, was editor of The Southern Literary Messenger. "I can certainly vindicate you in that," was his reply. "There is no encouragement whatsoever here for literary effort. Several times since the war I have been urged by friends to revive The Messenger, but—what is the use?" Our writers have learned a thing or two, and they all seek a more congenial clime.

But there is still another reason for this neglect of our writers, which is such a stain upon our name. We were essentially imitators; we worshipped England and things English; we "carried umbrellas when it was raining in London." Our social status was modeled after the English—not the contemporary English, but the English of the past. We had a modified and modernized feudal system. Our life was English. Whatever was American was vulgar. In literature we dared not strike an original—a wild American note. We clung tenaciously to the old English poets. Our poets imitated Pope and Tennyson and Burns, and when they did not
equal their models we laughed at them. We had no "Tenth Muse"; we lacked the refreshing and commendable "Yankee pluck" to boom our literary aspirants, to carry shouldered through the streets a jack-leg rhymster, crying before him, "Behold the man whom the sovereign people delights to honor!" Too good horsemen were we to accept a jackass, with his long ears, in lieu of the winged Pegasus. But now we no longer have even so good an excuse as this, for we have long since bowed the knee to the gods of the North. Our school-boys are familiar with their works; their poems are recited at our public celebrations, while our own poets and prose-writers are forgotten—some of them still alive under the very shadow of our eaves.

In fact, within a stone's throw of our College lives a venerable lady who, though as utterly unknown to most of us as if she had been dead a thousand years, was, half a century ago, hailed as a poet. When I recently questioned a well-known gentleman concerning her, he replied: "Yes, she was a great poet when I was a student here, but had long since passed from my mind. Ask Dr. Mitchell; he is Professor of Ancient History."

For forty years Mrs. Susan A. Weiss has been a voluminous contributor of popular short stories and sketches to all the magazines of the country, living sometimes in New York and sometimes in Richmond. Most students of Poe have heard vaguely of her in connection with that erratic genius; but very few know of her own history, and of the brilliant promise of her youth. Still fewer, even of those who recall the name and fame of Susan Archer Talley, would identify the two.

While Mr. Minor was editor of The Southern Literary Messenger there appeared in its columns several poems signed, first, "Susan," and afterwards "Susan Archer Talley." Their popularity was immediate. They were very different from the common-place, crude verses to which the
reading public were accustomed. Who their author was few knew, and there was much speculation as to whether she was young or old, Miss or Mrs., or whether the name was a *nom de plume*. One thing was agreed—that a poet of no mean parts had arisen in the land.

The following lines, which appeared in *The Messenger* shortly after the publication of her "Firelight Musings," in 1848, give some idea of the impression which she had made:

"TO SUSAN."

"Lady, a stranger knows not who thou art—
Whether a blooming matron, on whose knee
Bright rose-cheeked children sit in prattling glee,
Or a fair maid, whose slightest accents dart
Rapture or sorrow to some votive heart—
Yet can he not repress the sympathy,
Which in his bosom fondly turns to thee
And speaks the bliss thy tender lines impart.
For, oh! if Poetry be that sweet power
Which offers to the broken heart a charm,
To cheer it, lonely, in Life's dreary hour,
And once again its injured feelings warm—
Then may he for thy snowy brow entwine
A wreath in honor to thy 'Gift Divine'!

"Charleston, S. C."

"ALTON."

In the issue for July of the same year there was another tribute "To Susan," by W. Gardner Blackwood, also of Charleston.

Mr. Minor himself told me that he held Miss Talley's work in very high esteem, and was always glad to receive her contributions. "When I first met her," he said, "in society, I understood that she was a deaf mute, and great was my wonder that one so afflicted could write such poetry." When it transpired that the writer of these marvelously sweet verses was a miss of sweet sixteen, it seemed scarcely credible.
Nor was her fame local. Griswold, in his "Female Poets of America," which appeared about this time, deemed this child worthy of conspicuous mention; and Poe, to whom she was then a stranger, in his criticism of Griswold's work, declares that the author deserves our thanks for the cordiality with which he has recognized the poetical claims of certain Southern poetesses.

"He has not, however, done one or two of them that full justice which ere long the public will take upon itself the task of rendering them. We allude especially to Miss Talley. Mr. Griswold praises her highly; and we would admit that it would be expecting of him too much, just at present, to hope for his avowing of Miss Talley, what we think of her, and what one of our best-known critics has distinctly avowed—that she ranks already with the best of American poetesses, and in time will surpass them all—that her demerits are those of inexperience and excessive sensibility (betraying her unconsciously into imitation), while her merits are those of unmistakable genius."

"In point of actual merit—that is to say, of actual accomplishment, without reference to mere indications of ability to accomplish," he ranks her third among America's female poets, and also as one of the three most imaginative.

True it undeniably is that neither Poe nor Griswold were the most trustworthy critics that ever lived, and the former acknowledged to Miss Talley herself—when she expressed dissent from and surprise at some of his judgments—that he could never bring himself to aim a shaft at a woman. But it is equally true that when Poe did honestly criticise, he showed the greatest acumen and nice appreciation; and some of those, who afterwards won great distinction as poets—namely Longfellow—were first hailed from obscurity by Poe.

A sketch of Miss Talley's life is given by Mary Forrest, in her "Women of the South," published by Charles B. Richardson, New York, 1866.
The date of her birth, as given in the encyclopedias, is evidently incorrect. Mrs. Weiss says that she was sixteen when she met Poe, which was in 1849. She was therefore born about 1833, and her first poem appeared when she was eleven years old.

The "slashes" of Hanover, which produced the "silver-tongued" Henry, the "great pacificator" Clay, and Thomas Nelson Page, that inimitable delineator of ante-bellum Virginia life, gave to the world our heroine also. She was a Virginian of Virginians.

