FOOL'S MATE.

I.

In a quiet corner of the smoking room of the Green Dragon Hotel, Durnstable, a corner where the curling blue-gray wreaths gathered thickest, a little interested group was watching the most fascinating game in the whole wide world, and, like war correspondents, in cold, phlegmatic neutrality, calculating the chances of the combatants and forecasting the end of their struggle.

"Check!"

"Well, there."

"Check!"

"Ah, hum, it's no good; I resign." The loungers moved away, and the speaker leaned back in his chair and calmly surveyed the board.

"Gaston," he said, at length, "you are a master of the science of the game; it is useless for me to contend against you."

Gaston Slater, the manager of the Durnstable Bank, lighted another cigarette and acknowledged the compliment with a light laugh and a deprecatory shake of the head. "Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all. If you will pardon the apparent rudeness of the observation, my victories lie, not in any phenomenal strength of my own, but rather in the weakness of my adversaries. Now, if you had retained the queen's knight in the position that it held half way through the game, and covered the square with the rook——"

"Stop, pray, stop," the other interjected, "you are wasting your eloquence. I haven't the faintest idea where that knight was. My game always degenerates into the forlorn hope, and I play waiting for a stroke of luck to give me the victory, rarely with any deeper intent."

"But that is not the way to play chess."

"I know; but it is the only way I play. I can't concentrate my thoughts sufficiently; cannot, like you, centralize them upon the game and the game alone; they will drift away, as they have done to-night, when, while you have matched your strategy against my ignorance, I have been wondering who that man is over there, who has watched the whole game, and whose eyes seemed to gleam at every move you made. If I am any judge of faces, Gaston, there you have a foeman worthy of your—shall I say ivory, to prevent a muddling of the metaphor?"

At the words of his friend, Gaston Slater turned from the board where he had been arranging the pieces and glanced at the stranger, who was leisurely sipping his coffee; a military looking man, tall and heavy in build, with a full moustache, waxed at the ends to two ferocious daggers. Their eyes met, and with the easy-going air of men of the world a suspicion of a nod was interchanged, and Gaston busied himself with the board again.

"There, Frank," he said, after a moment with the pieces; "white to play and mate in three moves. Try that; it's one of my own."

Frank Thornley gazed at the board for a few minutes, for, apart from want of application, he had a keen and solid admiration for the game of games, the science of sciences, and at last looked up and moodily shook his head.

"Impossible."

Another voice interrupted, and the stranger, handing his card, asked in a melodious voice if he might be permitted to watch them.

"I am a great admirer of the game," he explained, in a semi-apologetic tone, "and play a little myself," he added, as a kind of afterthought.

Gaston Slater gave half a glance at the pasteboard, "Colonel Henry Walton," and then turned with a bow to the colonel, who took his seat by the table.

"White plays and mates in three moves," Gaston Slater murmured, complacently.

"One of my own problems."

"Ah!" The colonel smiled, and whistled very softly to himself.

"Will you try it?"

"With pleasure, but I prefer the red."

"Oh, it is impossible to stop the mate; it is certain to a player."

"Certain that white mates in three moves; but you have overlooked the fact that red can mate in two."

"No."

"But it is so; take the white."

Gaston Slater changed his seat, and Frank Thornley excusing himself, the two faced one another with the problem before them.

"One," the colonel cried, pushing forward the red rook. "Check!"

Gaston Slater's game for the white was over. He moved the king; and then "Two," said the other quitely, as down swooped his queen. "Mate."

"Perhaps you did not intend that red should play first," Colonel Walton suggested. "Of course, if white had done so, you would have won, only it was a case of mate in three moves for white and two for red, with victory for the first mover."

"You perceived it very rapidly," responded Gaston, proffering his cigarette case.

"I am pretty well used to problems," the colonel answered as he lighted his cigarette, "but would you care to try a game?"

"Only too delighted."

They played a pretty game, and, to his infinite satisfaction, Gaston Slater won, won easily, a little too easily, it seemed to him, against the man who had just shattered a problem he had spent hours upon, but as the colonel evinced slight pique at his defeat, Gaston felt bound to regard the victory as due to some oversight on the part of his adversary.

After all, what does failure or success depend upon so much as those strange unaccountable oversights? Oversights that the onlooker cannot comprehend, cannot conceive possible, and wonders how that obvious advantage was neglected, that fatal error committed, only to fall into some such blunder himself as soon as he faces the board.

The first contest of Gaston Slater and Colonel Henry Walton was followed by many others. Now in the hotel smoking room, and afterwards, as the friendship ripened, in the colonel's own private apartments, and ever the tide of fortune ebbed and flowed, now yielding victory to one and now to the other.

