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A MONTHLY MAGAZINE


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CONTENTS:

Frontispiece. Pagoda of Peking.

America. A Poem. The Hon. Charles Carroll Bonney, President of the World's Fair Auxiliary Congresses of 1893 705

An Evening with the Spiritualists. Lieut.-Col. W. H. Gardner, U. S. A. Retired 721

The Tai- ping Rebellion. (Concluded.) The Decline of Hung Siu-tsuen's Cause.—The Ever-Victorious Force and the Suppression of the Rebellion. With Pictures of Scenes in Peking, and of instruments in the Peking Observatory. From S. Wells Williams's Report 740

Deluge Legends of the American Indians. With Illustration. Editor 758

Judge Waite on the Early History of Christianity 761

The Hon. Charles Carroll Bonney. With Pen and Ink Drawing by Eduard Biedermann 763

Tolstoi on India 765

The Maha Bodhi Society of India 766

Book Reviews and Notes 767

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## INDEX OF VOLUME XV.

### MAIN CONTENTS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance, No Protectorate, but an.</td>
<td>Paul Carus</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America. A Poem.</td>
<td>Charles Carroll Bonney</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anarchism.</td>
<td>Paul Carus</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals in Italy, Cruelty to.</td>
<td>D. Holland Stubbs</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals in the Roman Church, The Treatment of.</td>
<td>L. Przybylski</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anubis, Seth, and Christ.</td>
<td>Paul Carus</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostles of Annihilation.</td>
<td>Felix L. Oswald</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiration. A Sonnet.</td>
<td>F. J. P.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auld, Georgie. The Judges of Jesus, Jews or Gentiles? With Editorial Reply.</td>
<td></td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Synedrium or Pretorium?</td>
<td></td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blennerhassett, Lady. F. Max Müller and the Religious Parliament</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonney, The Hon. Charles Carroll. The Need of a Civil Service Academy</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Province of Government.</td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— International Citizenship.</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Scientific Faith.</td>
<td></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— If the American People Would Have Free Government Endure.</td>
<td></td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— A Place for the Ex-Presidents of the United States</td>
<td></td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Religious Parliament Idea.</td>
<td></td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— America. A Poem.</td>
<td></td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boswell, R. Bruce. The Second Advent and the Judgment Day.</td>
<td></td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brushwork, and Inventional Drawing.</td>
<td>Thomas J. McCormack</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddha Relics.</td>
<td>William Clanton Peppe</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddha's Discourse on the End of the World.</td>
<td>Albert J. Edmunds</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunsen, Robert William. Biographical Sketch.</td>
<td>T. J. McCormack</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma, The Temples and Archaeological Treasures of.</td>
<td>Albert Grünwedel</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Callery and Yvan. Emperor Tao-Kwang and the Opium War.</td>
<td></td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carneri, the Ethicist of Darwinism.</td>
<td>Paul Carus</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carus, Dr. Paul. On Greek Religion and Mythology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Anubis, Seth, and Christ.</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— No Protectorate, but an Alliance.</td>
<td></td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Old Testament Scriptures as They Appear in the Light of Scientific Enquiry.</td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Crown of Thorns.</td>
<td></td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Origins of Christianity.</td>
<td></td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Crisis in Great Britain.</td>
<td></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Seven, The Sacred Number.</td>
<td></td>
<td>335, 412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— The Babylonian and Hebrew Views of Man's Fate After Death.</td>
<td></td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Prajñā-pāramitā. History of the Statue, now in the Royal Museum of Leyden.</td>
<td></td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Moncure D. Conway, a Militant Missionary of Liberalism.</td>
<td></td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Prof. Tiele on Babylonian Myths.</td>
<td></td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Count Gobineau.</td>
<td></td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Duplicate the Naval Academy.</td>
<td></td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Electricity and Phosphorescence in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Animal World. 540.—The Orpheus Mosaic. 566.—William McKinley.
577.—Anarchism. 579.—The Chinese Problem. 608.—Carneri, the Eth-
icist of Darwinism. 641.—Francesco Crispi. 645.—Deluge Legends of
the American Indians. 758.
Chinese Characteristics. R. Morrison ............................................... 551
Chinese Problem, The. Paul Carus .................................................. 608
Christianity, The Origins of. Paul Carus ....................................... 235
Civil Service Academy, The Need of a. Charles Carroll Bonney .......... 106
Columbus and Toscanelli. Theodore Stanton ..................................... 638
Conway, Moncure D., a Militant Missionary of Liberalism. Paul Carus .. 374
Conway, Dr. Moncure D. Ethical Culture Versus Ethical Cult. 98.—Our
Golden-Rule Treaty with China, and Our Missionaries ....................... 321
Crisis in China as Seen by a Chinaman, The. Tan Tek Soon ................ 118
Crisis in Great Britain, The. Paul Carus ......................................... 301
Crispi, Francesco. Paul Carus ....................................................... 645
Crispi, Personal Recollections of. Signor Raqueni ............................ 647
Critical, Reflective Period, The. Atherton Blight .............................. 255
Crown of Thorns, The. Paul Carus .................................................. 193
Deluge Legends of the American Indians. Paul Carus ......................... 758
Deuteronomy, The Date of. With Editorial Reply. H. Pereira Mendes ... 438
Devil, A Chief's View of the. J. W. McEachren ................................. 433
Edmunds, Albert J. Gospel Parallels from Pali Texts. 43.—Buddha's Dis-
course on the End of the World; or, the Sermon on the Seven Suns. 428.
Electricity and Phosphorescence in the Animal World. Paul Carus ....... 540
Emmengahbowk. The Rev. J. J. An Indian Chieftain on the Devil .......... 376
Emperor Tao-Kwang and the Opium War. MM. Callery and Yvan .......... 556
Ethical Culture Versus Ethical Cult. Moncure D. Conway .................... 98
Ethical Cult, The Value of. Comment on Moncure D. Conway's Article,
"Ethical Culture versus Ethical Cult." J. Cleveland Hall .................... 150
Exposition and the Passion-Play, The. J. S. Stuart-Glennie ................ 480
Ex-Presidents of the United States, A Place for the. Charles Carroll Bonney. 449
Fitzpatrick, F. W. Rome. The Secular Policy of the Papacy ................. 399
F. J. P. Aspiration. A Sonnet ...................................................... 60
Free Government, If the American People Would Have, Endure. Charles
Carroll Bonney ........................................................................... 341
Gardner, Lt.-Col. W. H. An Evening with the Spiritualists ................ 721
Genesis, The Legends of. Hermann Gunkel ....................................... 650
Gifford Lectures, The. John Sandison ............................................. 176
Gobineau, Count. Paul Carus ......................................................... 440
Gobineau. Paul Topinard .................................................................. 510
Golden-Rule Treaty with China, and Our Missionaries, Our. M. D. Conway. 321
Gospel Parallels from Pali Texts. Albert J. Edmunds ......................... 43
Government, The Province of. Charles Carroll Bonney ....................... 129
Greek Religion and Mythology, On. Paul Carus ................................ 1
Grotius Celebration at Delft, July 4, 1899, The. Thomas J. McCormack . 181
Gründwedel, Dr. Albert. The Temples and Archaeological Treasures of Burma 464
Gunkel, Dr. Hermann. The Legends of Genesis ................................... 650
Hall, J. Cleveland. The Value of Ethical Cult. Comment on Dr. Moncure
D. Conway's Article, "Ethical Culture Versus Ethical Cult" ................. 150
Hebrew Conception of Animals. Countess Martinengo ....................... 110
INDEX.