Virginia lays violent claim to Poe the genius, Poe the recognized representative abroad of the American muse, Poe whose profligate youth and obscurity she repudiated. But Poe was born in Boston, which, the Bostonians think, adequately accounts for his genius. The most impressionable period of his life was spent in England, and his most active and productive years were passed in the North. Nor is there any local influence discernible in his work. He was a literary cosmopolitan. Not so with Miss Talley. Born a Virginian, bred a Virginian, she was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Old Dominion. Her father, Mr. Thomas Talley, came of a highly-respected Huguenot family. He was a man of more than ordinary talents, of a charming personality, and, withal, of a temperament so sensitive and diffident that he was constrained to abandon his highly-promising law practice.

Mary Forrest presents a most charming picture of the little maiden, of five summers, roaming through the "lonely woods, pathless meadows, and gloomy hollows" of the old plantation, with no other attendant than her trusty Newfoundland dog "Trim." Herself the soul of innocence, incapable of injuring the feeblest of God's creatures, she never suspected or feared injury from others. She was known to face and subdue a fierce dog, from which her elders had fled in terror. She was fond of pets, and especially devoted to horses,
which she rode "with a graceful, fearless abandon." Yet she was no harum-scarum tom-boy, but a gentle, refined, serious child, and a much more congenial companion for her elders than for those of her own age. Nothing delighted her more than to stroll with her grandfather or to go on fishing and hunting excursions with her father. She lived close to Nature. The birds sang her songs; the brooks, in which she loved to wade, told her tales; and the daisies whispered secrets in her ear. Years later, when the birds and the brooks and the whole grand chorus of Nature was to her ears dumb, she poured forth her own sweet melodies, so full of the beauty and rhythm of Nature. With her lips, it is said, she could imitate, with marvelous fidelity, the sounds which had been to her so long silent.

The following extract, from her own pen, shows, however, that Nature was not the only book she read, and exhibits, as well, her wonderful precocity:

"When I was about seven years of age it was my habit to peruse eagerly every scrap of literature that fell in my way. In this manner I had read 'The Children of the Abbey,' 'Pike's Expeditions,' 'Buck's Theology,' 'Castle of Otranto,' and 'The Spectator,' with other prose works of equally dissimilar character; but as yet the world of poetry was an unknown world to me."

About this time her father moved to Richmond, and the little Susan had to leave her old familiar haunts and her glad, untrammeled life in the fields and the woods for a life which must have proved, to one of her temperament, most irksome. The restraints of school life, the selfishness and tyranny of her school-mates, grated harshly upon her sensitive nature. Affectionately attached to her teachers—with whom she was ever a favorite—she could never be induced to join in the rough sports and shallow pastimes of her school-mates; nor could their coarser natures understand this serious, reserved, meditative child.
She was not destined long to continue in their uncongenial society. By an attack of scarlet fever she was almost totally deprived of her hearing, and the combined efforts of the most eminent specialists, North and South, failed to afford her relief. Her parents were at first seriously perplexed as to how to proceed with her education, but soon found that it was but necessary to place suitable books within her reach. She soon mastered their contents, and, with so judicious a teacher and so industrious and apt a scholar, made phenomenal progress, and soon completed an education such as was rarely obtained in that day by those of her sex.

Not long after her sad misfortune Miss Talley suddenly developed a most unsuspected talent. A friend had sent her a handsome bouquet. Procuring drawing materials, she went to her room and in a short time produced an almost perfect copy of the flowers, greatly to the delight and astonishment of her parents and friends. The well-known artist, Robert Sully, who was soon after employed as her master, pronounced her talents of the highest order, and “was very solicitous that she should devote herself to painting,” predicting for her a brilliant future. But after the death of her father, a few years later, she laid down her palette and brush and has never since resumed them. Upon the walls of Mrs. Weiss’s tasteful parlor hang several of her early oil sketches and a magnificent copy of a Van Dyke portrait—perfect gems of art they seemed to my eye, though she insisted that they were unfinished, and but the products of a childish pastime. Ah! how I should like to see a finished one, thought I. What would have been her success had she persisted in this art! For beauty and finish, declared Mary Forrest, “her crayon drawings and miniatures are not surpassed by those of any artist in the country.”

In the following year, no less suddenly, her poetic talents were discovered. We cannot do better than give her own
interesting account of her introduction into the world of poetry, some time previously.

"One day I came across an old number of The Southern Literary Messenger, containing the well-known ballad beginning—

'Lo, the ring is on my hand,
And the wreath is on my brow.'

Whatever may be my present opinion of this poem, no words can describe the charms which it exercised over my childish fancy. The music of it was a keen delight; the mystery of it, which I could in no wise fathom, was a subtle fascination; and its sadness a pain which 'touched my soul with pity'—for that it was an authentic history, an actual experience of Edgar Allen Poe, it never occurred to me to doubt."

As would have been the case with almost any romantic girl not yet in her teens, the result of this sudden initiation into the realm of poetry was two-fold. Every scrap of verse that she could lay her hands on was eagerly devoured, especially if it was signed "E. A. P." To her mind he was a hero, a demi-god. His poems were not human productions, but revelations, inspirations. The very house in which he had lived and played, and the trees which he had climbed when a child, when they had been pointed out to her, became thenceforth, she declares, "objects of solemn and mysterious interest." It is needless to say that she immediately began to compose verses in imitation of these wonderful poems. They were intended for no eye but her own; they were a part of her worship of that "mysterious being in human shape"; but some of them came by accident into the hands of a friend, who at once recognized their genius and sent them to The Southern Literary Messenger. Their great success has already been described. She continued to contribute to The Messenger, while it survived, and in 1859, Rudd & Carleton, of New York, issued a collection of her poems, a copy of which may be found in the State Library. Mrs. Weiss
very modestly disclaims any merit for her poems. "They are only childish little verses," she said, depreciatingly. "I am ashamed of them now—indeed, when I read them over, in after years, I was so mortified at their puerilities that I cried about it."

We now come to the most interesting events of her life—her connection with Poe.

(To be continued.)

Only This.

A bow of ribbon, a faded note;
A single rose she wore at her throat;
A diary, too, with many a blot;
But whose they were—I forgot.