Time after time had Slater, anxious to return the colonel's hospitality, invited him to pay a visit to his rooms above the bank, but the colonel had always gracefully and good-temperedly declined. "No, no, my dear Gaston," he would say, with a hearty slap on the back; "never invite strangers to your house; think, my dear fellow, of the responsibility of your position."

"It is not so great as you imagine," Gaston had replied. "True, our bank is a country one, but it's not antiquated by any means; we have as fine strong rooms and safes as could be found in London. We have sometimes too much money lying idle in our coffers to run the risk of old-fashioned safes and out-of-date locks; and, what is better still, if our strong room door is touched after business hours the county police are instantly aware of the fact, for we are connected directly with the station by an electric alarm."

"Congratulate you, old boy," the colonel had heartily responded, and so ended the conversation. But at last a repeated urgent invitation had broken down his scruples, and he had consented to pay the long-desired visit.

II.

If Mr. Gaston Slater could have overheard the conversation of Col. Henry Walton as he sunned himself in Durnstable Park a couple of days after he had given his promise, his opinion of the open-mindedness of that individual would have undergone a complete and beneficial change.

The colonel was resting upon one of the rustic seats that adorned the park, and a couple of gentlemen, resplendent in silk hats and stylish frock coats, were engaged in earnest conversation with him.

"Well, colonel," exclaimed one—"oh, by the way, it is colonel, eh?"

"Yes, colonel this time."

"So it goes badly, eh?"

"Yes; couldn't be worse. Who ever would think that a last-created neighborhood like this would be right up to the knocker in all modern improvements?"

"Modern improvements be cursed!" the man exclaimed. "Just let me get a peep at the strong room, and if I don't—"

"My dear boy," interjected the colonel, "we all know your skill, but you can't overcome modern science."

"How about the new drill? Why, layers of hard and soft seamless steel are like cheese to it. Just put me outside that strong-room door, that's all I ask, and it won't be my fault if I don't see the inside."

"You are more likely to see the inside of a prison," the colonel replied. "If you so much as look at that door, a fiendish little contrivance rings a bell in the county police station."

"Oh!" The man whistled, and then, after a few moments' thought, continued: "What's it on—the strong room or the safes?"

"Strong room."

"Hum; then if we could pass that door it would all be serene?"

"Precisely."

"Do you know any more about it? How is it worked?"

"The alarm is never detached; it's built into the door, as it were, and whenever it's opened the bell sounds at the station. During banking hours it counts for nothing; it rings when the door is opened, but ceases when it is pushed right back. It's opened at 9, pushed right back, and remains so until it's shut at night; and after closing time the manager himself could not enter the strong room without having the police down upon him."

"Ah, I see," chuckled the other. "It is a wonderful contrivance; it guarantees the honesty of even the manager himself."

"During the night, yes. He holds the key, and no doubt we could get it; but, as you see, it would be useless."

"Ah, that door's a hard nut to crack. What do you think, Sidney?"

The third man raised his eyes, and for a moment looked reflectively across the park.

"What do I think?" he replied, at length. "Well, it strikes me very forcibly that after the smart things we've done across the water we are not going to be licked by an infernal tinkling bell. What's your idea, colonel?"

"Well, boys, it's a pretty thick job; there's only one way to do it, and that will be to get an official letter written to the police station—a letter signed by one of the directors of the bank and the manager, telling them that the bell will sound at a given hour on a given date and they need take no notice of it, although it will be after banking hours, as the books are to be gone into for some special reason—any lie will do."

"What a man you are for your joke, colonel!"

"I was never more serious in all my life."

"You mean the whole game is impossible?"

"Not a bit of it. I mean that that is the only way it can be done. Send that letter by one of the bank messengers, and it's 'open sesame,' as they say in the 'Arabian Nights,' and help yourselves."

"Oh, yes," sarcastically ejaculated Sidney; "and perhaps the director and manager would like to join in the spoil. Let's talk like men, and not like fools."

"A fool," mildly corrected the colonel, "is a man who forms a hasty opinion upon a matter he does not fully understand. I will undertake to supply that letter; the rest I shall leave to you."

"It's no use tackling forgery, colonel; it's too risky. We shall have to find some other way."

"In the first place, there is no other way, and in the second, it will not be forgery. The gentlemen will be obliging enough to sign their names themselves."

"Nonsense, colonel; you can't go up to two men and say, 'Here, just write your names on this sheet, one under the other, and leave me to fill in what I like above.'"

"Of course you cannot," the colonel murmured; "it would be want of tact, and, worse than that, want of manners."

"Then, how the——"

"Ah, you are curious. I thought you would be. And it's so simple—so beautifully simple. Look here."

