



John G. Saxe.

MASTERS OF ART AND LITERATURE.

Seventh Article.

JOHN G. SAXE.



EVERY one is familiar with Mr. Saxe as the Wit and Poet, but all do not know him as a Man. In introducing his face to our Gallery of "Masters," we have the ceremony to perform of introduction to the Man-Poet, and it is a genial

one, pleasing, we know, to readers as well as to the editor.

JOHN GODFREY SAXE is a native of Vermont, being born in Highgate, Franklin County, June 2d, 1816. His father, Hon. Peter Saxe, was farmer and merchant, dignifying both callings. All his

four sons were duly installed into positions behind the counter; but John, showing so little inclination for "the trade," was allowed his choice, and entered the Franklin County Grammar School, at St. Albans, in 1833. Remaining there two years, he was matriculated at the Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn., and there pursued his freshman course, returning, to complete his studies, to his own State, graduating at Middlebury College in 1839. The three years following were devoted to the law. He entered upon the practice of that profession in St. Albans—having married, in the meantime, one of the fairest daughters of his mountain State.

The leisure hours of several years were devoted closely to *belles lettres* studies, which, indeed, from his boyhood had ever been his companion books. He reviewed and extended his acquaintance with the classics, and also familiarized himself with several modern languages. It would seem that this mental service were enough for

even his strong constitution, but we find him coining his inimitable verses at the same time. It was in September, 1844, that the "Ballad of the Briefless Barrister" was first published, in the Knickerbocker Magazine. Its advent we all well remember. Newspapers, religious and secular, from Maine to Texas, adopted it—it became a public property—found its way into School "Speakers," and may now be pronounced one of the best "stock" (to use theatrical parlance) pieces in the literature of this country and of Great Britain, taking rank with Hood's best creations. It is unnecessary to say the author was not the "briefless" one, for his practice was always good—he prospered in his profession.

In 1845 Mr. Saxe was elected poet for the Associate Alumni of Middlebury College, and wrote "Progress—a Satire," which was delivered before the Society in July, 1846, and soon after was published in pamphlet form, by John Allen, of New-York. The reputation of this production of his pen was immediately won—it had a large circulation, and, generally, was conceded to be the best thing of its kind in American letters. Dr. Rufus W. Griswold said of it: "In skillful felicities of language and rhythm, general, clear and sharp expression, and alternating touches of playful wit and sound sense, there is nothing so long that is so well sustained in the one hundred and one books of American satire." Since then, we have had Lowell's truly successful "Fable for Cities," besides several other *attempts* at satirical compositions by well known authors, but "Progress" is still regarded as second to no satire in our literature.

In 1847 the wit produced his "Rape of the Lock," and in 1848 his "Proud Miss McBride." Both of these productions excited more laughter for their rollicking humor, their exquisitely conceived puns and pungent philosophy, than any poems which have appeared since "Hudibras"—Hood's "Miss Kilmansegg" not excepted, the metre of which Mr. Saxe adopted in "The Proud Miss McBride." "The Rhyme of the Ra!," soon followed the last named. If a poem is to be regarded worthy in proportion to the parodies it calls forth, then is the "Rhyme" one of the greatest of all, for it has had the honor of innumerable travesties and imitations, and *good* parodies. This may be said of several of his briefer poems.

In 1850, Ticknor & Co., of Boston,

gave the first regularly collected edition of his works to the public. Some idea of the popularity of the author may be had from the statement of the fact that, up to this time, the volume has passed to its *eleventh* edition, with fair prospect of its running up into the twenties. Additions have been occasionally made to the contents of the volume, giving to each successive issue a new interest. When it shall embrace the poems "New England," "The Press," and the "Money King," it will form a large book, containing as much laughter as any ordinary binding may hold.

In 1850 Mr. Saxe removed to Burlington, one of the most beautiful of New England towns, purchasing the *Sentinel* newspaper, which he conducted for five years with marked success. During that period he was elected U. S. Attorney, and upon retiring from that office, was named Deputy Collector of Customs, an appointment which he resigned several months since.

