



THE MOAT HOUSE.  
Richard Croker's house at Wantage, England.

**PLAYED-OUT OIL TOWNS.**

**MELANCHOLY SURVIVALS OF THE "GUSH-ING" DAYS THAT ARE NO MORE.**

Out in Western Pennsylvania there are many towns and communities—in fact, almost whole counties—where the oil industry is the support of the population. A slight decrease in the price of oil will nearly wipe out the income of whole families. Oil is scarce and the price low, and every slight occurrence that may affect the price is commented upon and carefully weighed and discussed from all points of view.

There is not the money in oil in Western Pennsylvania now that there used to be. "Gushers" are not struck any more. Oil men, and that means all of the residents, sit around the hotels and the postoffices and the stores and tell about the old days, when wells came in with fifty thousand barrels a day and oil was worth \$8.40 a barrel; but when a man has a well giving eight or ten barrels a day by pumping nowadays they congratulate him on his "production."

In the days of gushing wells and bonanza

here then, I tell you. Why, I see them old four room shacks down on th' bottoms rent fr a hunder an' a hunder an' fifty an' as high as two hunder a month easy. There wa'n't a house in town vacant. People was sleepin' in barns an' anywhere. There was plenty o' people on Main-st. in them days. Hey, George?" He clasps one knee and rocks back and forth, grinning all over his face with the pleasure of the recollection.

"You bet!" says George, with equal enthusiasm. "I see Main-st so crowded many a night that you had to walk in th' middle of the street to get anywhere; an' then you was liable to get run over any minute by the hosses crowdin' fr footroom." They all give themselves up to recalling the palmy days of the oil excitement, and that is all the satisfaction to be had from them.

"There's old Joe Bulkely," says one. "He didn't have a cent, an' some one give him an eighth in a lease out to'rds Brush Creek, an' she come in a gusher. Well, sir, it wa'n't six months before Joe was worth his half million, easy. Yes, sir, half a million in six months."

"What is he doing now?"

"Yes, that's so. But it takes 'bout \$8,000 to \$10,000 to put a well down in West Virginia. You see, you have to go down anywhere from three to five thousand feet there, an' through rock mostly, before you strike th' oil sand. An' up here you can put one down fr 'bout thirty-five hunder."

"What good does that do when there isn't any oil?"

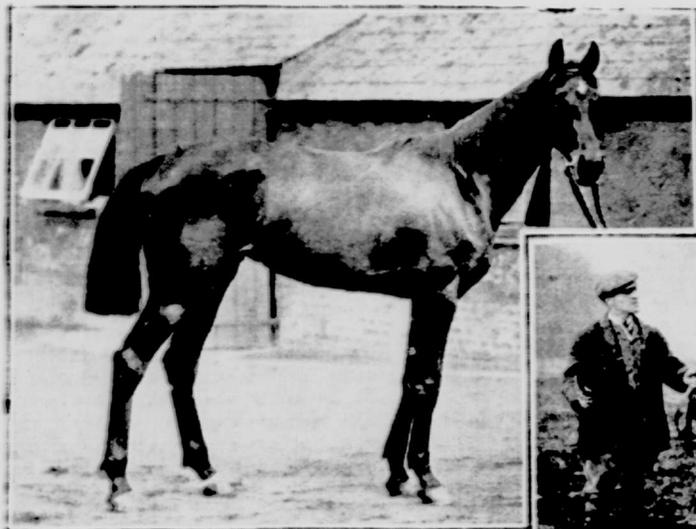
"You can't tell. You may strike oil. An' we don't none of us feel like puttin' \$10,000 in one hole."

"Then why don't you put your money into some manufacturing enterprise and get factories and shops located in your town and business started up?"

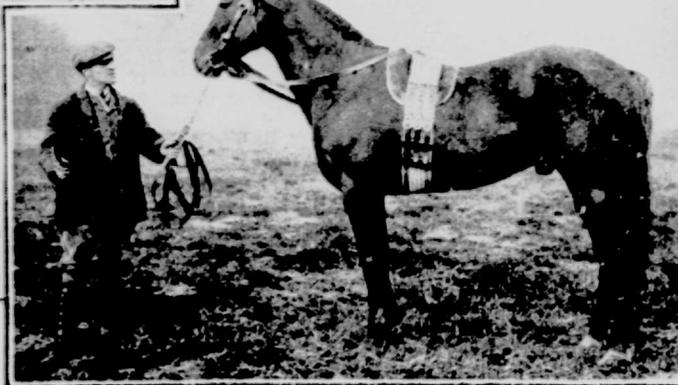
"Well, you see, we're in th' oil business."