To the Sound of the Horn.

"NIMROD."

EXT to my "home folks" and my sweetheart, I love my horses and dogs; next to these I prize my gun and my fishing tackle; and above all associations, except those mentioned above, I prefer the society of congenial hunters. There is no music like the music of the chase; there is no excitement equal to it. When the wild deer springs from the shady copse or tangled covert, and the eager pack open in full cry, you take the "buck ager" and tremble on the stand near the water brook, where the panting hart in its flight is rapidly retreating to free itself of its howling pursuers. You hear the music rise and fall, from hill to hollow, and from hollow to hill, like the chiming of distant bells. Louder and louder it rises, nearer and nearer it comes. You turn pale and tremble from head to foot; your pulse
begins to beat about a hundred and twenty-five times a minute; you hear the quick rustling of the leaves a hundred yards away; you catch a glimpse of something bounding by you like a rubber ball; you jump around like a cat "shot in the foot," your arms take the palsy, and you pull the trigger and shoot the top out of a sapling. The hounds go sweeping by you like a whirlwind. You wipe the beads of sweat from your brow, and try to fan down the temperature with your hat. Then, before you think of it, you hear the report of a gun half a mile below you on the stream; the music suddenly hushes; you rise and run. You hear the exultant yell of your companions; you at once know that there is venison in camp. The next thing is ransacking your brain for explanations or excuses; the following night your sleep is full of dreams and nightmares and visions of vanishing deer.

But the deer hunt is not what it has been in many sections of America. We have been no more merciful to the gamest game of the forest than to the poor Indians; they have gone together to the "happy hunting-ground." It is a pity that our law-makers have so completely neglected to give us wholesome laws for the protection of our game. I even fear that, in their eagerness to protect the cities and towns, they have forgotten the country, both man and beast; but I think I now see a tendency toward the protection of game. And I trust our statesmen will give more attention to the protection of timber and game, and less to the upbuilding of privileged classes and the cultivation of trusts, so that our people can have more health, wealth, and happiness.

Just here I feel like saying a word in regard to the sly old individual of the forest and field which still lives in spite of all we can do or say, and he is the inextinguishable fox, which still continues to dress in light red or gray uniform, and still delights to play drum-major for our hounds and for us. Did you never rise from your bed at the break of day, "when
the frost was on the pumpkin and the corn was in the shock," the air crisp and cool? And did you never mount your prancing horse and sound your hunter's horn—

"Hark! hark! What sound on the wind is borne? 
'Tis the conquering voice of the hunter's horn!
The horn! the horn!
The merry sweet nig of the hunter's horn."

And then listen to your howling and whining hounds as they gather around, anxious to join in the glorious jubilee, and as you rode off you could hear the sound of other horns in the distance, summoning you to the meeting-place down at the cross-roads, where the hunt was to begin? Of course you have, and you galloped on with joy, and just when the morning was hanging her banners of purple and gold on the sky, and the forest was nodding a tribute of welcome to her, just as the glad world was waking with laughter and song, old "Leader" and "Bell" opened on the hill half a mile away, "Sport" and "Speck" gave two or three quick shrill yelps, and with a "Hush! hark!" from the hunters, the hounds huddled and struck the trail.

Old "Rock" led off with a solo, "Beauty" chimed in with the B flat cornet, and then thundered an accompanying blast, and all the band began to play. There were flutes and fiddles and tambours and tinkling cymbals galore. Then were fluttering hearts and quivering leaves and the hills fairly shook with the chorus.

The wily fox circled and swung around the ridges, and the music circled and swung close at his heels. It was simply joy unconfined, as the flying melody filled the air like the incense of wild flowers.

"From early dawn till set of sun, 
When the red fox dies and the day is done; 
Then comes the sound of all sounds—'tis the hunter's horn."
Whether it is hunting the deer, or chasing the fox, or shooting the squirrel on the highest limb of the tallest tree, or courting the coveys in the field, or flirting with the fish in the streams, the life of the sportsman is glorious. Nature reveals her charms to him, and he learns to love her more and more for her kindness and her beauty. His memory is not an old, dingy garret, full of cobwebs; it is a continent ever fresh and green, with landscapes skirted with cooling shades and traversed with sparkling streams. He is not dreaming of gold in a little old sin-stained counting-room, but he is dreaming of the antlered buck or listening for the rustle of the wild turkey wings, and drinking in the melodies of the deep-tangled wildwood.

Poets mirror nature in their songs, and painters make the canvas glow with its reflected lights and shadows, but the sportsman sees, hears, and touches the very substance of the poet's song, and walks among the lights and shadows which inspire the painter's dreams.

And now, in conclusion, I want to give you a prescription for nervous strain and over-work. The best medicine I ever saw or heard of is a fishing-rod and plenty of bait. The world has gone mad on the subject of money-getting and glory-winning. I love the clink of the dollar myself, but only for what it will buy. I love a little tinge of glory, too, but not at the expense of the happiness of others. I would rather catch a fish than get a dollar any day; I would rather be a live fisherman than a dead Caesar. I would rather wage war on fish than on the Filipinos; I would rather have a fisherman's luck than to be commander of the late Spanish navy. Let the men of millions have the pleasure in their palaces; I envy them not. Let them pass the hours bowing and scraping on velvet carpets and lolling on silken sofas, but let me bow and scrape on Nature's rich carpet of green, among the maple blossoms and honeysuckle, and loll on the moss-covered logs, amid violets and daisies,
near the lake or river, where the cranes bow and scrape to the tadpoles and the bull-frog sings his sweetest song. Therefore, my fellows, I beseech you to be very faithful and keep your feet dry. Don't make a noise, or you will catch no fish.

STUDY books to know Man; study Nature to know God.

The Object of a Debater's Medal.

D. M. SIMMONS.

The ideal in debating is the ability to convince all classes. Since the college audience is never representative of the masses, and never assembles to be convinced, the debater has no real practice. He is trained only indirectly. Just as the man who is able to teach astronomy is fitted better to teach geography, so the man who is able to convince a college audience is better able to convince a less enlightened one. The goal for a contestant, since the audience is purely incidental, is to convince a committee of intelligent judges.