Henning, Dr. Charles L.  Anarchism Among Primitive Peoples........ 702
Highton, Henry E.  The Judges of Jesus, Again. With Editorial Comment.. 507
Holy Saint Josaphat of India, The.  Andrew D. White................ 284
Howther, Prof. Ira W.  Some Characteristics of Professor Huxley..... 517
Huxley, Some Characteristics of Professor.  Ira W. Howther........... 517
Indian Chieftain on the Devil, An.  J. J. Emmengahbrowk. .......... 376
International Citizenship.  Charles Carroll Bonney............... 218
Jesus, The Judges of, Again. With Editorial Comment.  Henry E. Highton 507
Judges of Jesus, Jews or Gentiles?  George Auld. With Editorial Reply.. 374
Le Conte, Joseph.  Obituary Notice.  T. J. McCormack................ 498
Lindsey, Edward.  St. Josaphat of India. With Editorial Comment..... 442
Manchu Dynasty, The Legend of the Origin of the.  R. Morrison........ 624
Man's Fate After Death, The Babylonian and Hebrew Views of.  Paul Carus 346
Martinengo, The Countess.  The Hebrew Conception of Animals. 110.—
Moslem and Catholic Conceptions of Animals. 192.
Mendes, Dr. H. Pereira.  The Date of Deuteronomy. With Editorial Reply 438
McCormack, Thomas J.  Brushwork, and Inventional Drawing. 30.—The
Hugo Grotius Celebration at Delft, July 4, 1899. 181.—Joseph Le Conte,
Obituary Notice.  498.—Robert Wilhelm Bunsen.  627.
McEachren, J. W.  A Chief's View of the Devil........................ 433
McKinley, William.  Paul Carus.................................. 577
Morrison, The Rev. R.  Chinese Characteristics. 551.—The Legend of the
Origin of the Manchu Dynasty. 624.
Mosaic in Jerusalem, A Recently-Discovered.  Conrad Schick.......... 563
Moslem and Catholic Conceptions of Animals. The Countess Martinengo.. 192
Müller, F. Max, and the Religious Parliament. Lady Blennerhassett.... 115
Mystères Upon Subsequent Religious Thought, Effect of the.  Charles James
Wood .................................................. 23
Naval Academy, Duplicate the.  Paul Carus .......................... 495
Parker............................................... 46
Old Testament Scriptures as They Appear in the Light of Scientific Enquiry.
Paul Carus.......................................... 156
Orpheus Mosaic, The.  Paul Carus.................................. 566
Oswald, Dr. Felix L.  Apostles of Annihilation........................ 694
Parker, W. Thornton, M. D.  The Religious Character of the North Ameri-
can Indians. 46.—The Muskee-Kee Wi-ni-nee. 290.
Peppe, William Clanton.  Buddha Relics .............................. 241
Pope Leo XIII. on Protestants.  A Roman Catholic.................... 510
Prajñāpāramitā.  History of the Statue, now in the Royal Museum of Leyden.
Paul Carus.......................................... 367
Primitive Peoples, Anarchism Among.  Charles L. Henning............ 702
Przybylski, L.  The Treatment of Animals in the Roman Church....... 253
Raqueni, Signor.  Personal Recollections of Crispi.................... 647
Roman Catholic, A.  Pope Leo XIII. on Protestants.................. 510
Rome.  The Secular Policy of the Papacy.  F. W. Fitzpatrick......... 399
Sacred Fire Among the Slavic Races of the Balkan, The.  Vl. Titelbach... 143
Salter, William M.  What is Life? A Sunday Address............... 596
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Details</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budge, E. A. Wallace</td>
<td>The Book of the Dead</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullock, Dr. Charles J.</td>
<td>Monetary History of the United States</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmese Temples</td>
<td></td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheyne, The Rev. T. K.</td>
<td>Encyclopaedia Biblia</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheyney, Prof. Edward P.</td>
<td>Introduction to the Industrial and Social History of England</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Announcement of a Series of Articles on</td>
<td>568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conn, Prof. H. W.</td>
<td>The Method of Evolution</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney, Leonard</td>
<td>The Working Constitution of the United Kingdom</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossfield, Henry</td>
<td>England and Islam</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das freie Wort</td>
<td></td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah, Die</td>
<td></td>
<td>767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharma, The Light of</td>
<td></td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durand (De Gros), J.-P.</td>
<td>Variétés philosophiques</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Turkestan, Ancient Civilisation in</td>
<td></td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Annual Report of U. S. Commissioner of</td>
<td></td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encyclopaedia Biblia</td>
<td></td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encyclopedia, The New Jewish</td>
<td></td>
<td>569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisher, Prof. Irving</td>
<td>Elements of Geometry</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiske, Prof. John</td>
<td>Obituary Notice</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foucher, A.</td>
<td>Étude sur l'iconographie bouddhique de l'Inde</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freethought Institute for London, A.</td>
<td></td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An Evening with the Spiritualists.</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garner, James Wilford</td>
<td>Reconstruction in Mississippi</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerland, Dr. E.</td>
<td>History of Physical Experimentation</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldman's Arithmachine</td>
<td></td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwin, Dr. William Watson</td>
<td>Demosthenes's Oration on the Crown</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham, Charles T.</td>
<td>Ethics of the Great French Rationalists</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray Dr. Elisha</td>
<td>Nature's Miracles, or Familiar Talks on Science</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green, Prof. A. H.</td>
<td>The Birth and Growth of Worlds</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groszmann, Dr. Maximilian P. E.</td>
<td>Founder of School for Abnormal Children</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grünwedel, Dr. Albert</td>
<td>Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halévy, Dr. Élie</td>