That's it. They are in the oil business, and the town has a deserted, dead and alive air that is smotheringly oppressive. There are wide, well paved streets, electric lights, water, gas, sewerage, substantial business blocks, handsome public buildings, attractive dwellings—and no business. The streets are deserted, many houses are without tenants, many stores empty of customers. The people you see are loitering along with nothing to do. All is the product of a passing boom. No attempt is made to make the conditions lasting. There is neither business nor attempt to make business. Near the railroad station are the ruins of foundries and machine shops which once supplied tools and ma-

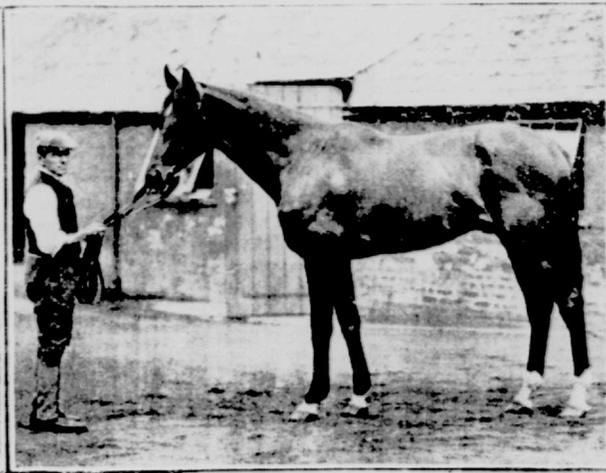
"I don't know as he's doin' much of anything now. The old man's been havin' purty hard



RHODA B.



DOBBINS.



AMERICUS.

**HORSES IN THE CROKER STABLES AT WANTAGE.**

prices one could not blame a man for putting \$3,000 or \$4,000 into a hole in the ground in the hope of getting out a fortune the contemplation of which fairly takes one's breath away. To go out now, though, and deliberately spend \$4,000 to drill a hole sixteen hundred feet deep in a place where practical demonstration has shown again and again that there is no more oil seems to an outsider the height of folly. Yet that is just what is done every day in the old oil country, and the men who do it could not be induced to invest a like amount in a legitimate business enterprise.

There are towns out there going to rack and ruin and rapidly decaying because the inhabitants are impregnated with the oil fever and the tradition of riches in an hour. If they are spoken to about the way their town is going to the dogs, they listen quietly and with a reflective air and acquiesce in all you say. "Yes, the old town is purty much run down. There was five hundred people left here last year, an' I heard to-day that the Porterses an' two families from across the creek was goin' to leave next month."

They sit awhile reflecting on the situation and saying nothing, and then one of them brightens up and remarks: "But you orter seen 'er when th' oil was here. There was plenty of people

luck these last few years, strikin' nothin' but dry holes, an' I guess his money's just about give out. That's purty tough, too. I mind when Joe was worth a million, easy."

"Well, if there are nothing but dry holes now, why don't you go into some other business?"

"Oh, we strike oil once in a while."

"There isn't one of you here, though, who hasn't put more money into dry holes this year than he has taken out of producing wells."

"Well, I don't know but maybe you might be right. But look at Tom Henderson. He's got nigh onto two hunder produc' wells makin' anywhere from six to twenty-five bar'ls a piece."

"Yes, Tom Henderson and perhaps half a dozen others in the town have production that amounts to something, but they are not drilling any more wells."

"Oh, yes, they are. That's where you're wrong. They're drillin' every day."

"Not drilling around here; not going over worked out territory. They're drilling in West Virginia, where there is oil."

chinery to the well drillers. Their roofs are sagging and their windows broken. Doors hang by one hinge, floors have fallen through, the rain and snow come in to rot the beams and ruin with rust the few remaining pieces of machinery which the owners have been too shiftless to remove. And the inhabitants point to those ruins with pride! They show what the town has been. The people who point out those ruins to you never seem to think that they also show what the town is to-day.

