

ELECTRA:

^

BELLES LETTRES MONTHLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

—

MAY, 1883, TO MAY, 1884.

"The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed
A youth who bore through snow and ice
A banner with this strange device,
ENCELSIOR."

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ELECTRA:

A BELLES LETTRES MONTHLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

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HALF AN HOUR IN CONSTANTINOPLE.

No other visit could ever obliterate the impressions made, as I stood on the deck of a French steamer, during the winter of 1877-8, just at sunrise, and saw for the first time Constantinople, the queen of cities, beautiful, beyond all others, for situation.

Indescribably charming is the sight, and you feel that all the dreams of childhood and the visions of fairy-land or enchanted grounds are realized in a twinkling of an eye, as you gaze with steadily increasing rapture upon this old city. It stretches around on the water for miles, divided into three distinct parts by the placid and beautiful Bosphorus and the limpid Golden Horn; yet forming a beautiful and complete whole, a picture of houses, churches, old castles, and marble palaces, interspersed with the domes of mosques, gracefully tapering minarets, and dark, tall cypresses.

An intense longing comes over you to stay there always, and look upon this lovely scene; but the charm is soon broken by the rude advances of the ragged boatmen, who vie with each other in angry words for your passage to the shore. You must go, and a little boat conveys you to land.

How striking the contrast! As soon as
VOL. I, No. 4—12.

your foot touches the shore, the beauty then is in reality a vision, for all is dirt, filth, destitution, and misery. To this, you receive a most cordial welcome from the hamels (porters), guides, and beggars, the latter bid you welcome in words and gestures suited to a court, extol you for beauty of person or grace of carriage, then hold out their hands and piteously beg for "backscheese." You hasten on, along the narrow, dirty streets, forming the only sewers of the city, stepping daintily and cautiously among the refuse and dogs, and gladly breathe again the fresh air, as you stand on the bridge across the Golden Horn.

Here, awaiting the arrival of one of those little steamers plying so busily on the water beneath, what a throng meets your eye! From sunrise to sunset a living mass are crossing and recrossing this bridge; every nation, tongue, and kindred are here represented. Sellers of laces, silks, fine linen, and "antiques;" long-robed jews, some with elegant Turkish and Persian rugs hanging over their shoulders, are pushing along, crying aloud the beauty and cheapness of their merchandise; a company of Greek priests with unkempt beard, tall hats, and long gowns, saunter along in close proximity

But this is not the dear fellow
 We kissed and sent away.
 Tall as the man he calls father,
 With a man's look in his face,
 Is he who takes by the hearthstone
 The lost boy's olden place.

We miss the laugh that made music
 Wherever the lost boy went.
 This man has a smile most winsome,
 His eyes have a grave intent ;
 We know he is thinking and planning
 His way in the world of men,
 And we can not help but love him,
 But we long for our boy again.

We are proud of this manly fellow
 Who comes to take his place,
 With hints of the vanished boyhood
 In his earnest, thoughtful face.
 And yet comes back the longing
 For the boy we must henceforth miss,
 Whom we sent away from the hearthstone
 Forever with a kiss.

—*Eben F. Rexford, in Youths' Companion.*

CASTLES ON THE RHINE.

BY REV. JOHN LEYBURN, D.D.

A somewhat extended tour in Germany was not complete without seeing the Rhine. So an excursion up the river from Cologne and back again through that portion including the finest scenery was determined upon. This arrangement would enable us to see it twice. We took the steamer at the usual hour in the morning, having as fellow-passengers a large number of English and two Americans. The weather was cloudy and chilly, and of course not the most favorable for enjoying the scenery. We took our seats on the deck, and by dint of shawls and overcoats we managed to keep comfortable.

Considering the fame of the Rhine and the fact that some eighty thousand trav-

elers pass along its waters every year, it is not a little surprising that the steamers are so poor. Instead of the floating palaces of our American rivers, these are not equal to one of our fifth-rate boats—small, low, black, and with scanty provision even of the most ordinary comforts. It seems to be presumed that the fine scenery is all one cares for. A railway runs down one of the shores, but those who come sight-seeing would enjoy but little of the Rhine by flying along its banks at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour.