<td>La Jeunesse de Bentham. 576.—L'Évolution de la Doctrine Utilitaire de 1789 a 1815</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Frank H.</td>
<td>The Arithmetic Primer</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, George</td>
<td>The Common Sense of Commercial Arithmetic</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart, Prof. Albert Bushnell</td>
<td>American History Told by Contemporaries</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Summer School of Theology</td>
<td></td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedeler, G.</td>
<td>List of Private Libraries. Second Part.</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson, John B., Jr.</td>
<td>American Diplomatic Questions</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofer, Mari Ruef</td>
<td>Children's Singing Games, Old and New</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hume, David</td>
<td>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Globe Co.</td>
<td>Chart of the Hemispheres</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Psychological Institute</td>
<td></td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janes, Dr. Lewis G.</td>
<td>Obituary Notice</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet, Paul</td>
<td>Philosophical Works of Leibnitz</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Chautauqua Society</td>
<td>Fifth Summer Assembly</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joly, Henri</td>
<td>Malébranche</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose, Arthur W.</td>
<td>Australasia, the Commonwealth and New Zealand</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keller Souvenir, Helen</td>
<td></td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilbourn, Dr. John Kenyon</td>
<td>Faiths of Famous Men</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krause, Dr. Ernst</td>
<td>Werden und Vergehen</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasswitz, Dr. Kurd</td>
<td>Wirklichkeiten</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonard, William A.</td>
<td>The New Story of the Bible</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian of Congress</td>
<td>Request for Nos. 35 and 46, Vol V., of The Open Court, to complete file</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Index</td>
<td>for 1900, The American</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loti, Pierre</td>
<td>The Story of a Child</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha Bodhi Society</td>
<td>India, The</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Published by the Anthropological Institute</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, Abbé Jules</td>
<td>St. Augustin</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Müller Memorial</td>
<td>Fund, The</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMurry, Prof. F. M.</td>
<td>Geographies</td>
<td>62, 635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McVey, Dr. Frank L.</td>
<td>The Government of Minnesota</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortillet, G. and A. de</td>
<td>Le préhistorique, origine et antiquité de l'homme</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray, D. A.</td>
<td>Atoms and Energies</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelloutier, Fernand and Maurice</td>
<td>La vie ouvrière en France</td>
<td>767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Père Hyacinthe in the Orient</td>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry, Prof. J.</td>
<td>Spinning Tops</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips, Prof. Andrew W.</td>
<td>Elements of Geometry</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology, Proceedings</td>
<td>of the Fourth International Congress of</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-Physical Laboratory</td>
<td>in the Department of the Interior, A</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puech, A.</td>
<td>Christian Greek Literature</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Parliament</td>
<td>Idea, The</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renouvier Charles</td>
<td>Histoire et Solution des Problèmes Métaphysiques</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revue de synthèse</td>
<td>historique</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribot, Prof. Th</td>
<td>Essai de l'Imagination Créatrice</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberty, Prof. E. de</td>
<td>Announcement of fourth volume of his ethics</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross, Prof Edward Als worth</td>
<td>Social Control</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruemelin, Gustav</td>
<td>Politics and the Moral Law</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon, Lucy Maynard</td>
<td>Domestic Service</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salter on the Soul, Mr. W. M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seelakkhandha, The Rev. C. A.</td>
<td>Visuddhi-Marga</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Sanghamitta</td>
<td></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Dr. David Eugene</td>
<td>The Teaching of Elementary Mathematics. 120.—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fink's Brief History</td>
<td>of Mathematics. 122.—Elements of Algebra. 249.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithsonian Institution</td>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>192, 384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society for Promoting</td>
<td>Christian Knowledge, Publications of</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stedman, Edmund Clarence</td>
<td>An American Anthology</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sterne, Carus (See Krause)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taft, Oren B.</td>
<td>Hypothesis for a Septacle Theory</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai-Ping Canon</td>
<td>Announcement of publication</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannery, Paul</td>
<td>History of Geometry</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarr, Prof. Ralph S.</td>
<td>Geographies</td>
<td>62, 635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple Primers</td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidy, Charles Meymott</td>
<td>The Story of a Tinder-Box</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toller, T. N.</td>
<td>Outlines of the History of the English Language</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INDEX.