The colonel put his hand into his breast pocket and extracted a thin black tube; he untwisted a small cap covering one end, and held it up before them.

"You don't need telling what this is?"

"I guess not. Reservoir pens are common, even on this side. This is the latest. What now?"

"What now?" Why, my dear boys," the colonel responded, in quite a parental manner, "what bad students of human nature you are. Don't you know that when you lend a man a new-fangled pen to see what he thinks of it, he invariably tests it by writing his own name? It's always his own name—never a quotation from his favorite poet, or an impromptu epigram, but just the one thing that comes easiest to his mind—his own name, written in his usual style, with that characteristic flourish of which he is so proud. Now, then, this is the way the thing will be done. To-morrow at noon I shall meet Mr. Beverley, the chairman of the bank, and my friend Gaston, to arrange for the investment of my funds. During the interview, with the bank's paper spread out well before us, I shall produce this pen. Perhaps they have seen one before, perhaps not; but in any case they will try it, and, it's a million to one, write their own names. The science of the game must be left to me and to luck. I shall use my best endeavors to get them to sign their names on the back of a sheet of the bank's headed paper, and trust to fate that they sign near enough together to answer our purpose; and then I can carefully obtain the sheet, and contrive that my note to the police fills enough space to fit the signatures."

The colonel deliberately lighted a fresh cigar from the stump of the last, and looked inquiringly at his companions.

"It's all right," said Sidney, "except that they will sign their names and then scribble all over the paper."

"No, they will not," firmly replied the colonel, in a tone that carried conviction to the minds of the others. "Now, you two think out some plan to get the keys from Gaston."

"Oh, we'll drug him."

"I guess not, my boy; he has a wife, and there's a sister, too, living with them, and very pretty girls they are. Now, look here, Gaston and I will, of course, play chess on the evening that we carry out this little job. His wife will give us some music, and his sister, who is a lady enthusiast, will watch the games. You, having obtained the keys, will open the strong room and safes and take all you can. Gold first, then the bonds to bearer, leaving the notes alone; many a good man has been done for by taking notes. A quarter of a million of the bank's funds are invested in United States government 4-per-cent. bonds to bearer in one-thousand-dollar bonds. Look for them, and then anything else, but be sure and leave the notes alone; they will all be stopped next morning. You, Ned, go up to London and get a Remington typewriter. That is the kind the bank uses. I shall want that for the letter to the police. Pack it in a box, so that no one can see what it looks like, and bring it to me at the hotel to-morrow night. And now, dear boys, au revoir. I am off to play Gaston—I owe him his revenge—and be sure you don't waste your precious time at billiards, but put your little heads together and find out a nice, artistic way to get the keys. Force is out of the question, remember that; it must be strategy, dear boys, strategy; put your heads together and think hard. Ta-ta."

And the colonel, jauntily settling his shiny hat a shade on one side, strolled towards the town.

III.

A full week passed before Colonel Walton sought his companions again, and then he stood and beamed upon the pair, who eyed him somewhat disconsolately.

"Well, dear boys," he said, in a voice overflowing with geniality, "a whole week's thinking, and what have we done? Now, then, one at a time. What's your idea, Ned, about those keys?"

"My idea is that it can't be done," the man growled in reply, "and we might just as well get out of it at once."

"Ah! I anticipated it," the colonel replied, vaguely addressing the universe. "They leave all the work to me, of course." He shook his head solemnly, and settled down between them. "I've been to London, dear boys," he remarked, after a moment's contemplation of his patents; "been to London and spent 15 guineas on a present for a lady."

"Hum, that's the attraction, then. That is why we are all fooling about round here."

"Ah, it's a beautiful present."

"Oh! confound the present. Why don't you talk business instead of running after the petticoats?"

"It's too warm for business, dear boys, and she is such a charming woman. How beautifully she blushed when I gave it to her. Thank goodness, we have not reached the age when a pretty woman has forgotten how to blush; it is so wonderfully attractive."

The two men simply gasped with impatience, but the colonel imperturbably continued: "A pale-blue Russian leather casket, lined with white satin, containing half a dozen cut-glass bottles of perfume, and locked with a tiny gold key. What a delightful present for a lady, and all simply for the sake of friendship, my boys, to the wife of my dear friend Gaston."

The others, who had scarcely gone to the pains of concealing their impatient annoyance, became suddenly interested as they noted the twinkle in the colonel's eye as he murmured, with premediated persistence, "A gold filigree key."

"Now, then, colonel, no bluff; what's the game?"

"A gold filgree key," the colonel sighed reflectively, "and an sweet an example of the metal worker's art that for safety the lady asked her husband to place it on his ring, where it rubs its aristocratic shoulders with the keys of the strong room and the safe."