For about twenty miles after leaving Cologne the scenery is tame and uninteresting. It is not until we reach Bonn that we enter upon the renowned portion

of the river. In one sense, however, all of it is renowned, as the Rhine is interlinked with a long succession of most important historical events. Its memories embrace Roman conquests and defeats, chivalrous feats of feudal days, the coronation of emperors, and the battles and negotiations of more modern periods. We found along its broken shores traces of these by-gone times.

Bonn owes its celebrity chiefly to its university, comparatively a young institution, having been established as late as 1818, but nevertheless enjoying a high reputation. Among the distinguished men who have adorned its chairs, are Niebuhr and Schlegel. The university occupies the palace of the old electors of Cologne, and has a library of one hundred and fifty thousand volumes; Prince Albert was educated here.

From Bonn there is a beautiful view of Seven Mountains (*Siebenberge*), on the opposite side of the river. This is a grand group, and softened as they are by this cloudy day, their undulating outline and the intermingled shades of green, blue, and brown on their furrowed sides, have a fine effect. They are the highest and wildest mountains on the Rhine, and their picturesqueness is enhanced by the ancient towers and ruins with which they are crowned. The Drachenfels, which is one of them, is frequently ascended by tourists.

Down the Rhine, Cologne is distinctly visible; not far off is Bonn with its university and quaint towers; on every hand are castles and old ruins mingled with the mountain heights, while below are villages, farm-houses, and the gracefully flowing river. Amid the wild mountains in the rear are the ruins of the castles of the archbishops of Cologne. The ruin on the Drachenfels is the remains of a tower, all that is left of the stronghold of a bold and noble race who dwelt on the mountain in ancient times.

Immediately across the river is Rolandseck, an abrupt, precipitous rock, on which rises a broken arch, the vestige of an old baronial castle and a striking object as seen from the river. These mountains of the Rhine not only have their picturesqueness enhanced by numerous old castles, carrying back to feudal times, and the daring deeds of bold robber chiefs, but also have their interest increased by the romantic legends which have been hung around them. Rolandseck is thus invested. According to the tradition, Lord Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne, having won the heart of a beautiful maiden and made her his betrothed, went off to the wars. After anxious months the tidings came that the noble young knight had fallen on the battle-field. The heart of the loving maiden was crushed by the cruel stroke, and having nothing left to live for, she took upon her religious vows, and entered the sisterhood of the nuns in the convent on the island just beneath.

Scarcely had she done so when her lover, who had not been slain, but was alive and unhurt, returned to make her his bride. But alas! it was too late; the irrevocable vows were upon her, and she dare not, and could not if she would, retrace her steps. Two fond hearts are now broken, and Lord Roland, disconsolate, as his only resource, builds himself a castle on yonder rock, so that day and night he may at least have the satisfaction of looking down upon the walls which inclose all that he holds dear. Year after year he kept watch from his tower, until at last his eye caught the line of a funeral procession at the convent. The nuns were burying a dead sister, and that sister—his heart told him—was she who should have been his bride.

The broken arch on the mountain top is the only memorial of the touching story. Schiller, as the reader may remember, has appropriated this legend

and made it the subject of his beautiful ballad, "The Knight of Toggenburg," changing, however, the locality. The Nonnenwerth Convent is still in possession of the Ursuline nuns. It occupies a beautiful site on an island in the mid-river, embosomed in rich foliage. Napoleon, during his campaigns, was about to despoil it, but spared it in accordance with the earnest entreaties of Josephine.

The banks of the Rhine are ground too thoroughly beaten to permit the present writer's detaining the reader by attempts at description, nor did the day's ride include the most striking portion. Not far above the Drachenfels is Sinzig, a village near which tradition says Constantine saw his vision of the cross when on his way to attack Maxentius. Near Brühl, on the opposite shore, is found a sort of volcanic stone resembling the tufa at Rome. It was formerly used for making stone coffins because of its possessing the quality of absorbing the moisture of the dead body. From this circumstance they gave these coffins the name of "*sarcophagi*"—flesh-consumers.

As the afternoon advanced the cloudy, chilly weather passed off and the clear skies hung brightly over the vine-clad mountains and shining waters. Before evening we were in sight of the magnificent fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, seated in proud consciousness of its resistless strength on the lofty heights, its yellow walls illumined, and its wide-mouthed guns looking all the more grim and black under the rays of the brilliant setting sun.