Tolstoi on India ........................................... 765
Traumüller, Dr. F. History of Physical Experimentation .......... 57
Trine, Ralph Waldo. The Greatest Thing Ever Known; Every Living Creature; Character-Building Thought Power ........................................ 512
Trumbull, Mrs. Frances. Obituary note ................................ 448
Udden, Prof. John August. An Old Indian Village ...................... 256
University of Pennsylvania, Medical School Laboratories ................ 448
Waite, Judge C. B. History of the Christian Religion to the Year Two Hundred .................................................. 761
Walsh, Correa Moylan. The Measurement of General Exchange-Value ...... 640
Ward, Prof. Marshall. Diseases of Plants ............................... 64
Waterman, Judge A. N. A Century of Caste ................................. 511
Willoughby, Dr. Westel Woodbury. Social Justice, A Critical Essay ......... 124
Wollpert, Frederick. From Whence, What, and to What End? .............. 573
Wood, Henry. The Symphony of Life; a Series of Constructive Sketches and Interpretations ........................................ 575
Wundt, Wilhelm. *Völkerpsychologie* ..................................... 315
Xénopol, X. Classification of the Sciences and History .................. 576
PAGODA OF PEKING.

Characteristic of China, as exhibiting the state of decay into which public buildings are suffered to fall. (After a photograph.)

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Frontispiece to The Open Court.
AMERICA.

BY THE HON. CHARLES CARROLL BONNEY.

1.

The age we live in is an island, grand
And beautiful and wonderful! Its clouds
Are pierced by mountain monuments of great
Immortal deeds. Its sunny hills are crowned
With Arts' proud temples, and the church-spires tell
Of golden vales where God hath worshippers.

Science is everywhere at work, and while
She buildeth wonders, upward to the stars
Goes a triumphal anthem evermore
From earth's green gardens and the ocean's shore.
With awe-filled souls we stand and look away,
Out on the deep, blue, limitless expanse
Of moving waters: backward to the past
The spirit turns, seeking some island fair
In the far-off horizon, upon which
The soul may rest its vision: looking down,
It sees the precious fragments that remain—
The splendid ruins of antiquity,
Beneath its feet. The searchers after truth,
Who find their joy in seeking hidden things,
Have sought them out with all the eagerness
Of children gathering the early flowers,
And from the dark waves drifting them away
Toward oblivion's midnight-mantled gulf,
Have rescued the rich treasures, and have learned
To read from them, as from a well-writ book,
The marvellous story of the continent,—
The birth and infancy of the New World,
And its advance through prehistoric times
Till it became adapted to the needs,
And fitted to supply the wants of man.

II.

Unnumbered ages have been borne away
To the great sepulchre, the mighty past,—
That glorious mausoleum where the years,
With all their good and glory, wrong and shame,
Lie down at last to the untroubled sleep,
When they have given back their life and bloom
And beauty to the Father from whose hand
They took them in the morning of their day,—
Since from the ocean's untold depths, and gloom
And grandeur, rose a New World. Strangely came,
From out the wondering waves, Atlantic born,
The new and mighty continents. All wild
And desolate at first, the billows came,
And sung their anthems grand along its shores.

III.