Of late years the popularity of Mr. Saxe has brought its attendant honors, of being invited to deliver College Anniversary poems, and to read poems before literary societies and communities. He had, consequently, to do one of two things, viz.: to give up his editorial and legal labors, or abandon the idea of publicly delivering poems and addresses. He wisely chose to live by his Wit, and now makes "Lecturing" his sole vocation. The poems "New England," "The Press," and the "Money King" were prepared for this use, and, consequently, are not in print. They are all unctuous with the riches of his mature mind, and have served the reputation of their author well. During the "season" just past, we learn that Mr. Saxe has delivered *ninety* "lectures"—a greater number of audiences to address in one season than has been placed, we believe, on the "Call-roll" of any other of our most popular lecturers. Such appreciation has the American public of the humorous side of life.

A new edition of our author's Poems, we understand, is arranging. It will include *all* the poet's hitherto productions, and will, therefore, be complete, and prove very acceptable. With age the poet grows more earnest—his poems less satirical and more humorous. More feeling, too, manifests itself in his late work. The mere wit is apt to be cold, with little sympathy for his victim—the humorist, on the

contrary, is supposed to be possessed of a fine sense of respect for others, seeking to please by his figures, rather than to cut with his sharper tongue. Mr. Saxe is too heartily good-natured, too much of a gentleman, to give pain; and we find, as he advances in years, and extends his acquaintance with mankind, that he grows more humanitarian and genial. The hitherto editions of his works have contained, singular as it may seem, no real *love* poem, if we except one Anacreontic. The new edition promises to make amends through a strong infusion of the romance and passion of life. And further: we learn that the author is now engaged upon a new work, for his next season's use. It will be entitled "Love"—a theme at once suggestive of multitudinous good things, when coming from the pen of one who knows so much of the lights and shades of the passion in all its manifestations.

We may be permitted to quote the following tribute to Mr. Saxe, from the pen of Anson G. Chester, Esq., editor of the "Syracuse Journal," as being as just in its generous appreciation as it is beautiful in its utterance:

"The world is not disposed to give a man credit for more than one thing at a time. Bryant is known as the poet rather than the publisher. There are plenty of people who are not aware that Longfellow was, for years, one of the most popular and successful professors of Harvard College. Dr. Hitchcock writes and preaches excellent sermons, but fame has covered them with geological strata—and when Percival died, the world mourned the poet and not the geologist.

"John G. Saxe supports, in the motley ranks of life the title of 'the witty poet'—a title which was long since awarded him by acclamation, and a title which, unlike hosts of others, is richly deserved. He is, indeed, occasionally spoken of as the 'editor of the Burlington Sentinel,' but he might have edited that hebdomadal for a century without having been suspected, by nine people out of ten, of 'having a finger in its pie,' or its leaders. Saxe is known to the public as 'the witty poet,' and the title is a barnacle that will cling to his anatomical 'timbers' until they are shivered by the bomb of death—a missile that makes no noise when it explodes. But like every other son of genius, Saxe lives an inner life, of which the world knows but little, and which we beg leave to uncurtain, so that those who

admire and love the poet may be constrained to admire and love the man.

"Saxe is a conversationalist—a word that carries its own superlative with it. As such we have rarely met his peer—never his superior. He brings to bear upon his forte of conversation the powerful artillery of a comprehensive intelligence, an opulent fancy, the keenest wit, the readiest repartee; and possesses that faculty of successfully adapting himself to a trivial or wrestling with a lofty subject, the envy of which is as common as its lack. His language is ever fresh and piquant—never 'stale and unprofitable.' He talks as easy as a brook flows—and, like the brook, the wide margin of his conversations are beautified by the violets and clover blossoms of simple and elegant rhetoric. One of the secrets of his power in this respect exists in the fact that Saxe is a thorough scholar. The classics are his playthings. He remembers what he has studied, and can quote the knottiest Greek sentences with no more trouble than he expends in the act of respiration. He knows every spear of grass in the field of belles lettres. Metaphysics are never a dose to him—and his love for the natural sciences is almost unnatural. He is a well informed man—to adopt a conventional phrase, which really means more than it seems to mean—able to cope with the professor, the divine, the savan, and sure to 'hold his own' with the best of them. His power is an educated power—alloyed to genius of no ordinary character, and controlled by the strongest good sense, the most refined taste, and the nicest sense of propriety. He makes no show of his learning; he never attempts to 'air his vocabulary;' but it is impossible for him to converse at all without evincing the qualities which we have here set down to his credit.