At Coblenz we tarried for the night. This prosperous town is beautifully situated at the confluence of the Moselle and the Rhine. It drives a brisk trade in the celebrated wines produced in the neighborhood, and in various other products, and is a great rendezvous for travelers up and down the Rhine, across to Paris, to Frankfort, and to the neighboring fashionable watering-place, Ems. We were

too late to gain admittance into the Castle of Ehrenbreitstein, but in the morning I walked up the hill commanding much the same view with the castle, and a very charming view it is; the bright waters of the Rhine and Moselle, enlivened by a passing boat, or raft, the vine-clad shores, castellated mountains, numerous villages, the town beneath with its fortifications, towers, and bridges, and the vast frowning fortress serving as a striking culmination for this most attractive prospect.

The fortifications of Ehrenbreitstein have been constructed with immense strength, under the direction of the best military and engineering skill, and at a great cost. The fortress mounts four hundred cannon, and is capable of accommodating one hundred thousand troops, though five thousand is considered sufficient for its defense. The magazines will contain provisions for eight thousand men for ten years. The cisterns will hold water enough for three years, and there is also a well four hundred feet deep communicating with the Rhine. The steeps by which it is surrounded, its strong walls, frowning batteries, and vast extent give it a most formidable and almost sublime aspect. Byron's lines about it are no doubt familiar to the reader.

Whilst strolling around Coblenz in the morning I wandered into the public square, on one side of which stands the Church of St. Castor, remarkable for its great antiquity and for having been the place where the sons of Charlemagne met to divide his vast empire into Germany, France, and Italy. In the middle of the square is a monument erected by the French in 1812, on which is inscribed the keen Russian sarcasm so often quoted by tourists. As the French passed this way on their expedition against Russia the French prefect of this department inscribed on this monumental foun-

tain, "In memory of the campaign against Russia. Prefecture of Jules Doayan." After Napoleon's disastrous retreat, the Russians pursuing arrived here and saw the boastful French inscription, and, instead of erasing it, their commander simply and waggishly used it after the manner of passports, inscribing underneath, "Examined and approved by us, the Russian Commandant of the city of Coblenz, January 1, 1814." If the French ever have the opportunity they will either add another or wipe out one or both of those inscriptions which for years have turned the laugh on them.

Our steamboat trip was resumed after breakfast, carrying us through the choice part of the Rhine scenery, far surpassing that of the day before. The mountain sides in many places are covered to the tops with terraces supporting the vines from which the most celebrated Rhenish wines are produced, and we were scarcely ever out of sight of the ruins of old castles. In the middle ages these castles were the strongholds of chiefs little better than lawless brigands, who helped themselves to whatever they could put their hands upon, levied blackmail on whomsoever they could, and made slaughter and devastation their pastime. To such chieftains these old castles were a watchtower and a fortress, many of them strong as to natural position, and rendered almost impregnable to the means of warfare of those days by means of moat, drawbridge, portcullis, and thick, massive walls. One can almost fancy, even now, as he sails up the smiling river, that he sees the wild chieftain on his tower, and hears his bugle echoing through the mountains, as he summons his followers to arms.

Could some magic art but bring up for an hour those days and their actors, that we might look in upon one of these old castles and see it as it was—the wild, bold chieftain with his warrior band

around him ready for some deed of daring, or seated in the banquet hall, making merry over their spoils, it would be a spectacle as well worth seeing as are the charming prospects of the beautiful Rhine.

One of the choicest of the old feudal castles, Stotzenfels, built by the archbishop of Treves, and long a favorite residence with them, was bought some years since by the town of Coblenz, and presented to the then crown-prince. It was restored and fitted up at much expense, and one would think would have proved a most inviting residence, at least during the summer—its commanding position, bewitching views, wild mountain rides and walks, internal comforts and beauties, and its romantic associations, making it all that heart could wish. But somehow the royal owner did not fancy it, and made but little use of it.

Stately and romantic as is this Castle of Stotzenfels, the guide-book tells us that it was once offered for sale for seventy dollars and did not find a purchaser.