If the object in giving a medal is simply to have a raffle for a golden bauble, by means of a debate, it would be well enough for each contestant to approach this goal along his own line of least resistance, and even to win out by being very clever in one point, no matter how poor in all the rest. But if it is the object of the society, in the award of a medal, to induce its debaters to develop not one, but all, of their talents in due proportion, and thus raise the standard of all-around debaters, it should sum up the qualities of an ideal debater under a few heads, such as argument, composition, and delivery, and specify a grade for each head, and judges should have the advantage of reading the debates, hearing them spoken, and anything else that would enable them to
determine with accuracy what was argument, what was bombast, etc.

If the debater had in mind that his manuscript was to go to the judges, and that the intrinsic value of his cold facts would determine a certain per cent. of his debate, he would give it a completeness that it would not have otherwise. The same is true with regard to every other point, and therefore such a plan would induce the man with a strong personality and a good voice to learn to write a good speech, and the other, who can write a good speech, to learn to speak it well, while without such training they are both failures, and equally pitiful.

Some offer, as an objection to giving the manuscripts to the judges, and specifying points and grades, that it would be an insult to their intelligence, and that judges should know a good debate without any such instruction. If the judge could select suits for the contestants, without knowing the sizes of their coats or trousers, or could select dinners for them, without knowing whether they were fond of oysters or Brunswick stew—because such information would insult their intelligence—they would probably be able to select a debate at random; but the fact that they cannot do either of these very well leads to the questions: What else is there besides a debate, of course—that judges are able to decide at random? And of what peculiar material is a debate made that it enjoys this distinction alone? The facts are, first, that intelligence is seldom insulted, and, second, intelligence leads judges, in making the simplest decisions, to ask for the rules that have governed in the preparation.

Another objection is that judges should not read a debate, because that would give them an advantage over the audience. First, judges could decide just as well if there were no audience at all, and just as well if the audience was to change for every speaker. Second, there is no need for an incidental audience to have the same advantage with the
judges, unless the decision is to be made, in a measure, from the popular opinion; and no one would advocate this, even for the intelligent audiences that visit Richmond College. These are some of the fallacies of this argument, while its truth and importance are still mysteries.

Others object to conforming to any rule. One says that Mr. A. is a splendid preacher, and never wrote a sermon; another, that Mr. B. is a good legislator, and never wrote a debate; and another, that Mr. C. is a successful preacher, and reads his sermons. And all in concert say, therefore I shall do as he has done. It is true that such men as these have lived and done great good; but it is none the less true that each of them was to some extent a genius, in his own sphere. A genius may learn to be a fairly good blacksmith or carpenter in a few weeks, but the average man cannot do it. Has Father Genius decreed that in the art of speaking alone every one who will may become his adopted son, while all other professions shall continue their apprenticeships? If not, why will an intelligent college boy, who does not happen to be a genius, chase that kind of a rainbow phantom all through his college course? Can he fail to know that if he neglects to train himself, either in speaking or writing, he will be the loser?

It is the combination of a number of these excellencies, and not one or two without the others, that raises the standard of the debater, and makes him best able to convince the masses. A debater's medal should be given for the purpose of bringing out all these qualities, and should be entirely out of reach of the men who deliberately neglect any one of them.
O fairest pair of human eyes,
Most finished work of azure skies,
    That e'er on mortal life did shine—
In thee I read the sweetest thought
That ever earthly stars have taught—
    "A sympathy divine."

'Tis thus I know thy secret power
That draws me every passing hour,
   And makes my heart to thee incline.
By simple look thou dost unfold
The purest heart e'er breast did hold,
   And rapture bring to mine.

Oft there are left but half expressed
In words, the feelings of our breast,
    And thoughts that glow within our mind;
But with this magic, sacred art,
Our greatest thoughts we oft impart
   In language most sublime.

Stories of the Opera.

DOUGLAS S. FREEMAN.

III—"The Minor Chord."

YES, she was only a chorus girl; but hasn't she a heart
just as truly as the *prima donna* with the golden voice? Because you didn't notice her on the crowded stage is that
any reason why she has not a story—maybe a tragedy—hid
behind that smile and laugh? Even if that tenor, who stands
where the calcium shines full in his face, sings the refrain,
is there not a minor chord, an unheard refrain, for the
little chorus girl? She was like them all—came from nowhere—going, the good Lord only knows where, when the season broke up. Maybe she didn’t love the stage; maybe she was only on to provide a living for that father up in Rhode Island—at least, that’s what they said when she died. What was her name—it doesn’t matter. “Nellie Reid” they called her, and she was *premier* of the ballet in “Bluebeard.” A little slip of a girl, hardly five feet, with a beaming smile, and a pair of great brown eyes that should have shone in a better place than the chorus dressing-room. Graceful, too, and as active as a gazelle. Whenever the chorus would not learn the new movement the stage manager had in mind, they would send for Nellie, and she never failed to straighten things out. But she never had a lover. I don’t know why that was, but was there not something in that brown eye, innocent though it was, which caused stage Bobby or dressing-room Tom to think again before he spoke to her? When the company played in New York she was never seen except at rehearsal and at performance. There were none of the “after-play dinners” with her. In fact, she was just a pure, sweet girl, acting, like so many do, not for love of the business, nor for love of man, but because it offered a living—honest, if you chose to make it such. This conduct made her distinct in a way, and caused her to be considered distant by the other girls.

We might think she is going to fall in love with some of the singers, or she is going to be rewarded for her virtue, and some day she is going to sing a “fat” part. But she didn’t. Her story was simple, her life was sad—all to the minor chord.