Saxe possesses the attribute of geniality to a remarkable extent. The secret of this possession lies in his own heart. That heart is a gushing fountain and not an Artesian well. Its emotions flow forth spontaneously—because they must—they are not drawn up in buckets. He is not soured by care or suffering. Through them all—and he has his had his full share—he has preserved an amiability, a feeling of fraternity, that beams from his honest face like a morning sun. He loves and hates most cordially, loves the good, the beautiful and true—and hates their opposites. He is perfectly familiar with the

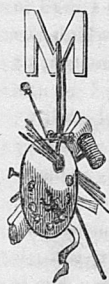
acids of sarcasm, but he never employs them—upon the vitriol-thrower's principle—to gratify any private pique or animosity. His wit is Attic—it never grovels in the basement. It is ever ready to flow—and of its flow he himself is unconscious.

Readiness is one of Saxe's prominent characteristics. Tax him as you will, you will always find him equal to the emergency. As a pretty instance of this quality, let us mention the fact that when he was last in this city, and just as he was preparing to leave, a literary gentleman—one of his warmest admirers—begged his autograph. Saxe instantly seized a pen—literally "the pen of a ready writer"—and dashed off the following impromptu:

My autograph! 'tis pleasant to reflect—
Although the thought may cost a single sigh—
That what a banker would with scorn reject,
Should have a value in a scholar's eye!

The career of John G. Saxe, marked though it has been by glorious achievements and signal honors, has but fairly begun. If kind heaven continues his life and health, his future will be lit by the rays of stars that the world has not yet discovered, and beautified by flowers whose germs have not yet sprouted. Fun does not hold its courts in vain—and it is no mean honor to be its prime minister.

ARTHUR F. TAIT.



MR. TAIT, one of our most promising and successful artists, in the field of hunting scenes and game pieces, is of English parentage, being born at Livsey Hall, near Liverpool, on the 5th of August, 1819. At the age of fifteen years he entered the house of Agnew & Ganetti, Repository of Arts.

It was here his tastes for his present profession were developed, though no time was offered for study, his active services in the store being required from 8 A. M. to 8 P. M. So strong was the impulse within him to pursue his art, that an arrangement was made with the janitor of the Royal Institution, by which he was admitted at three o'clock in the morning to that institution, where every facility was afforded him for the prosecution of his studies. Having attained considerable knowledge in drawing, he threw up his place in the store, and



Arthur F. Tait.

set up as teacher of drawing, in connection with lithography. His experiences in this field only served to confirm his artistic tastes. He fully resolved to pursue art as his profession and lost no opportunity for study in the studio and field. The "country" of England, barred and double-barred as it is against all "intruders," afforded few facilities for field experience. This determined the artist to make the United States of America his place of residence; and he accordingly came hither in 1850, opening his studio in New-York, where he has since remained.

His bird pieces and hunting scenes soon brought him to the notice of the shrewd picture-dealers, who so well know what is popular as well as good. His first work was sold to Mr. John Williams, of the firm of Williams & Stevens. Through the kind offices of Mr. Williams, the artist was introduced successfully to the public. Goupil & Co. made an early purchase of the "Return from the Woods," which they

had engraved in Paris. It was a very popular and profitable engraving, and served very much to advance Mr. Tait in the appreciation of the lovers of art in this country, where there are *very few* artists who have worked with success in field and game pieces. Two prairie trapper scenes were lithographed by Currier, which proved highly successful to the publisher, and induced the issue of a series—all of which had a large sale.

In 1852 Mr. Tait made the acquaintance of Mr. John Osborn, of New-York, a gentleman of liberal means and fine taste. In him the artist found a generous patron, some of his largest and most powerful pictures being purchased by Mr. Osborn. Among them the large work, "Looking for the Trail," "Still Hunting on the First Snow," "A Slight Chance," &c. These works, exhibited at the Annual Exhibitions of the Academy of Design, attracted considerable notice, and, what is strange, the critics of the press were almost general in