For a moment the colonel's two companions watched him closely, and then the twinkle in his eye became contagious, and they chuckled in chorus.

"Colonel, colonel, no wonder they are looking for you over the water."

Col. Henry Walton had had his little joke and was satisfied. He suddenly became alert and businesslike.

"What do you think of this, boys?" he asked, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket and holding it before him. "Headed paper signed by the chairman and manager of the bank. 'The bell will sound such and such a time—auditors going through the books, etc., etc.' Signed Joseph Beverley, chairman, Gaston Slater, manager. Ah! it needed a deal of care to manage this. Old Beverley wrote his name, put down the pen, and said it was a pretty idea, but I had a presentiment Slater would go a bit wrong, so I remarked as he took the pen that I thought that it would suit his slapdash S, and kind of put in his hand what to write."

"Very smart."

"Yes; but I had to cut my finger to stop him at the right moment, or I swear he'd have started scribling."

The colonel gazed reflectively at his forefinger, bound round with court plaster, and his companions grinned with delight at his story.

"Now, then, boys, you know everything. I have permission to introduce my two friends at Gaston's to-night, so we will just look in at your hotel and make ourselves respectable. You'd better bring one or two bits of wax, one never knows but what those little things may not be useful, and don't forget the key of the strong room is the largest, and the safes the two smallest, on the bunch."

The three men strolled through the town to the hotel and then towards the bank.

For a moment, as they crossed the threshold, the colonel's face clouded over gravely, and he whispered: "Fail to-night, and all is over;" but the shadow instantly passes as he enthusiastically shook the manager's hand and presented his friends.

As they entered the drawing room, Colonel Walton, in the first glance round, observed that his present to the manager's wife stood upon the little inlaid cabinet in the corner.

An hour was passed in conventional English conversation, and then Gaston Slater, with an apology to his new guests, suggested to the colonel that they might have just one game if his friends would excuse him and entertain the ladies.

Colonel Walton protested that his companions were quite aware of his fondness for the game, and would be unwilling to deny them the pleasure, while those gentlemen added their words to his, and, to prove their veracity, immediately commenced a lively chat with the manager's wife and sister.

The colonel suggested that the mellowness of the summer evening should not be spoilt by the introduction of artificial light, and carrying the table to the open French window, seated himself facing the room with his back toward the light.

Notwithstanding the game, Colonel Walton did not seem inclined to allow his friends to monopolize the ladies' society, and frequently interjected a remark when the conversation allowed him to do so without an appearance of rudeness. Gaston Slater felt his opponent was a terror. In the middle of a compliment to his hostess he would turn quietly, make the desired move, and then resume the conversation almost without a pause, while Gaston strove with all his might to break up that combination which was slowly and surely driving him into a corner, where mate lay in wait for the white king. The colonel chatted of all parts of the world as one who had traveled greatly, seemed to know the whole of America by heart, and was as well acquainted with Australia as with India. In fact, did but the ladies know it, Colonel Walton's travels might have been traced through the continents of the world by a series of audacious robberies which had marked the past dozen years and that gentleman's progress in his journeyings.

At length he returned to England. Admired the scenery of Derbyshire, Devonshire and Wales, his companions checking off in their minds the particular affair of each locality. "Then there's Bournemouth," he continued; "pretty little place, but too new," and the two men grew visibly perplexed in trying to remember if anything ever did happen at Bournemouth.

"Your move, Gaston. Don't let me hurry you, though; take your time, my boy."

Strange to say, the locality where nothing had happened seemed to please the colonel more than any other. He dilated upon the gardens, the walks and drives, and, more than anything, upon the odor of the pines. "How sweet and refreshing; give him nature's own perfumes far before the distilled compounds of the druggists." And then his hostess, with a bewitching air of surprise, declared he had reminded her, and she must show that delicious casket to his friends. The colonel deprecated, but she insisted, and Gaston Slater thrilled as he saw his opponent make a terrible slip in that last move, and leave his queen for the moment unprotected and in danger. Mrs. Slater walked across the room, and the visitors followed. Then there was a great amount of rustling of skirts, a handkerchief was violently shaken, while a lady's voice pettishly exclaimed:

"How provoking! I cannot have lost it; but I distinctly remember putting—why, of course, Gaston, you have it on your ring."

The hand of Gaston's adversary trembled slightly as he made his next move, and the bank manager, absorbed in the game, took no heed of his wife's remark, and sharply followed. The last words were repeated, accompanied this time by a tap upon the shoulder, and the colonel made another weak move as the thought flashed through his head, Would Gaston leave the game to open the casket for her, or give her the keys?

"Yes, your key is on my ring."

"That is what I am trying to impress upon you. I want to snow the casket to the colonel's friends."