Ages of glorious seasons glided by,
And living sunbeams came, God's messengers,
To bid the sleeping elements arise
In wondrous forms of majesty and power,
On the prolific breast of the New World.
Forms followed ever by still higher forms,
In an ascending order built on law,
Forms which should be upbuilted through the lapse
Of countless generations by the power
And glory of Jehovah's love, to form
A marvellous pyramid of being, crowned
By an immortal soul, called man, endowed
With power to bend the lightnings to his will,
And make the wild waves and the waterfalls
The servants of his reason; and the stars,
And relics of existences whose births
Are lost in untold cycles, yield up truths
Hid in the tombs of time so long that naught
But an immortal soul could wrest them thence.

IV.

In the o'er-arching sky enthroned, sat one
Who guided ever the high destiny
Of earth and man, to keep them in the way
Of God's appointment. His inspiring name
Is victory's anthem to the aspiring soul—
Our language hath no more triumphal word,
The mind can grasp no more exalted thought,
Than Everlasting Progress!
Under his care and guidance, in his smile,
The vast and wonderful development
Of universe and system, earth and man,
With an unfailing movement has gone on,
And with increasing glory shall go on
Forever, rising ever in the scale
Of life and beauty, toward the great divine,
Eternal, perfect Parent of the Suns.

V.

The vales were carpeted with shining grass,
And larger verdure, and the hills were crowned
With most majestic forests.

Races rose,
Of strange-shaped beings, rudimental forms,
Leading the way like prophecies, to more
Exalted phases of existences, which
Would manifest more perfectly the love
And wisdom of their Maker.

Ages passed:
Those races flourished; went from youth to age;
Wrought out the work they were designed to do,
Then went to their great sepulchre, and left
In its vast solemn chambers all that now
Tells their amazing story to mankind.

Races rose o'er their ruins: earth and air,
And the blue moving waters were the homes
Of active life, in forms more wonderful
Than those which in his marvel-making dreams
THE OPEN COURT.

Come to the poet. Every passing race
Hath morning, mid-day, evening, and at last
Its awe-inspiring burial and night.
Each hath its special mission to perform:—
He who created them makes naught in vain:—
And each, when it hath played its destiny
In Time's grand drama, goeth mournfully
Down into Death's deep shadow and still vale.

VI.

Anon the Monarch of the Under-world,—
Fierce King of Lava's realm of surging flame,—
Roused from his slumber and in torturing rage
Lifted great islands from the storm-tossed sea:
Builted majestic mountain ranges, wild,
And high and marvellous. Filled lakes with fire:
Wrecked life and loveliness. Hurled high in air
Huge burning rocks as children play with toys,
Shaking the mighty continents till all
That on them lived were paralysed with fear,
Or in dread chaos yielded up sweet life
To the fierce demon!

Prince of awful powers,
His name is Earthquake. In mid-world he dwells,
And in his rock-bound prison feeds on fire,
And dreams such dreams as none can ever know
But he who dreams them.

But in all these dark
And fearful episodes we still behold
An over-ruling, guiding providence
Of wondrous love and beauty. Oh! think not
That even here is aught unmerciful.
Do not our sorrows herald in the dawn
Of brighter mornings more replete with joy?
So did the earthquake but entomb the life
Which dwelt on earth, that in more perfect forms
A glorious resurrection it might know,
Into a world renewed and beautified
By storm and darkness.

VII.

Look backward to its source: the solemn flow
Of the mysterious mighty river, Life,
Whose Alpha, or Omega, or expanse,
No wizard hath pretended to unfold,
Is sweeping onward with the lapse of years,
And centuries and ages, to the deep
Unbounded ocean of a glorious
And indescribably grand destiny.
And we are portions of that Amazon
Of being: and each individual,
One of the living water-drops that form
Its never-resting billows: each great wave
A generation, sweeping grandly on
To Life's vast ocean.
Forever ebb and flow its mighty tides,
Bearing the fleets of progress on their breasts
To new achievements and discoveries.
Years are but moments in such histories.
But howsoever humble we may be,
As atoms in the universe of God,
Ours is the highest station in the grade
Of animate existence, and to us
He has assigned a mission to fulfil,
Of mightiest import.
There are sublime responsibilities
And solemn duties resting on us here;
Claiming fulfilment, and rewarding it
By clothing in habiliments of light
The Soul, and giving it a shining crown
Of everlasting glory, and a strength
And beauty, fitting it at last to be
Companion of the angels in their work
Of gracious ministry to human need.
To our own keeping priceless gifts are given,
In mental mines of gold and precious gems,
Exhaustless through eternity, though wrought
With utmost diligence, but yielding more
And more abundantly the rich rewards
Of the immortal treasures which they hold.

VIII.

The New World seemed abandoned to the sport
Of chance and chaos: changes vast and dread,
And mighty in the ruin which they wrought,
Swept o'er the land whose vales are now our homes,
O'erwhelming growth and progress: changing back
To dust the clay that life made animate
With bloom and beauty.

Whole generations of old moss-grown trees,
Children of ages of deep solitude
And solemn grandeur, that had clothed their forms
Of lofty majesty with leafy robes
Of brightness and of beauty, years on years
Whose story is unwritten, save by Him
Who writes His record on the enduring rocks,
Bowed to the winds and waters and went down
To the long sleep of ages 'neath the hills
Torn up and piled upon them, that should change
The forests into coal-fields which would light
In the far future, many a happy scene
Of home and fireside, in a hundred lands
Through coming life-times.