You know the company started out from New York, after a seven-weeks’ run, playing the big stands. Philadelphia came first, with its cold, uninterested audiences, and then—the road. The piece was like so many others—a mere mingling of song and spectacle—beautiful to the eye, melodious
to the ear. "Bluebeard" was its name; but it might as well have been "The Sleeping Beauty," or anything else—the title meant nothing. Nellie led the ballet, with all their numerous changes and dances—a beautiful little figure, bright, earnest, interested. But her aerial work, in which she excelled, came in the second act, when she played the "Black-bird," floating downward through the air, flapping great dark wings—indeed, like some spirit of another world. To do this she was suspended at every performance high up in the gridiron, by five wires, to secure her from a fall and to regulate her movements. She had learned the trick well, and never failed to "get a hand" when she came flying on the scene, singing her slumber-song.

The piece met with success, for the season was good; indeed, Nellie Reid's little song was worth the price of admission. Through Ohio, slowly, through Indiana, and on into Illinois they travelled, meeting with warm receptions everywhere and playing to full houses. And then they came to Chicago. The company had settled down by this time; they all knew each other, and were accustomed to each other's little peculiarities. No one laughed at Nellie, or called her a "great lady" because she refused to have a part in their revels and celebrations after the play; in fact, I think they respected her for it. And they found, too, that she was not distant after all. More than one of the girls, when in trouble, found Nellie sympathetic and willing to intercede with the manager. So they came to love her, those thoughtless chorus girls, and it brought out that old, old story of how virtue will be recognized. It isn't necessary to tell how the girls came to respect her, almost to adore her, though one of them cried like a child when they found Nellie that night, and said she had been a sister to them all; how, on that same fateful occasion, another sold half her outfit to put a bunch of roses in her cold hands. She gained their love in her own way—simply, gently.
And still, Nellie did not love any of the men. Several of the chorus men were smitten by her quiet charm, but they never became familiar; they never dared, somehow, pay her much attention, and her reserve became proverbial in the company. And one day, when they were in Chicago, May Edwards laughingly asked her if that handsome man on her dresser was her lover; if it was her charm, which kept her from favoring this, that, or the other one. Nellie only smiled, and I am not sure now whose picture that was; she never told, and they couldn’t find it after the fire.

Nellie favored no suitor, but she was at least fervently admired. I have mentioned how some of the "Fairy Guard" would have paid her attention. It was an open secret that the great "Prince" himself one night had proposed her as a toast—but these were not all. There was one other who did not sing in the chorus, whose place was not in the front rank when the ensemble sang the finale; in fact, he had only seen her that week before. He was but the boy who ran the elevator up to the tier dressing-rooms. Just a boy, with a boy’s heart and a boy’s dreams. They always form a distinct class, these youthful Thespians, worthy of any one’s observation. You hear him coming down the wings, calling the curtain; you see him running an errand for the tenor, or bringing the basso shaving water. Did you ever stop and think that these boys had ambitions like the rest of us. When Jack spilled the star’s hot water on his doublet maybe he was thinking of the day when he should be a star himself, and wear silk tights, and sing his own songs. Maybe, when the stand is over, the empty wings echo his boyish voice, singing the songs of the tenor, and conjuring up a time when he will not have to skulk in the wings when the foots were on—when he can stand out there like the comedian, and draw laughter from the people.

They called him Phil for short—Philip —— they print his name in the returns for the fire. He was just a stage
STORIES OF THE OPERA.

boy; who ever thought to ask him his name? He didn't have much time to see the singers at their work; he was forever busy carrying them up to their dressing-rooms and bringing them down again. But he noticed them all, from those clear eyes of his, and the Bluebeard Company hadn't been at the Iroquois three days before he fell in love with Nellie. Of course, he was only a boy—of course, he would never tell her about it; he didn't think for a moment she would listen if he did—he was only the elevator boy. But why shouldn't he love? It is entirely possible that he fell in love with some girl from every company that played at the Iroquois. But what does it matter? If youth gives license for anything, it is to love. But Nellie never saw it—never dreamed it. He only answered a little more promptly when the bell rang her floor; he was only a bit more polite when she was aboard—that was all. In fact, I doubt if Nellie ever thought of him, or, indeed, had noticed him half a dozen times. But what would be a boy's life if he could not love? But one day she did notice him. He was down on the first tier when the bell rang from her tier (the fourth), and he went up. She was dressed for her second-act entrance, in a gorgeous creation of red and gold, with spangles from tip to toe. He wasn't very swift in taking her down, for he enjoyed looking at her slyly, as she was engaged in arranging the blouse. She must have seen him watching her, though, for she looked at him and smiled. "Do I look nice?" she asked. He stammered. "Like—like er angel," he broke out. She laughed at the thought of an angel being clad in red tights and a golden blouse, but she answered, like the gentle soul she was, "Oh, I'm glad you like me." Of course, she would have said that to any one, but we don't philosophize at fourteen, and Phil was happy all that evening. After that, so kind-hearted was she, she always had a smile for the boy. You know big singers are not in the habit of taking the slightest notice of the attendants, and to have her, the
premiere of the ballet, talk to him was the greatest honor of Phil's life. And how he used to look forward to her appearance. He would sit in the elevator, sometimes, listening to the buzz around him, and then would come a little ring from the elevator bell above him, and he knew in a moment it was she. Somehow that bell rang differently when she wanted the elevator. Isn't that boyish love; or shall we call it adoration—the happiest love of a lifetime? Do not you remember how, when you were thirteen or twelve, you used to worship some young lady five, seven years your senior; and were you not happy? But Phil—

And then it came. The company had been playing at the Iroquois ten days. It was Christmas-time, and the managers had decided to give a special matinee for the women and the children. A little more liberty was given the comedians, and the ballet was instructed to answer as many as four encores, for women and girls are the most appreciative of listeners. The prices were lowered somewhat, and, as the Iroquois had just opened, the people flocked in crowds to the performance. The enthusiasm ran high at the end of the first act, and as he sat in the elevator, away back on the wings, Phil could hear their applause, and the piping of the chorus. Yes, he was sure that was her voice, ringing high above them all. He just knew it; there was no one in the company who could sing like her, he thought, and as for dancing—he imagined she was perfect. But as the first of the chorus came down hurriedly, to be carried up for the change, he forgot his day-dreams, and began handling the rush. She didn't come up until the last group. She had been talking to one of the girls. Phil looked at her admiringly, and almost forgot to stop at the third tier for some one, so absorbed was he. The second act went without a hitch; the stars all sang well, and the ballet movements were faultless.

