END OF A STRANGE STORY.

FANNY SWEET AND RACHEL BROWN; WERE THEY THE SAME PERSON?

A Louisiana Court Decides That They Were, and Thus Fastened Upon One Woman Adventures to Fill Chapters of Romance and Tragedy.

NEW ORLEANS, Dec. 10.—The contest over the succession of Fanny Sweet Mills, upon which the Civil District Court of Louisiana passed finally on Tuesday, Dec. 8, brought to light a series of stories so marvellous that a novelist would be accused of sensationalism if he gave them in any romance.

On Jan. 6, 1896, Mrs. William R. Mills died in this city at the age of 70. She was the widow of one of the most distinguished members of the New Orleans bar, who had been the leading counsel in the famous Myra Clark Gaines case, which resulted in this city's paying $2,000,000 to the Gaines heirs. Mills's fee in this case was one of the largest ever paid, and made him independently rich, but he died soon after his success, leaving all his property to his wife. Every one in New Orleans knew who she was, the notorious Fanny Sweet, who for thirty years had been the wildest woman in the city, whose freaks, follies, and wild escapades had made her notorious, whose life had been one long succession of adventures. She was a woman of 54 when she met Mills, but such was the power she exerted over men that this lawyer of fine family and of high social standing and reputation at the bar made her his wife.

She was 70 years old when she died, and her death was a miserable enough ending even for a life so stained with sin and crime. Mrs. Mills was a wealthy woman, yet died of starvation. She had $100,000 in bonds in her armoire, but died of lack of food. For three years before her death she was blind, but she was so filled with fear that some one would rob her of her money that she lived alone. She was taken sick, and, having no one to call the doctor or get her assistance or food, she lay upon the floor until she died of starvation. She was found dead by a neighbor. Her death revealed the romance of her life and a succession of tragedies.

Mrs. Mills, or Fanny Sweet, made a number of wills just before she died, in which she left her money to several conspicuous men in New Orleans. Most of them would have gladly foregone the money to avoid the notoriety. She revoked all her wills just before her death and died intestate.

The State of Louisiana laid claim to the estate and seemed likely to get it, when suddenly two heirs appeared—Charles C. Brown, a respectable lawyer of Sacramento, Cal., and Mrs. Mary McVey, an aged widow of Huntington, W. Va., who claimed that Mrs. Mills, or Fanny Sweet, was their sister, Rachel Brown. It seemed a thoroughly improbable tale, for the State of Louisiana had traced back Fanny Sweet's history and found that she was Minerva Seymour, an English barmaid, born in London in 1826. The evidence that Fanny Sweet was Minerva Seymour seemed complete and indisputable. She herself so declared repeatedly, so swore in her will, in her marriage certificate, and in her relations, however confidential with her lawyers, she told the same story. She was born in London, she said, of good parentage, but had been left an orphan when young, had run away from her guardian, grown up in the slums of Liverpool, had become a barmaid there, and finally had come over to the United States in 1846, when 20 years old. Arriving in New York in the ship Waterloo, commanded by Capt. Allen, the State found several of her fellow travellers on the voyage, who readily identified Miner Sey mour with Fanny Sweet. She spoke, they said, with a marked cockney accent.

Here comes in the extraordinary and incomprehensible part of the story, for the claimants to the estate declare that Fanny Sweet was their sister, Rachel Brown, a native of Rome, Lawrence county, O., and descended from an old Virginia family; and the court has decided, in spite of the frequent declarations of Fanny Sweet herself and of her friends, lawyers, and acquaintances, in spite of her wills and her marriage certificate, even in spite of her cockney accent and her landing in this country from Liverpool in 1846, that Fanny Sweet was Rachel Brown, and it has awarded all her property to the California and West Virginia claimants. The court was compelled to accept the Minerva Seymour episode as true, for it was so clearly proved—but passed it over as inexplicable, like the many metamorphoses which Fanny Sweet indulged in later in her life.

Rachel Brown was born in 1826 in Rome, O. She ran away from home when 18 years old, and was completely lost sight of for years, but this created no surprise, for it seems to have been the habit of the Brown family to run away. Her eldest brother, James, ran away a few years before, and was never heard of afterward. Her sister, Sarah, also disappeared, but turned up years afterward in California, after marriage and adventure enough to fill a book. When Rachel, therefore, ran off, it was regarded perfectly natural, and no one troubled himself about her. The claimants to the succession have tried to follow the career of the runaway girl, but there are many long breaks in their records. They frankly admit that there are no traces of her for two years, 1844 to 1846. No one has ever been found who saw or heard of her during that period. That she became Fanny Sweet afterward is insisted, and it is equally clear that Minerva Seymour was also Fanny Sweet. The court fought shy of this dilemma. There is but one explanation of it. The Ohio girl found her way to London in some way, picked up the cockney dialect, and picked it up so successfully that she never lost it afterward. There are some absurdities about this theory, but it is the only possible one. It may have been Rachel Brown's idea of completely destroying her former identity and cutting herself adrift from her relatives. She played the part well if this theory is correct, and yet her relatives got her money after all.