"Oh!"

"Your move, Gaston."

"Hum—yes."

With his whole mind absorbed upon the board, Gaston drew the keys from his trousers pocket, unhooked them from his chain and handed them to his wife, while the colonel softly whistled through his teeth the opening chorus of "The Gondoliers."

Gaston took the colonel's queen with a chuckle, and his sister earned the eternal gratitude of the latter individual by walking to the piano and softly taking up his chorus. Murmurs of admiration floated across from the other side of the room, and the chink of a bunch of keys as they were laid upon the cabinet. Then they rattled slightly again; there was a pause; one of his friends was talking fluently about the city of Cologne, and a feminine voice thanked some one who handed the keys to her again.

The casket was locked. Mrs. Slater returned the keys to her husband, who replaced them on his chain, and, with an exclamation of triumph, mated.

"Now, do not forget, colonel," the manager cried, as he speeded the parting guests; "it is this day week."

"For myself, you may rely upon me, but I leave my friends in London."

"Are you sure your friends could not return with you?"

"I am afraid not, my dear fellow; but if they can look in later——"

"They will be welcome."

"Then that is settled. This day week I take my revenge. Ha, ha, what a melodramatic sentence. Good night, dear boy, good night."

The colonel turned sharply upon his companions as they left the bank.

"Well?"

"All right, colonel, we've impressions of half a dozen keys between us. Your lady friend is as blind as a bat."

"She's a deuced fine woman," the colonel replied, firmly. "It's the man who's the fool."

IV.

The ensuing week seemed to Gaston Slater the longest in his life, and each day he found himself checking off so much time as gone, counting so much yet to come, before the arrival of the only man he cared to play. He was sick of the easy victories against people who only vaguely understood the science of the game. Colonel Walton had shown him what a player was, and he would rather be beaten every time by that man than win with sickening monotony at the club.

Often, while studying a particularly abstruse problem, he found his thoughts wandering after his friend, and Colonel Walton, working at his miniature lathe in his apartments in London, with a series of delicate looking tools and files to his hand, hummed to himself, and continually thought of his dear friend Gaston.

At last, to the infinite satisfaction of both, once more Gaston and Colonel Walton faced one another across the mimic battlefield.

Slater asked after his friends; the colonel was sorry, but they were detained in London, and desired to be remembered and excused.

The colonel that night was not quite up to his usual form. Perhaps the distractions of London had unsettled him, or perhaps he was thinking that things might, after all, not go quite well. He believed they would; he saw no possibility of any hitch, but yet when it came to the critical moment it was trying—trying even to the most experienced, and doubly so when his part was physical inaction; when it was pure strategy and brain power, while the other hands fell the whole activity. He had not a doubt that his friends would be able to manage the outer door of the bank quietly enough. Then as to the alarm, that was all right. He had, with Slater's permission, just before the doors closed, sent one of the bank messengers with a letter to the police station, ostensibly about his lost diamond ring, but in reality the letter that had excited the admiration of his friends, bearing the genuine signatures of Beverley and Slater. He had, unobserved, devoted a little attention to the handle of the drawing-room door, and the only remaining task was to prevent Gaston, his wife or sister leaving that room between the hours mentioned in the letter—8 and 10 p. m.—and so discovering that the strong-room door was open.

Just 8 o'clock. The colonel made his first move, and almost fancied he could hear his friends attack the outer door. How slowly the minutes seemed to pass! Half a dozen times he glared at the hands of the clock, and half a dozen times wondered if it had stopped.

Quarter past 8 chimed.

Now, if all were well, tney were in the strong room.

"Check, colonel."

"Ah, yes; I beg your pardon. I'm playing badly to-night—there." The colonel, always a philosopher, decided that it was useless worrying himself, and settled down to the game in real earnest, and, presto! before he knew it the hands of the clock pointed to 9:15. An hour gone. It was impossible, he thought, that the whole affair could really go through so smoothly so quietly, and, as if in answer to his thoughts, his hostess rose.

"You will excuse my leaving you, Colonel Walton," she said; "our maid has been called suddenly to her mother's by telegram, and I am sure you are dying for some coffee."

The colonel smiled consciously when the telegram was mentioned, and protested at the trouble he was occasioning, but as the ladies still moved towards the door he instinctively sprang up to open it for them.

He turned the handle and pulled the door sharply forward, but as it came it met his outstretched foot, then suddenly rebounded and fastened with a snap, leaving the china handle in his grasp.

Nine thirty.

He looked towards them with a comical air of despair, and then attempted to fit the handle on again, but so clumsily that the shaft was thrust right through and fell upon the mat without, while he stood—the picture of gentlemanly embarrassment—with the handle in his hand.