They had just begun the third act, and the elevator was up on the fourth tier, for Phil loved to stay up there and watch
them fasten Nellie up to do her floating trick. How beautiful she looked in that flapping black-bird dress, with her wings and plumage. They had just finished, and she was on the gridiron, ready to descend, when the bell rang in the elevator, and Phil hurried down. The octette was singing “The Pale Moonlight”; he could hear them, and he hoped he might have a chance to run out to the wings and see her come down. As he passed the second tier he noticed a fuse burning out in the fourth groove, and told the stage fireman about it when he reached the stage level. The octette was just finishing their second encore, and Phil crept forward, hoping to catch a glimpse of Nellie. But, as he turned toward the wings, he heard a cry behind him, and, turning, saw in a minute that the drop was afire.

The scene that followed need not be pictured. “Lower away!” cried the stage manager to the fly-men, “lower away!” And, as a great cry rose up from the audience, the asbestos curtain came down slowly, and stuck midway. The company meanwhile were hurrying for the off-wing door, and, by the time Phil was aware of what had happened, only the stage firemen and the belated octette were on the wings. Above him, sweeping like some great torrent, touched off as if by magic, were the flames. It was impossible to hear anything save their roar and the hoarse cry of the people in the audience, already fighting and tearing their way to the exits. In vain the manager called for volunteers to go up and unfasten the asbestos curtain. It meant sudden and sure death—no one ventured.

Phil stood dazed at first, scarce realizing the extent of the danger, and then he thought of Nellie. Of course she had gotten out—but then, the wires were hitched to her back, and he knew she could not unfasten them. For a moment the boy stood there. “Go to her!” something said to him. “Save her! save her!” But then he was only a little fellow, and it was a long way up to the fourth tier, and
besides—but he shut his eyes and bravely rushed to the elevator. Without the theatre heroes were doing great deeds—catching women as they fell, breaking in doors, knocking down partitions—but the little boy on the elevator was going to do his part. He trembled as he entered his cage. He hesitated again, and then he remembered how she looked that afternoon away up there on the wings. He turned the controller, and up they went—up through what seemed to the boy solid walls of flames, so swiftly had the fire spread. On, on—the distance never seemed so great before. At last—was this the tier? No, one more. The elevator was stifling hot now, the controller grip was scorching, but he held on. With a jerk he stopped the elevator, and ran out on the tier. Above his head the roof of the theatre was aflame, below him the third tier was a mass of blaze. He lost sense of distance—which way was she, right or left—where did they put her? And then he heard her cry. It came from that direction, and now he knew. He fought his way through the smoke to the gridiron. As he looked down he lost heart for a moment—flames, flames, all flames. And then she called again behind him: “Phil, oh, Phil! help me!” I am not sure what happened then—he never could tell, nor could she, and no one else saw. It seems that her thick covering must have protected her somewhat from the heat, and the flames had just reached her when Phil came up. She was secured by four guide wires and by the main wire, which bore her weight. Hardly knowing how—desperately, maybe heroically—the little fellow struggled with the wires to free Nellie. He managed to break three of the guide wires. The flames were like hell itself now; they scorched his hair, they burnt his uniform. Now the fourth—and Nellie’s black dress has caught. He stopped to put it out, and then, with a mighty effort, swung her over on the gridiron. Just then the heat broke the last wire, and she was loose. It was
a long, long pull back to the elevator—the smoke stifled, the heat maddened. Nellie had fainted now, and the lad had to drag her to the shaft. Just at that moment his own coat began to scorch. He tore it from him. Inside the cage it was hotter still. But how the controller scorched and blistered his hand! Nellie lay lifeless, with half her great black garments burned from her; her face seemed unhurt. Down now, like lightning, through the smoke. Phil counted the tiers—three, two, here was the ground floor. But an idea struck him, and, turning the controller, he shot down to the basement. He cleared the last floor, and then—he fell.

In the basement the firemen had just begun playing their hose. The flames had not reached them here, and they were pouring a flood of water on the stage through the traps. Up through the air-shaft they could see the furnace-like glow of the flames; the elevator shaft was full of smoke. They had just broken in the little iron door to the shaft, when suddenly down came the elevator. It struck the springs at the bottom with such force that they thought the cage had burned away from above and dropped. But, through the smoke, they saw something on the floor—it was Phil, laying across Nellie's body.

It did not take many minutes to bring an ambulance, and before long the two were laying in a near-by store, turned for the time into a hospital. They laid her down on a great bundle of sheetings, and some one brought a roll of curtains and placed him beside her. A fireman had whispered how they found them to a nurse, and when the doctor came, in a few moments, she told him. Tenderly, for that catastrophe softened all hearts, the physician and his assistants uncovered them and dressed their burns. They saw that neither could live, and presently moved them into a little counting-room at one end of the store. It was 5 o'clock when the firemen found them in the elevator; at 7 neither had stirred. Without, through the smoke and fog, came the
throb, throb, throb, of the engines throwing water on the smoking sepulchre. On into the night the bells of the ambulances, carrying away the dead and wounded, sounded a dismal knell through the saddened streets. Men fought like spirits of the pit to rescue the wretches from the ruins. In the big store the delirious raved and screamed; a long line of white-faced friends passed through the aisles, searching for loved ones. But no one, save the nurses, went to the little room in the rear; no anxious mother or grief-stricken father sought for those two; they were alike, children of the stage—no one knew of them.