Her brother and sister drop her career in 1844 and take it up again in 1846, when the girl whose subsequent multiplicity of names caused such confusion landed from the Waterloo. She drifted from New York to New Orleans with a man named Smith, and when she landed in the Crescent City she was Fanny Smith, instead of either Rachel Brown or Minerva Seymour. Smith married her in New Orleans, and there she was one of the gayest of the gay, and notorious at the old Globe ballroom as one of the wildest of the dancers. It was during the flush times of the Crescent City, when money was plentiful and morals were at a low ebb, and when, in fact, everything else, then raged there, the universal motto was: "A short life but a merry one." It was a short life for Smith, who died of the yellow fever a year after his marriage, leaving a widow of twenty-one with nothing in the world. New Orleans, lively as it then was, was no place for the widow. She drifted down to South America, and when the discovery of gold in California started the wild rush to the Pacific coast Fanny Smith was among the first pioneers. She fitted into the wild civilization of the mining camps, and was the belle of Sacramento. She was the mistress of Rube Raines, who ran the biggest gambling saloon in Sacramento, El Dorado, while she was the head of a dance house, the Palace. Fanny Raines, as she was now known, was perhaps as desperate and as quick with her gun as any man in California. She was unfortunate in using it, however, for one of her first victims was Albert Putnam, one of the most reputable citizens of Sacramento. It was at the time that the Law and Order movement in California was organizing, when the people of the Pacific coast had grown tired of the crimes committed there, and of being ruled and domineered over by gamblers, murderers, and blacklegs. Mr. Putnam was one of those who took a lead in the movement for peace and order, and when he was killed by the mistress of one of the worst gamblers in the town, the tragedy so stirred public sentiment that there seemed every probability that Fanny Raines, in spite of her sex, would be lynched, but she had friends in Sacramento, such strangely to say, she ran across her missing sister, Sarah, there, who, after marrying men named Swartout, McCormack, and Green, was then living in California, under the alias of Leah Duell. Her friends hurried her aboard a boat, got her away from Sacramento before the lynchers could find her, and she started for new fields, going first to Acapulco, Mexico, then to Panama, where she met Abraham Hinckley of New York, who was engaged in business there. He was infatuated with the woman, and he took her to New York, where he married her, and she dropped the names Minerva Seymour and Fanny Smith and became Maria Hinckley. She enjoyed her second marriage but a year. She visited her husband in Panama, travelled to Cuba and other countries, and finally wound up in New Orleans, where she seemed to have grown tired of married life, for she brought suit for divorce and got it.

Then followed a curious episode in her life which was largely responsible for the decision of the court giving her property to the Brown heirs. Maria Hinckley, after wandering around the world, and changing her name at every place to which she went, after going through the most remarkable proceedings to cover up her past and lose her original name, returned to Rome, Ohio, her birthplace, after an absence of thirteen years. She came back as a respectable and well-to-do widow, to find her mother dead. She built a handsome and expensive monument over her mother's grave, on which she had carved an entire poem, written by herself. Whether she was tired of her life of wandering and adventure and wanted to settle down to a quiet, respectable life, no one except herself could ever say. She unfortunately got into a quarrel with her brother-in-law, McVey, whose wife got half her succession. There were recriminations and lawsuits, in which Mrs. Maria Hinckley was generally successful, but they so disgusted her with her family that she again shook the dust from her feet and came back to New Orleans, where she changed her name and became Fanny Sweet.