"You've done it now, colonel," cried Slater, looking up from his study of the game. "Thirty feet from the ground, we're prisoners until some one releases us from the outside."

"What is to be done?"

"Finish the game, at any rate," suggested Gaston, who perceived the victory rested with his side; and the colonel, with profuse apologies for his clumsiness, walked towards the window and gazed down into the street.

The music of "The Gondoliers" seemed to have caught very strongly upon the good people of Durnstable. A man passed below, whistling "I Stole the Babe," and the colonel turned again towards the room, and as he did so an idea seemed to strike him. He walked over to the fireplace, picked up the slender burnished steel poker, and, inserting the end into the aperture where the shaft of the door handle fitted, used it as a spindle, and with a dexterous twist turned the lock and opened the door.

"Ah! Got it."

"Colonel Walton, you are an inventive genius."

"Mrs. Slater, many people have done me the honor to make a similar observation."

Gaston won his game, then coffee and music, permission to smoke for the gentlemen, and time, that once dragged, was now fleet-footed. Never before had the colonel shone so brilliantly or been so full of anecdote. At last 12 struck, and he rose.

"One more game before you go, colonel," Gaston begged, as the ladies left them.

"Well, well, as you like. But be careful; I'm in a winning mood now."

"Come along, then; it is your revenge."

"It is, and I'll have it."

The pieces moved silently for half a minute, and then the manager gasped.

"Confound it all! What's that?"

"That, Gaston, my dear boy," the colonel replied, as he rose, with a grim smile, "that is what every man gets once or twice in his lifetime and never learns to like—'Fool's Mate.' Good night, dear boy, good night."

—Huan Mee, in Cassell's.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

People who sell newspapers in the streets of Moscow are compelled to appear in uniform.

Iowa's State fair this year will be open on Sunday. The machinery will be idle and religious services will be held.

It is said that more than 90 per cent. of railway passengers in England travel third class. They contribute about 83 per cent. of the receipts.

A business firm in Stanford, Ky., always opens the day's business with prayer, proprietors, clerks, messengers and porters all kneeling together.

Recent mortality returns from the Southern States show that the death rate of the colored people from tuberculosis is three times as high as that of the whites.

It has been discovered in the town of Jamestown, R. I., that it is impossible to secure a man there for jury duty, as they are all enrolled in the fire department.

Gibraltar, which has been commonly supposed to be impregnable, is evidently not so, England having decided to spend about $10,000,000 in strengthening its defenses.

A single bee, with all its industry, energy and the innumerable journeys it has to perform, will not collect much more than a teaspoonful of honey in a single season.

The pastor of the German M. E. Church in Atchison, Kan., has received from his congregation only $14 since September, and that was for services rendered as janitor.

Public libraries spend vast sums of money to make their collections complete. In the Boston Public Library is a collection of works relating to Shakspeare which cost $50,000.

Contrary to the general impression, railway earnings in 1896 were actually greater than those in 1895, the gross amount having been $1,123,646,562, or an average of $6,519 per mile.

The lowest temperature ever recorded was on Dec. 30, 1871, and was experienced by Professor Gorochon. He was at Werchojansk, Siberia, and the temperature was 81 degrees below zero.

A horse can live twenty-five days without solid food, merely drinking water; seventeen days without either eating or drinking, and only five days when eating solid food without drinking.

Nevada for many years has had but one Baptist Church. This is at Reno, and now a second has been established at Wadsworth, thirty-five miles distant, with a membership of sixteen and four awaiting baptism.

Children are large patronizers of the postal savings banks of France. Out of over 400,000 depositors in these institutions, according to the reports of the minister of posts and finance telegraph, 80,658 are minors.

A baby that weighs but eight pounds at the age of eighteen months, which is a pound and a half less than it weighed when born, is the attractive center of all the gossip of the little town of Danbury, N. H.

The English island of Thanet is almost wholly composed of chalk. The island is ten miles in length and about five in breadth, and geologists say that there are not less than 42,000,000,000 tons of chalk "in sight" on it.

A. W. Jones, of Augusta, Me., has a valuable coin in his possession over 400 not forgot, it is of black bronze, and in its fine state of preservation shows the figure of Emperor Lucius Caesar, in whose reign the coin was made.

In India there are 100,000 boys and 627,000 girls under the age of fourteen who are legally married, while 8,000 boys and 24,000 girls who have not attained the age of four are under marriage bonds as arranged by their parents.

There are 365,000 men employed in coal mining in this country, of whom 135,000 are at work in the anthracite regions of Pennsylvania. For every 100,000 tons of coal mined one poor miner on the average loses his life by accident.