Birds of giant forms,
And powerful pinions, and death-dealing beaks;
And towering ferns and grasses with them went
To the same mighty sepulchre and sleep.
Fishes of varied colors and strange forms,
Which played in clear bright streamlets and fair lakes,
Or dwelt in secret caverns, lone and deep,
O'erwhelmed and shrouded in their coffin clay,
Lay down to slumber with the untold dead
Of sea, and plain and mountain: wondrous forms,
Whose fearful strength like the wild tempests owned
No master but the King of Kings alone.

Vast lakes that mirrored all the gorgeous
Cloud-palaces and mighty giant shapes
That sylphs build on the azure plains of heaven,
Broke through their mountain barriers and rushed on
To mingle with the ocean, giving fields
Of untold richness to the sun's warm smile.
Those lakes are now the prairies. Little dream
They who tread daily o'er them what they were
In those time-hallowed centuries.

Yet now,
In this our own age the same work goes on
In the great inland seas: slowly, yet none
The less unceasingly and certainly.
And though in its brief life-time, human eye,
Unaided by the instruments which art
Hath blest the soul with, in its thirst to know,
Could note no change in their vast magnitude,
Still, with the lapse of unknown centuries,
They shall go back, to mingle once again
With ocean's waters. From its depths they came,
And to them they shall all at last return.

They too are emblems. When the child grows old,
How yearns the heart to find and feel once more,
The tender love of infancy's dear home,

IX.

Years followed years, and age succeeded age
Of mightiest changes, fitting this New World
To be the dwelling of a loftier race
Than yet had been upon its vales and hills.

And now the Earthquake, in his prison home,
Was fettered for a thousand centuries,
Striving from time to time to break his chains,
And showing that though bound he is not slain,
But lives and dreams of liberty and war,
While Man, the last and God-like one of all
The wondrous line from monad up to mind,
Makes here his empire.

To the New World came,
From lost Atlantis, and more distant climes,
And island habitations now unknown,
Invading hosts who made the land their own,
And turned it to the uses of mankind.
Builded huge castles; fortified great towns;
Reared monuments and temples; gathered gold
And gems from mountains; shells and pearls from sea:
And fruits and flowers, and fields of golden grain,
From the fair hillsides and the sunny plains.
The peopled bosom of the New World smiled
In palmiest prosperity, nor dreamed
Of dread catastrophe impending near,
And waiting the appointed hour to fall
And overwhelm the continent.
But it was so: the cycle was complete,
The era closed. The equinoctial year,
Vast and mysterious, had reached its height,
And stood a moment, mid the watching stars,
Looking with pitying eye upon the world,
Then voiced the order to the waiting seas,
Of the far north to take their mighty way
Of deluge and destruction, toward the pole
O'er which the Southern constellations shine.

The New World woke as ever. The great sun
Rose as serenely from the gorgeous east,
Kissing the dew-drops from the blossoms fair
That in the soft grass nestled bashfully,
As he had done for ages. Leaping brooks,
Whose crystal waters, ever murmuring
Low dreamy melodies, to silver changed,
With every gush of sunlight that streamed down
Through whispering leaves and blossom-laden boughs:
And joyous choirs of bright-plumed singing-birds
Sang Eden orisons. The active world
Woke with its olden hum. The student bent
O'er the strange cypher and hieroglyph,
Seeking in science something to allay
The thirst that burned his spirit. He who tilled
The soil for his subsistence, went that morn
To his loved labor with the same free heart
And jocund carol that bilk him now.
And radiant maidens, singing joyous songs
Gathered wild blossoms and sat down to dream
Enchanting wild blossoms and sat down to dream
Gazing away into the clear blue heaven,
Till they forgot the green world and drooped down
Amid the sweet-breath blossoms and dreamed on
In vision-lighted sleep of that bright world
Whose radiant beauty and exquisite joy
Steal o'er the spirit in its holier hours,
Filling the heart with heavenly happiness,
And such sweet melodies of love and faith
As make it feel the nearness of the realm
Of the immortal life: the kinship close
Of those who there delight to do God's will.

XI.

Such was the New World ere the mighty change
That now succeeded in its history.
Then the Storm-Demon spread his sable wings,
Hiding the blue sky and the awe-struck earth
With masses of impenetrable gloom.
His angry torches glimmered fitfully
Amid the thunder of the mighty guns
That heralded destruction. Then the rain
Fell on the earth's warm bosom. Day passed day,
Week followed week, and still the waters poured
In torrents from the windows of the sky.
Brooks swelled to roaring rivers and rushed on,
Strewn with the fragments of the total wreck
They left behind. At last, the mighty deep,
Rising to meet the fury of the storm,
O'erleaped its boundaries, and made the earth
Another mighty sea—a sepulchre!
The great waves in their madness fiercely tore
From their foundations the majestic hills,
And planted them o'er cities, hushing all
Of life, and joy and sorrow, hope and fear,
In the dark dread immensity of death.
The unbound ocean brooded o'er the earth
Like Night o'er Chaos, solemn and alone.

XII.