Some hard-hearted people inhabited these beautiful shores in the feudal days. On the opposite side of the river from Stotzenfels, and higher up, is the Castle of Marksburg, an unaltered specimen of a stronghold of the middle ages. It abounds in mysterious, narrow passages, curious winding stairways, dungeon-vaults hewn in the rock—one of which is a horrible pit into which the wretched prisoners were let down by a windlass as into a well—and a chamber of torture, where until recently, remained the rack which had extorted so many cries of agony from unfortunate mortals. Such relics of inhumanity show that sadly in contrast were the occupants of these castles with the unsurpassed charms by which they were surrounded. Nature was almost heavenly in its attractions; man was degraded, remorseless, and cruel. His dwelling-place was amid scenes celestial; his spirit and his deeds were diabolical.

On the same shore, not far from the town of St. Goar, is the vast Fortress of Rheinfels, the most extensive ruin on the Rhine. It was erected in the thirteenth century by a certain count who had an eye to his purse, and who managed to fill it, unmolested for a time, by levying a duty upon all passing merchandise. But as the count's gains increased his tariff became more exorbitant, until the burghers of the neighboring towns rebelled, and for fifteen months besieged him in his stronghold. Though they were not successful, their movement led to another, which resulted in despoiling the castle, and putting an end to the bandit's rich spoils. After various changes the castle was ultimately blown up by the French, and has since served only as an additional romantic ruin to decorate the scenery of the Rhine.

Tourists who have plenty of time at their command, and are disposed for a delightful excursion, can land at St. Goar, and ascending the adjacent heights enjoy some of the most picturesque sights on the river. The saint after whom the town is called was a remarkable person in his way—a holy hermit, who, if we can believe the tradition, once performed the miraculous exploit of hanging up his coat on a sunbeam. A certain St. Elizabeth, however, dimmed the glory of St. Goar's miracle, comparatively at least, by hanging out a whole washing of clothes on a sunbeam.

Not far above St. Goar is a perpendicular cliff remarkable for its echo. The German students in order to amuse themselves, here among the head men of Oberwesel, ask the echo, "Who is the burgomaster of Oberwesel?" The echo answers "Esel" (the German for ass).

It is needless to weary the reader even by the mention of the various picturesque old castles that one after another

were presented to our view as we steamed up the placid stream, each turn bringing out new candidates for our admiration. After reaching Bingen, the romantic scenery comes to an end, and the shores gradually subside into the same tame character with those below Cologne. We stopped at Bingen and spent several hours very agreeably at its pleasant hotel. The castles seem to thicken on approaching Bingen. The secret of the ruin of almost all these ancient strongholds, is that the depredations and outrages of their robber chieftains became insupportable and the League of the Rhine carried out the sentence of the Diet of the Empire, by storming and demolishing them. The robber chiefs, the Diet, and the League, perhaps, had little idea that between them, they were making an invaluable contribution to the gratification of thousands of wanderers from many lands, who annually drink delight from the fountains of beauty and romance afforded by these shores. What would the Rhine be without its ruined castles? It would still be a beautiful river, flowing between picturesque shores, but the charm of romance, one of its chief glories, would be gone.

As to the mere river and shores—the natural scenery—I must say that in my humble opinion, the Rhine does not exceed the Highlands of the Hudson. True, the picturesque region of the former is much more extended than the latter and the terraced vineyards also add to the effect of the Rhine; but after all the chief element against the Hudson in the comparison is that those grand, beautiful mountains lack the old castles with their dreamy romance.

In the afternoon of the same day we took the return boat for Cologne. The speed of the steamers in ascending the river is about ten miles an hour; in descending about fifteen. The boat

on which we then embarked was inferior to that on which we had come up, and most of the passengers were Germans. The weather was more favorable than at any time for some days past; it was a splendid afternoon, and the scenery appeared to much greater advantage under such joyous skies.