There is in the strong rooms of one of the oldest private banks in London a large quantity of jewels, plate and other valuables which were deposited for safe custody by French refugees shortly before the outbreak of the revolution.

The people living at Peak's island, Me., are so healthy that the physician who attempted to make a living by remaining there failed, and the islanders, sick and well alike, contribute a certain amount yearly, outside that paid for services, to keep him there.

One of the oldest, if not the oldest, English firms is that of Richardson, leather manufacturers of Newcastle-on-Tyne. The predecessors of this firm were leather sellers to the monastery of St. Hilda, which was disestablished at the time of the Reformation.

An Omaha old book dealer bought a Bible from a tramp, who said he found it "on the road" between Portland, Ore., and Omaha. The Bible was printed in 1690 and has manuscript notes made in Plymouth, Mass., in 1623. The bookseller has refused $175 for the volume.

The horses which have been turned loose to forage for themselves in the eastern part of Washington have multiplied very rapidly and there are said to be as many as 100,000 now roaming about. The farmers look upon them as pests and are hoping that the cold weather will kill them off.

The little village of Martin, Mich., has not had a saloon for thirty years, but so many drunken men were seen on the street lately that an investigation was ordered. The authorities found a joint containing fifteen barrels of whisky in the cellar of a private residence near the business center.

The Kneipp cure stories have revived recollections of an old pioneer who went to his last sleep in Rangeley, Me., more than a quarter of a century ago. It is said of him that his remedy for cold feet—a remedy he did not hesitate to apply to himself or recommend to his friends—was to take off his shoes and stockings and walk in the snow.

Frozen milk has become an important article of trade in Europe. It is frozen in different-sized bricks, and in this way its purity and freshness are insured. The Belgian government intends to increase the trade at an annual outlay of £10,000, and in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, a company has been formed and arrangements have been completed for the regular export of frozen milk.

How "The Duchess" Wrote Novels.

Buffalo Courier.

She once described her method—not that methods are of any earthly use to other aspirants for literary fame, but that the operations of a successful writer are always interesting. "I scribble my notes," she said, "on the last sheets of my friends' letters. Wouldn't they be surprised if they knew that the last sheet became the scene of a love affair, a full account of a murder, a boycotting, or, most likely of all, a flirtation? I am not a very good sleeper, so I am very apt to plan out my scenes at night and write them in the morning. Write with regularity? Sometimes I have written the last chapter of a book first—a good situation will come to me. I will write it out and later on write all around it."

A Great Truth.

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Don't be dazzled by big exports at the expense of decent wages and purchasing power among the American people. The United States is the richest when its workers are so well paid that they can pay good prices for each other's products.

OFFERINGS OF THE POETS.

A Sleep Song.

O reddening lips that prophesy
Of flowerful meads, and burning days,
Behold! a weary singer lays
His lyre and faded chaplet by:
Foreseeing how the dark must fall,
And apprehending death in all.

"Alas!" (And surely I can tell
How, in the dusk, bright eyes grow dim),
"The wine is savorless to him
Who nears that hoary citadel,
Looming above the waters deep
That circle round its towers of sleep."

And as ye falter in the dance,
And hush awhile the rapturous strain:
Enamour'd of the poet's pain,
Or saddened by his tears, perchance!
I watch the gath'ring night draw on
Like a low-plaining Halcyon.

O flawless purple of the glade
And crocus-gold I shall not see!
At last life's subtle mystery
I read and ponder, unafraid.
To sing is well, till all be guess'd:
And then to sleep—for sleep is best.

—Pall Mall Gazette.

As the Sun Went Down.

Two soldiers lay on the battlefield
At night when the sun went down.
One held a lock of thin gray hair
And one held a lock of brown.

One thought of his sweetheart back at home,
Happy and young and gay,
And one of his mother left alone,
Feeble and old and gray.

Each in the thought that a woman cared
Murmured a prayer to God,
Lifting his gaze to the blue above,
There on the battle sod.

Each in the joy of a woman's love
Smiled through the pain of death,
Murmured the sound of a woman's name,
Though with his parting breath.

Pale grew the dying lips of each,
Then, as the sun went down,
One kissed a lock of thin gray hair,
And one kissed a lock of brown.

—Town Talk.

A Valentine from Her.

See yonder lad a-footing free,
How jocundly he hies;
The morning's tingling ecstacy
Is dancing in his eyes.
A flowery way becomes his path,
The skies a golden blur,
The earth a paradise—he hath
A valentine from her.

A sudden song escapes his lips,
A joy-reverb'rant thing;
Through love's divine companionship
He feels himself a king.
He dreams of no sad aftermath,
This buoyant worshiper,
And all, forsooth, because he hath
A valentine from her.

—Clinton Scollard, in Home Magazine.

