

LEARNING EXTRAORDINARY—
A DOWN-EAST SAVANT.

Probably not one in a hundred readers has ever heard of William Small. But those who are accustomed to read Oliver Optic's Boy's and Girl's magazine can hardly have failed to make his acquaintance unwittingly. He writes over the mystical sign of the square root, and all his contributions are as full of information as an egg of meat—to use a trite comparison. In many respects he resembles Elihu Burritt, the learned blacksmith. He is the son of a poor farmer, was born, we believe, in Auburn, Maine, and now a farmer himself, lives there. Growing up, as all poor farmer's sons grow up, in constant toil, he was generally regarded by his acquaintance as a stupid, inert fellow, who never would amount to anything. But the hunger for knowledge was gnawing his mind incessantly. At the age of nineteen he bought his first book, a copy of Legendre's Geometry—having earned the money for the purchase by hoeing corn at one cent per one hundred hills, after his regular days work was done. Before he reached the age of twenty-five he had gone through the entire course of the Celeste. At the age of thirty-one he could read thirty one languages, and speak fluently seven or eight. It is his rule to learn one language per year. He is one of the very few Savant scholars in America. Some ten or a dozen years ago he went abroad and traveled extensively. At Paris he attended the sessions of one of the institutes—we are not sure which—and went with a class of students through a course of pure mathematics. Coming home to his lodgings from these exercises, dripping with perspiration, he used to say: "There are not five men in the United States who can follow these boys through such work as this." His mind seems to have been originally mathematical; but his proficiency as a linguist shows that he has not neglected other departments of learning. And in addition to purely scholarly acquirements he has mastered the science of law. His industry is like that of a machine; there is no intellectual difficulty that can appal, no mental labor that can weary him. In the preparation of these little papers for Oliver Optic's Magazine, which would not make a quarter column in a newspaper, he puts more work than is given to many magazine articles, drawing information from all languages and all authorities. He is now thirty-six years of age, six feet two inches in height in his stockings, and weighs 230 pounds. In the field of his "erudition," and his physical strength, may be estimated from the fact that he lifts 500 pounds with ease. He sleeps not more than five of the twenty-four hours, and is strictly temperate in all respects, using no liquor or tobacco. It is a common question by his friends—what is his object in life? To this as to most other interrogatories, he returns no direct answer, but says that he has an object in life, which will appear in good time. He has a daughter nine years old, who speaks French, German, Italian, and Spanish.

OYSTERS AT THE PYRAMIDS.

I always supposed the Sphinx to be made of one solid block of granite, but I was gravely mistaken. It is simply shaped out from a mass of rock in situ, and two or three formations, speaking geologically, go to make up its substance. I do not pretend to any great knowledge of geology, but I believe I am correct in stating that its base, or body part, is nummulitic limestone, and its neck and head a rough kind of oyster bed. What will my good friend Frank Buckland say when he hears that the great sphinx is in part made up of fossil oysters? And, furthermore, what will he think, I wonder, when he peruses what I am now about to write for his special delectation? But I must begin my story at the beginning. I wandered away from my companions, in company with two Arabs, in order to find some beetles and reptiles as might be hidden underneath the stones scattered about upon the sandy plain intervening between the pyramids and one of the immense causeways made for rolling up the building materials when the pyramids were built. Overlooking this huge causeway is a sort of cliff of rocks from which workmen are at this time busily quarrying out stones for building purposes. Stones after stones were turned over by my Arabs, and under most of them I found a rich harvest of beetles, etc. I found "Lord Beccles" at home," and at once pounced upon him as my lawful prize. In turning over the stones, I came unexpectedly upon one that I fancied was made up in great measure of fossil oyster shells, but being quite unprepared for such a discovery, I never for a moment dreaming that I should find fossil oysters scattered round the pyramids of Egypt, I really doubted the evidence of my own senses. I thought to myself, "I must say to my friend, 'Bauerman, I have found oysters on the desert,' and after all the shells should turn out to be those of some other mollusk, and not oysters at all,—may I say it, Mr. Editor?" "Oh, no," I answered, "I must, but I maintain, perfectly permissible deception. I, so to speak, deceived my geological friend, under pretence of showing him something worth looking at to the stone containing my oyster treasure, and then to my extreme delight and relief he said, 'Why, that stone is full of oysters,' or words to that effect. I could have danced round the stone from sheer joy, but I did not, and instead we climbed up the face of the cliff to find out from whence the stone upon the plain had fallen. It was easily found; overlying the nummulitic limestone is a vast oyster bed, and in it I found oysters of all ages and sizes, from the tiny spat, I should say not a year old, to the full-grown mollusk, which measures full five inches from the hinge to the edge or lip of the shell. The little oysters were sticking to pieces of older oysters, and often in great clumps or bunches to one another. If we could only propagate oysters now, as oysters evidently multiplied and thrived in the Miocene Sea, in which sea these which are now fossils at the pyramids lived and flourished in prehistoric times, perhaps we would soon come down in price, and we should be able to purchase a dozen for the price we now have to pay for a single oyster.—[J. K. Lord, in Land and Water.

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