Night overtook us not long after we had passed Coblenz and sublime Ehrenbreitstein, but not until we had feasted our eyes upon the finest portion of the scenery. Though it was quite dark we still sat on deck, listening to the German jargon, inhaling their vile tobacco smoke, gazing up into the spangled vault above, watching the ever-changing outline of mountain and castle against the background of the sky, or the succession of hamlets, villages, and towns, as their sparkling lights went floating past us. Drachenfels and romantic Ro-

landseck looked solemn and sublime in their ebon mantles, while a lighted window here and there in the long walls of the Nonnenwerth Convent showed that some of the sisters were still keeping their vigils. Before eleven o'clock we could trace the massive proportions of the Cologne Cathedral, and soon after we had landed, bidding adieu to the Rhine.

"Adieu to thee again! a vain adieu!
There can be no farewell to scenes like thine;
The mind is colored by thy every hue;
And if reluctantly the eyes resign
Their cherished gaze upon thee, lovely
Rhine!
'Tis with the thankful glance of parting
praise,
More mighty spots may rise, more glaring
shine,
But none unite in one attacking maze
The brilliant, fair, and soft, the glories of old
days."

THE CANTAB.

With two spurs or one, and no great matter which,
Boots bought or boots borrowed, a whip or a switch,
Five shillings or less for the hire of his beast,
Paid part into hand; you must wait for the rest.
Thus equipt Academicus climbs up his horse,
And out they both sally, for better for worse;
His heart void of fear, and as light as a feather,
And in violent haste to go, not knowing whither.
Through the fields and the towns, see, he scampers along,
And is looked at and laughed at by old and by young,
Till, at length, overspent, and his sides smeared with blood,
Down tumbles his horse, man and all in the mud.
In a wagon or chaise will he finish his route?
O, scandalous fate! he must do it on foot!
Young gentlemen, hear! I am older than you,
The advice that I give I have proved to be true,
Wherever your journey may be, never doubt it,
The faster you ride, you're longer about it.

—*Cowper.*

OUR grand business is, not to *see* what lies dimly at a distance, but to *do* what lies clearly at hand.—*Carlyle.*

INDEX TO VOL. I.

	PAGE.
A Chapter on Rings. By Pamela McA. Cole	414
A City in Two Hemispheres. <i>Youths' Companion</i>	258
A Dream. <i>Brainard's Musical Monthly</i>	627
A Glimpse of the Bad Lands. Letters to My Nieces, No. III: by Edmund M. Vittum	471
A Grecian Musical Festival. By George Upton: <i>Brainard's Musical World</i>	303
A Little After Christmas Story. By E. G.	561
A Morning with Rosa Bonheur. Selected	445
A Royal Poet—James I. of Scotland. Washington Irving	501
A Short Story, Sad and Authentic. By Et Girard	620
A Sketch. By Mary Y. Hogan	632
A Strange Country. By Edmund M. Vittum	250
A Trip to the Moon. By Polly Cabell	609
A Trip up the St. John's. By Kenneth Campbell	235
A Useful Tree. By J. K. Bloomfield	557
A Visit to the Great Wall of China. By Miss A. E. Safford	658
A Walpurgisnight. Translated from the German of E. Vely, by H. de la Ronde	3, 78, 109
An English Maiden. By Annie E. Wilson	236
An Old-time Precursor of the Modern Reporter. By Thornton Macaulay: <i>Baldwin's Monthly</i>	451
An Oriental Wedding. <i>Philadelphia Press</i>	63
Alexander Coumoundouros. From our Athens Correspondent, F. D. K.	286
Among the Berkshires. By Henry B. Corey	365
Arthur of Brittany. Miss Yonge's Cameos of English History	131
Atolls. By Rev. T. D. Witherspoon, D. D.	273
Battle in the Laboratory. By Two School Girls: <i>Hamptonian</i>	119
Caernarvon Castle. Selected	379
Castles on the Rhine. By Rev. John Leyburn, D. D.	197
Charles Linnæus. By Halo	610
Conversation. Cowper	52
Dress and Clothes in the Thirteenth Century. <i>The Penny Magazine</i>	252
Dust Falls. By Rev. T. D. Witherspoon, D. D.	118
Earls of March. By Annie E. Wilson	562
Easter Eggs—A Legend of the Eastern Church. By Iota	701
Fall of Hungary. By Et Girard	549
Feliza. Translated from the French of Marie Lionnet, by H. de la Ronde	621, 677
First Fruits. By Rev. T. D. Witherspoon, D. D.	661
From Strength to Strength. By Alice King: <i>The Girls' Own Paper</i>	31, 67, 121, 174, 242, 288, 342, 430, 474, 550, 612
Gaspar Hauser. By Halo	538
Giotto. By Ray Montgomery	499
Glimpses of an English Song Bird. By E. P. P. Allan	217
Golden Rod. By Helen F. Moore	164
Grandmother's Random Recollections. By Mrs. Flora Byrne	308, 485
Greek Superstitions Regarding Diseases. By M. K.	640
Half an Hour in Constantinople. By Iota	161
Halloween. By Elizabeth B. Sayres	280
Harry Push on his Way Around the World. By Isabella M. Leyburn	21, 83, 136, 184, 231, 312, 367, 447, 496, 570, 695
"Ich Dien." By Annie E. Wilson	375
Into the Light. By Abby Eldredge	488, 540, 599, 667
Janie Moore's Best Christmas-Gift. By Ray Montgomery	440
John Howard Payne. Condensed from the <i>Courier-Journal</i>	127
Kenilworth Castle. <i>The Penny Magazine</i>	241
Kublai, Great Khan of the Tartars and Emperor of China. <i>Marco Polo's Travels</i>	688