At midnight the doctor said that neither had two hours to live. Nellie was a mass of burns, only her face and back having escaped the flames, and Phil was cooked all over. But they did not rave; no mad delirium haunted the mind of either. They were still unconscious. Twelve o’clock boomed out while the doctor stood over them. There was something of eternity in the air—death brooded over all in Chicago that night. The electric lights were all out in that section; on the desk, over there, a single candle illuminated the watching nurse and the dying patients. They had covered Nellie’s burns with a great sheet; her hair, which had been encased, and had strangely escaped injury, spread over the sheet now—beautiful, dark hair—while the white face showed no sign of the struggle—rest. As for Phil, his face was burned almost beyond recognition; but, did you notice, the charred fingers of his right hand were still clenched, where he had held the controller-grip. One o’clock, and no change, though the light flickered lower, and the two sufferers breathed with greater difficulty. Already a thousand instruments were sending the fearful tidings all over the country. From the marble entrance of the Iroquois a long line of laborers brought out the charred and mangled corpses. The smoke had drifted back on the city like a pall—the end was come.
It must have been nearly 2 o’clock when the nurse noticed a slight movement from the couch where Phil lay. She went to him. Slowly, painfully, he opened his swollen eyes, and spoke slowly: “When—I—came, she knew it was me.” The nurse was about to inject a strong dose of morphine, when the boy lay back—he was past suffering now. The nurse turned around. Nellie, too, had opened her eyes; she had heard his words perhaps; she was smiling at the boy beside her—smiling? Yes—and dead.

When morning came they laid them out in the morgue, but no one save the girls of the company came to them; no mother looked for Phil, no father sought for Nellie. They lived to the minor chord; the minor chord was their requiem. And they never knew whose was the picture on Nellie’s dresser.

The writer wishes to acknowledge his obligation to Mr. Charles Bloomingdale, through whom he received the details of this true story.

The aim of the true student is to know; and, knowing, to appreciate.
A young editor seldom takes up his new honors without a solemn oath of betterment and great ideas of revolution. It is perhaps more natural, or at least most human, for one man to stake his judgment against that of the unfortunate who preceded him, and manage his magazine as it suits him, according to his own ideas, with great reforms of his own choosing. As we take up this honorably onerous position, we must acknowledge a feeling of bashfulness. We do not think our revolutionary ideas can be worth much. We will only try, as best we may, to preserve the present good name and reputation of The Messenger. Our predecessor, quietly, and without comment, brought about some exceedingly beneficial improvements in the conduct of the various departments. Following his plan, “On The Campus” and “Athletics” will no longer appear. “Editorial Comment,” hereafter to take the place of “Editorial,” will be open broadly to all the students. With this brief word of introduction, we promise our best endeavor, our deepest enthusiasm, in the work of The Messenger. May her cause prosper!
The opening article of this issue, a paper on "Susan Archer Talley," is worthy of comment. The author, John Moncure, has set a good example to all would-be literary investigators, by the careful manner in which this article has been prepared. The lady herself was interviewed, her works were read in their entirety, and the former editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, Mr. B. B. Minor, was also seen and questioned about the poet. We know also that the author spent something like two months in the preparation of the article. That is what we want—not many hastily-written stories by a few prolific writers; rather a few carefully-written articles by the many.

We received in our mail for this issue a poem entitled "Love." The poem had its merits, but the scribe, using a typewriter, signed only "Anon." We had no means of identifying him (or the her, as might be inferred from the tenor of the poem). Under these circumstances we were unwilling to publish the poem, not knowing whether it was original or but a copy sent in by some obliging friend. Please let all communications be signed; though, should the author so desire, the name will not appear in print.

Even a casual reader of The Messenger cannot but notice the scarcity of verse in our issues for the last few months. Time was when from cover to cover we would find clever, bright poems; but, lo! how the mighty are fallen. In this issue we publish only three original poems, and we do not mind confiding that these were all that were regularly submitted. What has come over the College? Does youthful
genius no longer muse on a moonlight night? Does the clanging of the old bell no longer stir poetic fancy? What is the matter? We hardly dare say that "some mute inglorious Milton here may lay," but it is axiomatic that no man can know his poetic ability, or lack of ability, until he has tried. The poet may be "born" all right, "not made," but, no matter how great may be the natural ability, unless there is something to develop it, we are more than apt never to hear the poet was born. The "Open Sesame" to the Palace of the Muse is the universal "Try."

A GREAT NUISANCE.

Have you been in the Library recently, searching for the current issue of some magazine, and, when you asked the librarian for it, it could be nowhere found? That the magazine came, he is positive; where it is now—a mystery. There are two explanations for this great nuisance. One is that the professors take the magazines out soon after their arrival, and do not return them until they have thoroughly read them. That this happens, we cannot believe. Of course, it is altogether possible that some professor may take out a magazine for the night, and, because he was late getting up and the bell rang as he was eating, he might have forgotten it. But that a professor would take out such a magazine as *The World's Work* or *The Century* the day it arrived, and keep it a week, we cannot believe. There would certainly be the thought that the magazines were bought by the College, for the College, and not for one individual; that no one man had a right to monopolize College property to the shutting out of the other two hundred and twenty-four. The librarian's own statement shuts out the possibility.

The other explanation, and one almost as untenable, is that some students have a habit of taking the magazines and carrying them to their rooms for private purposes—not stealing them, one must understand—merely borrowing them for
two weeks or a month, you know, for reading when Greek is too much of a bother or Latin too long; not stealing, merely depriving. Of course, this seems improbable, and yet—the magazines disappear.

THE BASIS OF LITERARY ART. A college magazine is rightly considered a "trying" ground. The young man who comes to college is supposed to have no previous literary training, and to first learn through the college mag. the fundamental principles of literary style. The editor frequently receives articles which bear all the earmarks of being the embryo author's first production. In these we have always noticed one glaring fault—artificiality. Not always artificiality of style, but some crude, morbidly-startling plot, some blood-and-thunder, fire-and-brimstone adventure. In our estimation, naturalness is the greatest virtue of a story.