Easily the most prosperous class are the farmers. They lease their farms to the oil men, who drill them full of holes and pay well for the privilege. The farmers themselves do not often take an active part in the oil business, although there are some who have done so, and they have generally done well, because they have been content when they have made enough, and have not sunk all their profits in "dusters." When the oil gives out and the wells go dry, they still have their farms.

An abandoned oil field is a desolate sight, dot-

ted all over with brown and weather beaten derricks, many rotting and falling to pieces, with here and there a boiler or an engine incrustated with rust, useless from long abandonment. The occasional new derrick or laboriously pumping engine only serves to heighten the solitude and loneliness, the melancholy waste of forsaken fields. The old fields are typical of the towns, with their dying industry and fading population. Dismantled foundries, machine shops gone to ruin, half-empty lumber yards, inhabitants dreaming of the past while the present slips away; these are the characteristics of the "oil town." There are a few towns which have got away from the oil rut and are now prosperous, bustling, manufacturing places; but the majority are dead, or practically so. Perhaps some day, when the younger generation gains more power in the land, these now dead towns will renew their lives in more lasting forms.

**FRENCH RELIGIOUS ORDERS.**

**THEIR VAST POSSESSIONS.**

Paris correspondence of The London News.  
Two closely printed volumes of 1,000 pages each have been distributed to the members of the Chamber. The printing of them has cost £800. They are packed with statistics on the fortunes in real estate of the religious orders, and show their progress since 1850, when the worst wave of reaction that France ever experienced set in. That year they owned properties valued at £2,000,000. Their ostensible real estate has since risen to £44,000,000, but the wealth held in trust and otherwise kept out of sight must, it is thought, considerably exceed £120,000,000. Should this ratio of increment continue, they would in another half century possess £400,000,000 to £600,000,000.

What do the religious orders want with all this wealth? The almsgiving of the religious orders is not great. Indeed, they are reputed avaricious. Their orphanages are scarcely disguised industrial schools. The profits of the child labor in these houses are considerable, and the children are turned adrift when of age, penniless, badly clothed, narrowly specialized, and unable to adapt themselves to new conditions. The Bishop of Nancy was a year ago engaged in a hot campaign at Rome and in his diocese against the Order of the Good Shepherd, which is the greatest outfitter of lingerie de luxe in France. The Bishop of Laval quite recently did battle with a begging order in his diocese that also knows how to turn child labor to industrial account. He first remonstrated, and was publicly vilified by way of answer. On an appeal to Rome the Pope decided in his favor, and limited the conditions for the creation or spread of such orders. The ease with which, under the name of religion and charity, the laws against mendacity could be evaded led to the great multiplication of religious orders. They have two great sources of wealth—the dowries of new members and begging. The begging leads often to large donations and to legacies.

There are altogether 3,216 religious houses in France. Of these 2,784 have schools of various kinds, including the kind of orphanages on which the Bishop of Nancy has put his foot down. Since 1877 the religious orders have swarmed in Algeria, where they number 30,133 members. The numbers are not given of those that swarm to the other French colonies, and to Canada and British India, where Roman Catholic enterprise is very great. Sacred Heart convents go in for elegant education for young women. They have been rapidly gaining ground in Canada, California and the hill districts of British India. There are orders, such as the Poor Clares, Trappists and Carmelites, which go in for fasting and other mortifications of the body, but they are by far the least numerous.

Most religious communities live well. Loyola expressly forbids mortification of the body, which might render the Jesuit a less efficient Soldier of the Cross. He wanted his disciples to be able bodied, enterprising, resourceful. Saint Vincent forbade every attempt to rise above the common law, unless in observing the vow of celibacy and rising at cock crow in the morning. His daughters kept a plain, excellent table. I was once a neighbor in the country of a Sisterhood of St. Thomas de Villeneuve, and hired a cook who had been with them for seven years. She was one of the best cooks I ever knew in a narrow range. She spoke of the sisters as gourmands and gourmets, as hearty eaters and dainty, but without thinking the worse of them for that. They ran a hospital for scrofulous children, and they were assisted by a large staff of servants. The sisters never did servile work themselves, but knew how to get it done. They were not saints, but certainly were not sinners, either. They were good to the children, and most successful in begging for them. The worst thing I knew of their community was that a member fell in love with the gardener, and finally insisted on retiring from it to marry him. The Mayor of the Commune, though a Clerical, had to post the bans on the door of the parish church, to the great disgust of the religious people with small minds.