Years glided into years. The waters went
On to the Southern ocean, and once more
The New World felt the sun's life-waking smile.
The rainbow shone in heaven, God's great seal
Of glowing beauty. How we love to look
Upon its splendid glories when a storm
Is passing from the blue and beaming sky!
Over the graves of that primeval race,
Trode a new people. From the mountain lands
Whose heights o'er-topped the deluge and its woes,
In the more favored countries of the world,
Came when the love of conquest led them forth,
Adventurous men, and once more peopled o'er
This glorious New World; builded new towns:
Founded great empires: reared high monuments
That looked with silent majesty toward heaven,
As it did seem forever. Laws were made,
And gifted orators and poets stirred
The deepest passions of the human soul,
Rousing high aspirations and sweet dreams
Of coming glory. Lovely maidens twined
Wreaths of love's amaranth and myrtle bloom
Around strong manhood's warm and generous heart,
Which yielded gladly to the thralldom sweet,
While the enchanting, joyous melody
Of perfect happiness stirred all the strings
Of the heart's golden lyre.
Whene'er two spirits of like temper meet,
Love's angel, swift descending from the skies,
Ripples the waters of the heart's pure spring,
By delicate touches of his shining wings,
And soul responds to soul with songs of joy.
And fair-haired children played on mossy knolls
With clear sweet ringing laughter and glad hearts
All ignorant that life hath nights of tears.
So dreams man ever in prosperity,
And in the future sees but brighter hours,
And dearer pleasures than the present yields.
And there were gushes of child-warbled song,
And tales of thrilling interest, that waked,
And stirred to action bold aspiring thoughts,
And proud ambitions purposes to win
By persevering industry and zeal,
A place in Fame's immortal galaxy
Of gifted souls, which would outlast the years
Allotted to the spirit for its work.

Along the wilderness-shored Oregon—
In the Missouri's clime, and in the land
Of the Cordilleras—in the golden vales
Of California, and where lived and reigned
The unknown builders of Chi Chen—along
The lofty Andes, those majestic thrones
Of giant Condor and of mountain storm—
In the rich country of the Amazon—
Along La Plata, and on Chili's shore,
Nations sprang up and flourished.

XIII.
The generations followed as of old,
And peace and power seemed builded on the rock
Of perpetuity. The years passed on,
Till finally the clear and starry north
Was shadowed by a dark and threatening cloud,
Which moved with ceaseless march toward the south.
The savage Indian in fierce war-tribes came
From Boreal Asia, o'er the ice-paved sea,
As poured the mighty hordes of Goth and Hun
Into eternal Rome, and swept away
From their fair homes and happy villages,
The people who had built them: save amid
The vales of Mexico, where still remained
The Montezumas, great and powerful,
Waiting a future conqueror: and save
That garden of the Southern continent,
Where still the Incas reigned in strength and power.
The North was desolate; its vast expanse
Was but a hunting-ground for roving tribes.
In Yucatan had perished a great race,
A gifted people; yet their temples still
Survive decay: like old Cholula tell
The mournful story of those long-gone years.
And many an ancient relic tells its tale,—
Some touching legend of that earlier race.
And we have found in many a sacred place
Throughout the Western Hemisphere, the graves
Of those forgotten peoples, and have torn
Their mouldering bodies from the halls of death,
To learn their story from their crumbling bones.
We tread upon their tombs. The dust that formed
The mortal dwellings of their spirits here,
Into our forms is moulded: and the same
Atoms that blossomed in the past, bloom now
In other forms, in other creatures shine.
The mind, the bright Immortal Soul alone,
Is reproduced and multiplied in time.
Dust moulders back to dust. The spirit knows
No dissolution. It but recreates
Its human being and goes home to heaven.

XIV.

Again the march of centuries went on,
And hunter nations flourished and grew strong.
Then the wild warrior in his forest home,
Wooed the fond dark-tressed maiden and looked up
Through the dim glory that fell on his soul,
To the Great Spirit's throne beyond the stars,
And uttered unto Him his simple prayer.
And council-fires were lighted, and young braves
Chased the free bison and the bounding deer
O'er hill and prairie: and the wigwam's smoke
Curl ed lightly upward to the smiling sky,
Beyond whose bright horizon they did dream
Of waking from death's sleep, to find a home
That never would be visited by pain,
Celestial hunting-grounds,—the Spirit Land.

And while the years went on, bold Northmen came
O'er the Atlantic from their far-off homes,
And traded with the Red Man, and bore back
The wealth the New World gave them for their toil.

XV.

Years glided into years, and 'mong the thrones
Of the stern empires of the elder world,
Wandered a glorious spirit. He had seen,
With the clear vision of philosophy,
Across the Western ocean, a New Path,
Undreamed of by the sages: they did mock
At what they deemed his worse than foolish dreams.
But his high spirit knew its destiny,
And, mastering every obstacle, revealed
To Europe's wondering princes the deep truth
Of his grand vision, realised at last.
Oh! there is something God-like in the dreams,
And toil, and tears, and suffering, and renown
Of the far-seeing, gifted souls who come
Like angel visitants from Paradise,
And walk among us. Ah! how oft unknown
In their habiliments of human clay:
How often wronged and tortured: trodden down,
Finding no rest but in a martyr's grave.
But they rest sweetly now. The world has done
Its worst: and soon in tears, repentance comes,
With gold and marble, and funereal hymns,
And mournful music, and dark waving plumes,
To make atonement for long years of wrong.
Death is the greatest blessing of the good.
The high, the gifted: when the star goes back
To its divine Creator, then the world
First learns how great a spirit it has scorned.
We mourn their loss, and yet for them rejoice,
For they are in a far more peaceful clime,
From which in life's serener hours they come,
And whisper to the spirit yet again,
The olden love they erst did give to us:
Warn us of evil: counsel us of good,
And bid us live and strive so worthily,
That we may join them when our work is done.
Time glorifies the past; and each year adds
Brightness and purity to all that we
Have loved, and still do love, though life's swift stream
Hath borne them from our worship, far away.
The sunlight tinges every cloud that made
Our spirits sad, and the sweet roses hide
Each thorn that wounded.

xvi.

