

(Continued from Fourth Page.)

tells a most gruesome story of how he started once to act as guide and canoe-man for an English sportsman and his young son, and how he returned with them both dead in his canoe. The son, in stepping ashore from the boat, was struck in the wrist by a manuta, and died in a few minutes after he was got back into the boat. The father, wild with grief over the awful death of his boy, threw himself on his son's body and kissed his lips before the guide, knowing what the result would be, could prevent him. The father thus absorbed the deadly manuta venom, which had permeated every vein and pore of the boy's body, and soon lay dead beside his son in the boat.

"Whether the old Indian guide's awful tale is true or not I have no means of knowing, but having seen a mule that died in two minutes after being bitten by a manuta, I do not feel like doubting it. The snake that killed the mule was shot immediately afterward, and it was the only specimen of the manuta I ever saw. In general physical formation it resembled closely our rattlesnake, having but two fangs, closing up in sockets like the rattler's."

HOW PENS ARE MADE.

Part of the Method Observed in England Kept a Secret.

A celebrated poet tells us that nothing is new. The assertion seems true of metallic pens. It appears as certain as anything of the sort can well be that they were known as far back as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that they were made in large numbers in Birmingham more than hundred years ago. It was, however, 1823 or 1824 before steel pens began to be made by a cheap process and to take the place of the old-fashioned quill. If that process had not been invented what flocks of geese we should require now! For it is said that 15,000,000 pens are made in Birmingham every week and that fifteen tons of steel are used in their making. To watch how pens are turned out is very interesting.

First of all, sheets of steel have to be rolled, and as pens are weighed and not counted—a gross being considered to weigh so much—it is clear that those sheets must be of an even thickness. For this reason every part of the steel is measured with very great care and faulty pieces are rejected. The steel, which is all right, is cut into strips as broad as two pens, put together, are long. These strips are given to women and girls called "cutters," who sit before presses. The steel is placed over a little hole, and at the swing of a handle down comes a punch, passing clean through the metal, falling into a hole, and pushing the pen blank through. The pieces of steel thus made are taken to another room and there the hole at the nib is cut out with a second press, just like the first.

The third process, called "annealing," is for the purpose of making the steel soft, so that it will not crack or break. It is very simple. The pens are put into a furnace until they become a dull red, and are then taken out and allowed to cool gradually.

Women afterward take these pens, and with wonderful quickness put them under a heavy steel stamp worked by foot. This is the stage when the pen receives the name of the maker and all other particulars which may appear on it. Next the pens are bent by yet another press to the shape in which they reach the user, and after that they are again put in a furnace and heated to a dull red. On being taken out they are thrown into oil, and this sudden cooling has the effect of making them so brittle that they may be snapped in two as easily as a piece of glass. As this process makes the pens very greasy and dirty, the next thing done is to boil them in soda and water, after which they are white and clean. They are then placed in an iron cylinder which goes round and round over a number of gas jets. In this the pens are kept until they turn a dark blue from the effects of the heat, and then they are removed. Now the pens are still hard, but they can be bent without breaking. They are in fact what is called "tempered." Another cleaning follows. The pens are mixed with wet cinders or something that looks like that and churned by machinery in an iron barrel until they become white. When they have been treated in the same way with a fine dry substance they are as bright as silver. Yet another trifling process comes next, and then we reach what used to be the great secret of pen making. It was done in locked and darkened rooms. The work-people were bound by oath not to tell. No visitor, not even royalty itself, was allowed to see it. And what is this carefully hidden secret? Merely slitting the pen from the hole (made at the second stage of its journey through the works) to the point.

Simply speaking, the tool which does this consists of a pair of scissors nicely fixed in a press. Each pen is held between two square blades of steel. These coming together cut the pen exactly in the middle of the point. Now the pens are finished ready for use. But some undergo two or three further processes to make them look bright and smart, or to color them between brown and blue, or to make them plated with copper or gilt. Who would think that a pen passed through so many hands and took so much care and skill to make? Yet pens are made with such quickness that they can be sold at very low prices. In Birmingham some kinds have been bought at as little as 1 1/2 pence a gross. That means that about fifty have been sold for a halfpenny. Only about fifty years ago steel pens not so good as these cost one shilling each. The change has been brought about by improved machinery and by the number of pens which can now be made. Figures prove that more steel is used up for making pens than for swords and guns all over the world.—London Chatter-box.

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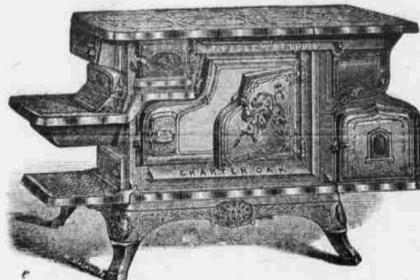
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