INDEX.

	PAGE.
Led by a Child. <i>The Girls' Own Paper</i>	277
Leonardo da Vinci. By Ray Montgomery	672
Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L. E. L.). By Mrs. Anna W. Young	565
Letters from the Orient. By J. R. S. Sterrett, Ph. D.	89, 141
Loiterings in the Footprints of Luther. By Rev. John Leyburn, D. D.	337
Louis VII. of France. By Annie E. Wilson	73
Luther. By James Anthony Froude: <i>Eclectic Magazine</i>	380, 406
Margaret of Lancaster. By Annie E. Wilson	683
Matilda Atheling, Wife of Henry I. of England. By Annie E. Wilson	8
"Monteagle." By Rev. E. E. Bigger	593
Negro Aphorisms. <i>Century</i>	349
Old Travelers. <i>The Penny Magazine</i>	418, 507, 559, 617
Origin of the Phillipine. Translated from the German of Gustav Freytag: By E. G. K.	436
Parlez vous Francais. <i>The Girls' Own Paper</i>	189
Peeps into a Royal Family. By Annie E. Wilson	282
Raphael. By Ray Montgomery	190
Remarkable Preservation of a Bible. By Gen. Richard E. Vaughn	641
Rembrandt. By June English	253
Richard, Duke of York. By Annie E. Wilson	628
Rio de Janeiro. Rev. D. M. Hazlette	693
Saint Cloud. By M. G. Duff	193
Saunterings about Monticello. By William T. Price	529
Signs and Omens. By Helen F. Moore	421
Sir Edward Landseer. From Miss Thackeray's Sketch: <i>Cornhill Magazine (Littell)</i>	105
Swallows' Nests. By E. G.	439
Tasso. <i>The Penny Magazine</i>	373
Teunyson's Dream of Fair Women. By Mrs. Alice Harris Smith	634
The Early Female Sculptors. By Stereo	114
The Eastern Bazar. <i>Palia Chronia</i>	663
The Emperor of China. From an English Paper published in China	638
The Esthetic Craze. By Cheveux Gris	403
The Frog King. By Elizabeth B. Sayres	248
The Frontier of To-day. Letters to My Nieces, No. II: Edmund M. Vittum	427
The Girl at Number Ten. By Rose Hartwick Thorpe	317
The Homeless Poet. By Isabella M. Leyburn	49
The Host of Sunny Side. By Annie E. Wilson	26
The Mountain Top. An Allegory: <i>The Girls' Own Paper</i>	16
The Narrowest House in the World. <i>New York Evening Post</i>	191
The Ocklawaha. or "Crooked Water." By Kenneth Campbell	481
The Origin of Great Men. From Samuel Smiles: <i>Self Help</i>	295
The Prize Story. By Iota	465
The Rival Physicians. By Miss Anna Dick	357
The Seventh Daughter. By Benjamin Blythe	223
The Toilet of the Fly. Selected	182
The Truant. Washington Irving	28
Three German Duels. By F. P. V.	604
Three Scottish Princes. By Annie E. Wilson	171
Visit to Old South Church. By Fred. Myron Colby: <i>Our World</i>	181
Vision of Hellas. Translated from the Greek of Miss A. G. Pappadopoulos, by Rev. W. Andrews, D. D., Canon of Peterborough, England	350
Volcano in Iceland. <i>The Penny Magazine</i>	598
Wedding Presents in China. By Belle S. Lockett	311
Wild Flowers of Montana. <i>Century</i>	192
Will's Sister. By Sophie May	534
Woman and the Bible. By Rev. Geo. L. Leyburn	545
Woman's Work. By Mrs. Marion McBride, of the <i>Boston Post</i>	355, 494
Women Here and There. By Rev. Geo. L. Leyburn	256
Wyckliffe. By Iota	310

