

**THE ECHO CLUB, AND
OTHER LITERARY
DIVERSIONS**

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The echo club, and other literary diversions by Bayard Taylor

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BAYARD TAYLOR

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BY

BAYARD TAYLOR.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	v
NIGHT THE FIRST MORRIS, FOX, BROWNING.	11
NIGHT THE SECOND MRS. SIGOURNEY, KEATS, SWINBURNE, EMERSON, STEDMAN.	34
NIGHT THE THIRD HARRY CORNWALL, WHITTIER, ROSSETTI, ALDRICH.	52
NIGHT THE FOURTH BRYANT, HOLMES, WILLIS, <u>TENNYSON.</u>	72
NIGHT THE FIFTH TUCKERMAN, LONGFELLOW, STODDARD, MRS. STODDARD.	93
NIGHT THE SIXTH LOWELL, BAYARD TAYLOR, MRS. BROWNING, BAKER.	113
NIGHT THE SEVENTH JEAN INGELOW, BUCHANAN READ, JULIA WARD HOWE, PIATT, WILLIAM WINTER, MRS. PIATT.	132

NIGHT THE EIGHTH	150
WALT WHITMAN, BRET HARTE, JOHN HAY, JOAQUIN MILLER.	
THE BATTLE OF THE BARDS	168
A REVIEW	175
PARADISE DISCOVERED	186



INTRODUCTION.

THE papers which make up this volume are sufficiently described by its title. They are literary "Diversions," — the product of a good many random hours of thoughtless (or, at least, only half-thoughtful) recreation and amusement, — nothing else. More than as many burlesque imitations of authors, living or dead, as are here contained, had been written before any thought of publication was suggested. The fact that there was no such original design requires that the form in which the diversions are now presented should be explained to the reader.

The habit originated, very much as it is described in the "First Evening," at least twenty years ago, in a small private circle. Three or four young authors found not only amusement, but an agreeable relaxation from their graver tasks, in drawing names and also subjects as from a lottery-wheel, and improvising imitations of older and more renowned poets. Nothing was further from their minds than ridicule, or even incidental disparagement, of the

latter, many of whom were not only recognized, but genuinely revered, by all. One form of intellectual diversion gradually led to another: the parodies alternated with the filling up of end-rhymes (usually of the most difficult and incongruous character), with the writing of double or concealed acrostics, spurious quotations from various languages, and whatever else could be devised by the ingenuity of the company. I may mention that some years before Mr. Lewis Carroll delighted all lovers of nonsense with his ballad of "The Jabberwock," we tried precisely the same experiment of introducing invented words. The following four lines may serve as a specimen of one attempt:—

"Smitten by harsh, transectie thuds of shame,
My squelgence iades: I mogrify my blame:
The lupkin world, that leaves me yole and blunt,
Denies my affligance with looks askant!"

Of course, nothing further than amusing nonsense was ever contemplated. A few of the imitations found their way into print, but they were comparatively unnoticed in the flood of burlesque with which the public was then supplied from many other quarters. As a participant, for several years, in a variety of fun which was certainly harmless so long as it remained private, I was of the opinion that very little could be made public without some accompanying explanation. The idea of setting the imitations in a framework of dialogue which should represent various forms of literary

taste and opinion seemed, first, to make the publication possible. But when I came to examine the scattered leaves with a view to this end, I was at once struck with their inadequacy to the purpose of comical illustration. Removed from the genial atmosphere in which they had spontaneously grown, many of them seemed withered and insipid. Many others were simply parodies of particular poems, instead of being burlesque reproductions of an author's manner and diction. The plan demanded that they should be rewritten, in consonance with the governing conception of the work, as a whole. This was accordingly done; and not more than three or four of the following poems belong to the original private "diversions."

There is scarcely a more hazardous experiment which an author can make, than to attempt to draw amusement from the intellectual characteristics of his contemporaries. If I had not been firmly convinced that the absence of any conscious unfriendliness on my part *must* make itself evident to many who were old and honored friends, I never should have dared it. In addition to this, I ventured on a number of private tests, and was further assured by finding that the subject of each travesty accepted his share with the greatest good-nature. I have yet to learn that the publication has given other than a very slight momentary annoyance, and that only in one or two cases. It is doubtful whether the same experiment could be made in any of the other arts, with a sim-