

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is badly faded.

Extracts from a Letter Of an Asiatic Traveler In America, Picked up By the Wayside,  
That is, the Letter Was Picked up

Charles Theodore Greve

On the banks of this beautiful river is situated quite a large city, which the natives call Cincinnati. This is a very peculiar city indeed, and one that furnished the traveler much food for reflection.

The first thing that strikes one is the fact that the city is so very dirty. This is said to be occasioned by the constant warfare existing between two gladiators, Johnnie and [Murat], who fight each other with mud and printer's ink. No one seems to know what they are quarreling about, but the conflict is carried on to the bitter end, –of their lead pencils. The great quantity of dirt caused by their warfare has made it necessary to provide a means of cleansing the city. This is done every year by flooding the whole city with the waters of the river. In spite of the cleansing effect of this annual flood, it is said however, that some of the merchants of the city complain bitterly of it. Such is the contrary disposition of man.

The city surpasses all other cities of the country in the greatness of its institutions, and is especially noted for its high attainments in art and music, ranking above all others in these respects. I know this to be so, for many of the most prominent citizens have told me so, and who could know better than they.

From what I hear, I feel as if my journey may as well end here, as there is nothing in the world, outside of Cincinnati worth seeing. To be sure there are, as far as I have seen, no outward pre-eminence of the city in these directions, but this is probably owing to the fact that Cincinnati art and music are of too subtle a character to be recognized by the untutored foreigner, being conditions of the Cincinnati mind; in other words, “all in your eye.”

One evidence of the taste for music which I had almost forgotten to mention, is the presence, in all the street-corners of citizens performing on musical instruments, which they work with a crank or bellows. A strange point about these musicians is that in almost every case they are either blind or crippled. I have been told that this has been caused by the violence of some of the ruder of the citizens who were incapable of finer emotions excited by divine music. And yet, in most things, these people are human.

However that may be, the musicians of whom I speak do attain marvelous skill in the use of their instruments, for with such delicacy and care do they manipulate their cranks and bellows that they really at times produce quite musical tones, resembling the cries of the animals of the forest. In view of this extraordinary skill, and the evident sincerity of purpose, the conduct of those who beat and maimed them seems more reprehensible.

Such is the restless disposition of man however, that even some of the residents of this heavenly city are not satisfied with their lot, but periodically rise in revolution and burn the Temple of Justice. It has been suggested, however, that this is an indication of the artistic taste of the people. I don't quite understand the suggestion, for surely their temples of justice must have been of a high artistic order. Perhaps the meaning is, that by means of the repeated destruction and rebuilding of the Temple, the people are familiarized with the different orders of architecture. These fires too add largely to the wealth of the country by giving occupation to the local industries.

The city has a government of its own, and is, to a certain extent, free. It is obliged, however to pay tribute, and acknowledge a sort of allegiance to the people who inhabit the mountainous regions surrounding the city. The people of these mountains are a very arrogant race, and have ground the people of the city down to almost complete subjection. These mountaineers are so much feared that they are enabled to walk through the streets of the city, and even do business there with perfect impunity. But they are never asked to pay any of those taxes which are a necessary burden upon all men except those fortunate mountaineers. As a result of this, the inhabitants of the mountains become very rich and build beautiful residences. I am told however that the people of the city grumble very much at this oppression, and will probably soon rise in revolt.

The people of Cincinnati claim to have discovered the nectar of the gods, which they call beer. When taken in sufficient quantities, it has a very pleasing effect.

(Here the letter breaks off)