INDEX.

POETRY.

A Bird's Song. By May M. Anderson	341
April. By General W. O. Butler	657
Calling the Cows. By May M. Anderson	107
Celebrities. By Anna S. Reed	276
Change. By Mrs. M. J. Smith	231
For the Love of God. By Margaret J. Preston	439
Girlhood. Selected	405
Grandmother's Love Letters	685
Greenway Court. By Margaret J. Preston	115
Guess. By Mrs. Georgianna Lee	702
Heart's Ease. By Ingomar	480
Home, Sweet Home	130
Jesse and Colin. Crabbe	54
Let Your Love be Spoken. By Kenneth Campbell	285
Lost, a Boy. By Eben E. Rexford: <i>Youth's Companion</i>	196
Maid of Isla. <i>Surf and Wave</i>	312
Meeting at Night. <i>Surf and Wave</i>	240
Milton's Last Poem. A mistake—not by Milton	603
My Resting Place. By Mrs. M. J. Smith	348
My Rights. Susan Coolidge	548
October. By Rose Hartwick Thorpe	273
Omar Pasha and the Two Arab Girls. By J. M. Tydings	299
Over and Over Again. Selected	77
Sampson. Chaucer	372
Sea-Shell. Landor, Wordsworth, Byron	30
Sir Henry's Cat. By Mrs. Lucy Randolph Fleming	675
Six Years Old. By May M. Anderson	558
Some Day. By May M. Anderson	228
Song to the Birds. By K. C.	493
Song of the Lighthouse Girl. By Sigma	611
Sunset Pictures. By Kenneth Campbell	691
The Cantab. Cowper	202
The Child and the Bird. By J. McD. G.	15
The December Twilights. Letters to My Nieces No. IV: Edmund M. Vittum	596
The Deserted Garden. Mrs. Browning	220
The Isles of Greece. Byron	140
The Kept Promise. By Margaret J. Preston	294
The New Eva. From the German. By G. T. Berg	401
The Raindrop's Fate. By Margaret J. Preston	7
The Rosy Vandal. Bret Harle: Selected	183
The Sea. By Barry Cornwall: <i>Surf and Wave</i>	163
The Snail. Cowper	51
The Soul's Expression. Mrs. Browning	147
The Young Ladies' New Year's Toilet. Selected	470
To-morrow. By H. J. Stockard	465
"To Present You Faultless." By Mrs. Herrick Johnson	169
Under the Gas. By Merle Murrie	639
Winter. Cowper	529

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

Home Sunlight	42, 97, 151, 207, 262, 325, 387, 456, 511, 575, 642, 703
Reading Club	40, 96, 149, 205, 259, 323, 386, 454, 518, 579, 645, 706
Book Notices. Literary Notes	97, 150, 206, 260, 324, 455, 520, 581, 646, 707
Scrap Book	44, 99, 153, 209, 264, 326, 390, 457, 521, 582, 647, 708
Glimpses Into Nature. Brief Notes on Flowers, Birds, and Insects. By M. P. P. H.	*465, 327, 392, 584, 649
Bits of Science	101, 155, 211, 329, 394, 459, 522, 586, 710
Graphicon	37, 94, 148, 203, 267, 331, 395, 461, 523, 588, 652, 712
Current History	45, 102, 156, 212, 269, 333, 397, 463, 525, 590, 654, 714

Should read *465, 267, 269.