A cultured reader, an educated public, soon tire of the nonsensical unreality of some writers. True literature is the highest form of art; art is only art when it is natural. Of course, we suppose when a writer has been engaged in literary work for some years, he may try the unusual, but a young writer had better lay himself open to the charge of common-placedness by a natural narrative than to be called a fool by some impossibly-conceived, absurdly-compounded story. Be natural, and you will be artful.

OUR LAST ISSUE. Some one suggested, not long ago, that, as we were going to have no Annual this year, it would be a good plan to at least have an extra number of The Messenger, at the end of the term—a sort of souvenir issue, with pictures of the societies, the various clubs, and fraternities, and so on. We think the idea a good one. Our printers can get out, without trouble, a hundred-
page issue, with illustrations and everything necessary to make up at least a presentable souvenir. All we want is the money. If there are a hundred and fifty men who will buy the issue, at a dollar each, we see no reason why we should not have a pleasant reminder of the season of 1903-'04.

Who Shall Wear the "R"?

A good deal of comment has lately been aroused, and many different sentiments expressed, relative to the wearing of R's on athletic goods, sweaters, caps, etc., by men who do not engage in athletics, who have never made a College team, and gained for themselves the privilege of wearing the College emblem.

There appears to the writer one, and only one, side to this question.

Every man, except a hoosier from the backwoods, knows that the custom in all American colleges and universities is that only members of some regular team are allowed to wear the college emblem. To argue the question with a man who knows or cares nothing for college etiquette is useless, for those fine feelings which distinguish a man from a bore are entirely foreign to his nature. The reasons which lead to this custom are few and simple. The college emblem is given and worn as a reward for services rendered by students in inter-collegiate contests. The privilege of wearing this emblem is greatly prized, and leads many to strive for the honor, thus furnishing much material for our second teams. The college emblem distinguishes the men prominent in athletics from those who do nothing for it; yet some pushing individuals, whose actions do far more credit to their nerve than to their brains, desire to swell around college and the outside world—faking only the latter, however—along with the fellows who have sweated and worked day after day in order
to uphold the honor of their *alma mater*. Such a spirit should not be tolerated at Richmond College for another day. We are an up-to-date college—not a prep. school, as such a spirit would seem to indicate—and such childish tendencies should be abolished.

If ignorance has been the cause of this difference of opinion, my words have been perhaps too severe, and I am sure that a word to the wise will be sufficient; but, if not, the offenders should be branded, and public opinion should consume the man who would dare work this subterfuge. 

T.
We believe that the Exchange Department is among the most important of a college magazine, and shall hereafter devote more space to it. Nothing helps a magazine so much as criticism.

First, we have the *Randolph-Macon Monthly*, one of the best-looking and neatest of all college magazines. The wide pages give it an especially pleasing appearance. In J. Miller Leake, its chief poetical contributor, we have one of the best college poets in the State. His work has the right spirit. We notice in this issue "The Rosebud and the Rose" and "The Three Lands." "A Day in Concord" is enjoyable and true to the spot, as the present writer remembers it. "The Mystery of the Hill" was evidently written with the intention of concluding the story in this issue. The author could find no good conclusion, so he postponed his misery one issue. We await it with eagerness. There is a scientific tinge to this entire magazine, if we except the poetry and the one story, "A Misunderstanding," which is as typical a beginner's story as we have read in months. Better call it an old-time effusion.

The *Hampden-Sidney Magazine* is not up to the standard. Its tone is rather low, with mediocre poetry and inferior verse. It is not up to the usual level of Hampden-Sidney things.

The *Southern Collegian*, of Washington and Lee, has a poor cover. If we are to suppose the two pictures on the cover to be Washington and Lee, it requires a good stretch of imagination. The contents are very good, however, with two really sound articles, "Early History of Money" and "Sound Thoughts on the Genius of Shakespeare." The
"Puritan's Violets" were rather faded. This magazine publishes all its poetry together—rather a bad idea, we think.

*The Furman Echo* has a back like a crepe lamp-shade, and is printed on a low grade of paper. The magazine is strongly local, and at the cost of inferior stories. It contains only three stories, and we are sorry to see the three worst prose articles of a month, all in one magazine.

That William and Mary turns out good literature, no one will deny. *Her Literary Magazine* is always welcome. It is large, well filled, well put up. We may doubt William and Mary's ability to get together a base-ball team, but they can put out one of the best magazines of the State.

*The Emory and Henry Era*, from without, is one of the most graceful of our exchanges, but within! "Lost and Won" is startlingly impossible, though in fairly good style. "Corinne" has excellent sentiment, and fearful metre. "Miss Montmorency" is a cleverly-told nothing, which is high praise. "Peter Wilson, B. A.," is a stout Southern treatment of the race question. At least one can say it is strong, and it is apt to be enjoyed by any one who has Southern blood in his veins.

Then comes *The Critic*, a shy little publication by the pupils of the Lynchburg High School. It's almost hidden away among the large exchanges, but to the writer it is most enjoyable, as bringing up forgotten memories of an old home. How strange it is to see names on the editorial staff that we remember as children. But to the contents. Such a small publication is necessarily local. Its prose contributions are not bad for a high school, and its social features are well handled. We hope to see it again on our table. By the way, it's a good thing for high schools to begin training their pupils in journalism.
It's worth any one's while to read the last issue of the Lesbian Herald. It is historical, interesting, and well gotten-up.

We were, on the whole, pleased with the Davidson College Magazine. In fact, Davidson is a booming place anyway.

There is always something pleasing about the cumbersome Georgetown College Journal. It looks home-like. It is distinct among them all. But that poem on Mother Erin did remind one of standing up before the teacher, swaying the body to get the metre, and lining out some "piece." The article on Austin, the poet, was a clear, interesting study. And we enjoyed "The Murderer in Mrs. Fussel's Flat." Come again.


"The Village Blacksmith."

Beneath the spreading chestnut tree  
The village blacksmith stood,  
A-shoeing Johnson's smiling mule  
The best way that he could.

Beneath the spreading chestnut tree  
The smiling mule still stands;  
The blacksmith, full a mile away,  
Lies wasting in the sands.  

—Scott Leigh.