Then from Europe came
To the New World Columbus had revealed,—
This wondrous land of promise and of hope,—
The White Man with his cultivated soul,
Learning and science, eloquence and art
To find new homes where with a freeman's hand,
And an unfettered conscience he might live
In larger liberty, a higher life.
But then as if to prove that savagery,—
The lust of conquest, and the greed for gain,
Defile all races of our human-kind,
Alike barbarian and civilised,
The men to whom Columbus showed the way,
Filled Mexico with carnage, woe and wrong;
Peru with outrage, robbery, and grief,
And wrought destruction not to be described
In human language. Ah! how terrible
Is murderous war, in all its murderous forms!

XVII.
Thousands of years ago, Humanity,
On eastern plains began her grand career,
Her march triumphal, westward round the world,
Each year, each century she has gone on,
Developing some new sublime idea:
Ascending in the scale of thought and truth:
Ennobling and untrammelling herself,
With each advance towards the setting sun.

Such was its destiny. The pale-faced race
Has driven the red warrior as he drove
From home and burial-place those who, ere him,
Peopled the lands of free America.
Fair is the White Man's future, but the race
Of the stern Indian bows to destiny,
And in its wasting desolation e'er
Moves slowly onward toward the deep abyss
Beyond the horizon where the Red Man's sun
Still lingers, shedding a faint radiance
Over the country he once called his home.

XVIII.
Filled with funereal gloom the aching heart
Lifts up its eyes with longings for the light,
And turns again toward the morning's gates,
Then smiles to see the glory of the dawn
Descending to the valleys. Now the soul
Ascends the mountains for a larger view,
And soars above them till the continent
Before its vision like a picture shines.
How marvellous and beautiful the scene!
Fields, farms and gardens, cities, villages,
Imperial States, and Nations still more vast!
And in the heart of North America,
The Great Republic. Elsewhere on the earth,
Each people dwells apart, in its own land,
And holds its rights by arms and fortresses,
And strategy and battle. Not so here:
But in this wondrous land all races seem
To find a common ground of harmony,
And dwell together as should brethren dwell,
In unity and peace, with equal rights.

What means this miracle? How was it wrought?
The marvellous mystery is quickly told.
This is the Palestine of the New Age!
To its fair fields the voice of God hath called
From all the leading nations of the earth
The brightest of their children, here to build
A living temple of Free Government,
The last and greatest wonder of the world.
Here Liberty abides. Here Law and Faith,
And Equal Rights, and Justice hold their sway,
Except so far as some invading wrong
Breaks in and baffles them till put to flight
By the roused people whose resistless power,
The common welfare ever may invoke.
For in America the people rule,
And choose their Kings to serve them, not to reign.
Thus they who in their native lands had feared
Their neighbors as their foes still meet them here
As equals, and become their warmest friends.

XIX.
Yet here in Freedom's Garden had been sown
The dragon's teeth of human slavery,
Breeding vast ills and bringing on at length
A trial of Free Government so fierce,
Prolonged and terrible that it was proof
To all the world that more than kingly power
May by self-government be held and used.
And thus has been assured throughout the earth
The final reign of Law and Liberty,
With sovereign Justice and Equality:
And by Coöperation, finally,
Such bounteous prosperity that all
May find supply of every righteous need,
By honest industry.

Then will the dream
Of Paradise Regained have been fulfilled!
Then, learning wisdom from the Prince of Peace,
The Nations will in Arbitration find
A better safeguard of their rights, than war;
And wealth and power their highest glory seek
In the most faithful service of mankind.

XX.
Thus do the hopes of human liberty—
Free State, Free Church, free conscience and free thought;
And equal rights, protection and defence;
Laws mightier than armies, order firm
And well-maintained without the bayonet:
Rest on the Great Republic, and depend
Upon the future of America.
And this high claim involves no disrespect
Of elder nations, though their treasuries
Hold glories gathered through a thousand years,
For the Republic is God's minister
For human service, not a new device
Of man for conquest and aggrandisement.
So when the empires of the older world
Salute the Great Republic, they confess
Not the supremacy of other men,
But the transcendent providence of God.

The eagle symbols His all-conquering Truth,
The stars a knowledge of His sacred Laws,
The bands the bonds of Human Brotherhood:
And the fair hues the banner's folds display,
The light and love of Unity and Peace!

Where'er these emblems tell of Liberty,
And Law, and Justice, and Fraternity,
And he who rev'rences, would name them all,
He speaks the one grand word—America!