To-Day.

Wait not the morrow, but forgive me now;
Who knows what fate to-morrow's dawn may bring?
Let us not part with shadow on thy brow,
With my heart hungering.

Wait not the morrow, but entwine thy hand
In mine, with sweet forgiveness full and free;
Of all life's joys I only understand
This joy of loving thee.

Perhaps some day I may redeem the wrong,
Repair the fault—I know not when or how,
Oh, dearest, do not wait—it may be long—
Only forgive me now.

—The Academy.

Surpassed.

The strenuous gull beats down the sweeping wind;
The lark, aspiring, sings in viewless sky,
But I, who have so hoped and dreamed and loved—
How less than these am I!
O silver gull, thy calm of tireless flight,
Unresting peace, be mine;
And thou, familiar of the skies, teach me
An ecstacy like thine.

—Grace Duffield Goodwin, in February Century.

Possession.

With princely pride, his princely lands toward,
He pointed, saying: "Of these acres broad,
Lo! I, alone, am master sole, and lord."

The old earth chuckled at the boaster's stress:
"Fool, know that I, alone, am masterless—
All them that hath possessed me, I possess."

—Ada A. Mosher, in Cosmopolitan Magazine.

HUMOR OF THE DAY.

Untrustworthy.

New York Times.

"Wheeler is somewhat of a liar, is he not?"

"Well, he swears by his cyclometer."

His Desire.

Puck.

Old Flint (savagely)—So you want to become my son-in-law, young man?

Young Swift (promptly)—No; I merely want to marry your daughter.

A Distinction.

Puck.

She—Then a "tariff-tinker" is a man who wants to make changes in the tariff?

He—Yes; that is, changes which we oppose. If he wanted to make the changes which we advocate, he'd be a statesman.

Ingratitude or Imposition.

Judge.

Benevolent Party (cheerfully)—I see Mr. Edison expects to cure blindness by electricity.

Blind Man (gloomily)—Yes; these inventors are always driving some poor man out of business.

What She Said.

Twinkles.

"Did you tell her I was out, Bridget?"

"I did, mum."

"What did she say?"

"Thank the Lord, mum."

A Timely Departure.

Judge.

"Poor Mrs. Scattles! Dead only three weeks and her husband has already another wife."

"Poor thing! How fortunate is was for her that she died before he married the second time."

Explaining Himself.

Harper's Weekly.

Judge—Guilty or not guilty?

Prisoner—Not guilty, boss.

Judge—Ever arrested before?

Prisoner—No, boss. An' I nevah done stole nuffin' before, neder.

She Was Tired.

Yonkers Statesman.

"Won't you take this seat?" said the gentleman in the car, rising and lifting his hat.

"No, thank you," said the girl with the skates over her arm. "I've been skating, and I'm tired sitting down."

In Society.

Puck.

Drusilla—I did not see you at the Vanblunt reception last night, dear.

Dorothy—No; I hoped to be able to go, up to the last moment, but was prevented.

Drusilla (sweetly)—Yes; I know the invitations were limited.

Evolution.

Puck.

His Wife—And you are to defend that shoplifter?

The Lawyer—My dear, she isn't a shoplifter. She was, formerly; but she has saved so much money in the last ten years that she has become a kleptomaniac.

On the Limited (Washington) Express

Twinkles.

Mrs. Senator (to the colored porter)—Is my husband, the senator, in the smoking car?

The Porter—Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Senator—Then say I want him. I am so afraid he is discussing that horrid foreign policy again.

The Porter—Don't be feer'd, ma'am; 'tain't policy—it's poker.

A Mere Formality.

Philadelphia North American.

"Then you absolutely refuse to allow your daughter to marry me?"

"I positively do," roared the father.

"Um; I expected as much," murmured the young man, as he edged toward the door. "I merely went through the formality of asking you in order to avoid the possibility of a suit for breach of promise."

A Cynical Sire.

Washington Star.

"Did you speak to my father?" said Miss Gushley.

"Yes," replied the young man with embarrassment.

"You told him that despite your humble fortune, we wish to marry?"

"Yes—or something to that purpose."

"And what did he reply? That I was too young?"

"No, not exactly. He said I was old enough to have more sense."

The Richest Woman in the World.

Springfield Union.

Queen Victoria is an economical person. Though immensely rich, she has given but £500 to the Indian relief fund. The Prince of Wales, who is burdened with debts, gave £250. William Waldorf Astor, whose naturalization as a British citizen is denied, gave £2,000, and the American banking firm of J. S. Morgan & Co. gave £1,000. The Queen, with far greater interest in India, gives but one-fourth what an American, with absolutely no interest in India, did. This is not creditable to the charitableness of the Queen.

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