

Poet's Corner.

A V E M A R I A .

A BRETON LEGEND.

(From the Cornhill Magazine.)

In the ages of faith, before the day
When men were too proud to weep or pray,
There stood in a red-roofed Breton town,
Snugly nestled 'twixt sea and down,
A chapel for simple souls to meet
Nightly, and sing with voices sweet,

Ave Maria!

There was an idiot, palsied, and bleared,
With unkempt locks and a matted beard,
Hunched from the cradle, vacant-eyed,
And whose head kept rolling from side to side;
Yet who, when the sunset-glow grew dim,
Joined with the rest in the twilight hymn,

Ave Maria!

But when they up-got and wended home,
Those up the hill-side, these to the foam,
He hobbled along in the narrowing dusk,
Like a thing that is only hull and husk;
On as he hobbled, chanting still,
Now to himself, now loud and shrill.

Ave Maria!

When morning smiled on the smiling deep,
And the fisherman woke from a dreamless sleep,
And ran up his sail, and trimmed his craft,
While his little ones leaped on the sand and laughed,
The senseless cripple would stand and stare,
Then suddenly holloa his wonted prayer,

Ave Maria!

Others might plough, and reap, and sow,
Delve in the sunshine, spin in the snow,
Make sweet love in a shelter sweet,
Or trundle their dead in a winding-sheet;
But he, through rapture, and pain, and wrong,
Kept singing his one monotonous song.

Ave Maria!

When thunder growled from the ravelled wrack,
And ocean to welkin bellowed back,
And the lightning sprang from its cloudy sheath,
And tore through the forest with jagged teeth,
Then leaped and laughed o'er the havoc wreaked,
The idiot clapped with his hands, and shrieked,

Ave Maria!

Children mocked, and mimicked his feet,
As he slouched or sidled along the street;
Maidens shrank as he passed them by,
And mothers with child eschewed his eye;
And half in pity, half scorn, the folk
Christened him, from the words he spoke,

Ave Maria!

One year when the harvest feasts were done,
And the mending of tattered nets begun,
And the kittiwake's scream took a weirder key
From the wailing wind and the moaning sea,
He was found, at morn, on the fresh-strewn snow,
Frozen, and faint, and crooning low,

Ave Maria!

They stirred up the ashes between the dogs,
And warmed his limbs by the blazing logs,
Chafed his puckered and bloodless skin,
And strove to quiet his chattering chin;
But, ebbing with unreturning tide,
He kept on murmuring till he died,

Ave Maria!

When the meads grew saffron, the hawthorns white,
And the lark bore his music out of sight,
And the swallow out-raced the racing wave,
Up from the lonely, outcast grave
Sprouted a lily, straight and high,
Such as she bears to whom men cry,

Ave Maria!

None had planted it, no one knew
How it had come there, why it grew;
Grew up so strong, till its stately stem
Was crowned with a snow-white diadem—
One pure lily, round which, behold!
Was written by God in veins of gold,

Ave Maria!

Over the lily they built a shrine,
Where are mingled the mystic bread and wine;
Shrine you may see in the little town
That is snugly nestled 'twixt deep and down,

Through the Breton land it hath wondrous fame,
And it bears the unshriven idiot's name,

Ave Maria!

Hunchbacked, gibbering, blear-eyed, halt,
From forehead to footstep one foul fault,
Crazy, contorted, mindless born,
The gentle's pity, the cruel's scorn,
Who shall bar you the gates of Day,
So you have simple faith to say,

Ave Maria!

SNAKES IN THE POST OFFICE.

ON Monday night, as the bell of St. Paul's clock struck the midnight hour, the clerks in the Post Office were busily sorting and stamping letters. Suddenly from a small paper box sprang a long slender snake with flashing eye and far extended tongue. Consternation seized the young men for a moment, and the viper was master of the situation. Coiled upon a huge pile of unstamped letters he lifted his head and looked about him. Quick as a flash one of the clerks seized a sharp knife in one hand and a heavy letter stamp in the other, and in less time than is needed to tell it, the Florida export was neatly divided into three equal but angry parts. They were nicely replaced in the box, which was sent forward to its destination.

Snakes in the Post Office are by no means infrequent. Scarcely a week passes in which one or more are not found. Sometimes they are sent in bottles, occasionally they are done up in wooden boxes, but generally their sole protection is a thin paper box, which nine times out of ten is broken or mashed by the heavier articles in the bag. Horned toads are a favourite contribution from people spending the winter in Florida. It is estimated that a hundred a month of these choice products of the South are sent through the mails. A day or so ago a bundle containing a swarm of bees was forwarded in a mail bag. Not long since an alligator was found among the letters, having broken out of the pasteboard in which he had been enveloped.

In one of the mails there were two pairs of scissors neatly done up and addressed to Mrs. Anderson, at a watering place. A corkscrew, sharp and savage, was mailed recently, a postal card being tied to the handle. Glass cannot be sent through the mails as it is about as dangerous as biting snakes to the unsuspecting clerks. Consequently, there can be seen in Mr. Purday's collection a fine thermometer, a sweet-faced photograph, sundry bottles of medicine, and a sugar-bowl. Neither can sugar nor flour be sent. Samples of both, as well as of tea and coffee, are constantly mailed. In many cases the latter are detained for lack of stamps.

Insufficiency of prepayment is a fertile source of detention. There are samples and packages, some of them valuable, kept in the Post Office for lack of one cent. It would seem as though the Government might collect the extra cent at the other end of the route, but Congress determined otherwise.

Postmaster James has opened a formula registry of complaints, and it is noteworthy that in nearly every instance investigation turns the tables back on the complainant. One well-known firm recently complained that they had to pay 1 dol. 20 cents on a single book. Investigation showed that the leaves were covered with writing. Banks often raise a hue and cry after a stolen package. Investigation almost invariably shows the package to have been misdirected. Lately a large parcel of army letters, about which great complaint was made, was returned to New York, having been misdirected to San Francisco.—*N. Y. Sun.*

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION UNION.

It is a satisfactory fact to the defenders of free and denominational education that the National Education Union, which has so long fought their battle against the Birmingham League, has found it unnecessary to maintain its organisation on a war footing. The Executive Committee of the Union is able to report that "legislation respecting Elementary Education in England has now reached such a stage that it has become a question whether the objects of the National Education Union are not so far secured—for the present at least—as to render unnecessary the continuance, on its present scale, of the organisation which has existed since the year 1869." The objects of the Union have in the main been secured by legislation; provision is made by statute for the elementary education of every child; education is compulsory; and a "preference is given to indirect compulsion;" while "in principle free choice of school is left to the parent," though "it is to be feared that the practical application of this principle will be rendered difficult in the case of indigent parents in consequence of the enactment in the Statute of 1876, which permits School Boards to remit fees, but compels parents to resort to the Board of Guardians, often at great personal inconvenience and loss of time, for the necessary assistance if they desire their children to attend voluntary schools." Still, "denominational schools hold their ground. . . . The National Society has established a fund to aid, during a period of difficulty, schools which, in the absence of such assistance, would be closed or transferred to School Boards; and other religious communities show the like vigilance as to their schools. The National Education League, which had its head-quarters at Birmingham, has been dissolved, and it does not appear probable," so the report concludes, "that any further attack will be made during the next few years on the denominational or voluntary system of Elementary education." The Union has therefore dispensed with the services of its Secretary and Travelling Agents, but keeps up its London office and the nucleus of a staff, wishing it to be clearly understood that it holds itself in readiness "to meet any future aggression," and to take such action in support of religious education "as any emergency or change of circumstances may demand."—*Tablet.*