It was just as the civil war broke upon the country. Willis G. Stevens secured the contract from the Confederate Government to supply the trans-Mississippi department with gunpowder. He was to buy it abroad, and started for Europe, via Mexico, as New Orleans was then blockaded. He had as partners in the business young Fred Sweet and a leading merchant of New Orleans. After travelling through Texas the merchant was surprised to find that Fred was a woman, in fact was Fanny Sweet, who found male dress better suited to her adventures, and who in after life went as often in trousers as in petticoats. The Confederate agents got as far as the Rio Grande, where Stevens was taken dangerously ill, and was nursed by Fanny Sweet. The nursing did not seem to agree with him, and when he died and Fanny came into most of his property she was publicly accused of murdering him; but in those times of civil war, the criminal courts were practically suspended, and although the charge of murder was made repeatedly, Fanny Sweet was never molested. She came back to New Orleans, said that Stevens was largely indebted to her, brought suit against his heirs, and secured a large part of his succession. From that time to her death Fanny Sweet never left New Orleans. She became a part of its criminal history. She built on the famous shell road, just on the edge of the city, a palatial mansion, surrounded by the handsomest gardens. There the wildest revelries went on, and the police were frequently called on to restore order; but she had friends and influence and defied all police regulations. Nothing afforded her more satisfaction than to drive in a handsome carriage through the city, dressed in male attire, firing her revolver in the air. This, however, was mere trifling, and there were several more serious episodes in her career at the shell road house. A young man of conspicuous family was murdered in her garden, but the family gladly hushed up the affair. Then, a young woman was killed there, and there were whispers of Fanny's wild jealousy and uncovorable temper and her quickness to use her gun, but it was during a period of the grossest police corruption, and no one cared to trifle with Fanny, and the murder was never made public; it was returned as a suicide.

Sixteen years ago Fanny Sweet, then well beyond fifty, further astonished the world by marrying the distinguished lawyer William R. Mills. The marriage shocked Mills's friends, but it seems to have been a happy one, for when he died, eleven years afterward, he left his entire property to "his beloved wife," whom he styles "Fanny Minerva Seymour Hinckley," including a large proportion of her aliases. After that Rachel Brown, Minerva Seymour, Fanny Smith, Fanny Raines, Maria Hinckley, Fred Sweet, Fanny Sweet, or Mrs. Mills led a quiet life, soothed her sorrows with opium, became blind, and finally died of starvation, insisting to the last that she was originally an English barmaid, Minerva Seymour. For over ten months the court has been busily engaged in hearing testimony about her career, and has brought out the facts here given, but there are hundreds of other incidents of her career still untold.

CONCERNING STATESMEN AND OTHERS.

Sketches In and Out of the Careers of a Few of Our Statesmen Now Corralled in a Marble Building at Washington.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12.—The crop of stories from the newly sprouted Congressmen promises fairly excellent results, even at this early date. These raw recruits to the historical army of national lawmakers, though it is a year before they have any rights in Washington that a policeman is bound to respect, are dropping into town quite frequently and, of course, they have to talk. Indeed, if a Congressman or any kind of a statesman didn't talk, he would be under suspicion at once. As one of them said on one occasion: "Of course, people say we are fools because we talk so much, but if we didn't talk, those same people would say we were knaves; so there we are, and what are we going to do about it?"

So they keeped on talking, for no statesman likes to be suspected of knavishness.

One of the new members was in town last week and he told a story about his four-year-old boy which he says he will swear to if anybody doubts it.

"That boy of mine," said he after narrating a reminder of him, "is a born school teacher, I think, for he will teach her tell things to people than do anything else, unless it might be to ask questions in his search for knowledge. As he is at the age when he has a lot to learn, he is in a position to have a great deal to tell. About a week before I left home, he came rushing in from school and bouncing into his mother's room with his books under his arm he sang out:

"'Oh, mamma, did you ever hear of George Washington?'

"'Why, Kenneth, of course,' said she, 'I told you of him a long time ago. Don't you remember?'

This was a disappointment, and Kenneth shook his head in a feeble effort to recall what his mother had told him.

"'But this isn't the same one,' he contended.

"'I think it must be,' she said.

"'Oh, but I'm sure it isn't I,' he insisted. 'Yours didn't live at Mt. Vermin, did he?'

"She could scarcely say 'yes,' concluded the member, "and to have said 'no' would have been misleading, so she explained matters by telling him the name of Washington's home in print and asking him to spell and pronounce it."

A member of Congress from Tennessee coming into Washington over the C. and O. one night last week was telling stories. In the smoker with him was a Methodist Bishop, who is a good fellow himself, and he had been making a few sly digs at the Congressman and at the kind of moral material which found its way into the make-up of statesmen.

"Which reminds me," said the member, getting the Bishop on a corner, "A good many years ago we had a fox law in my State to the effect that $2 would be paid for the scalp of each and every fox delivered to the County Clerk of each county. We also had a statesman of the kind my good friend the Bishop thinks we all are, to wit, he was a bold, bad man. That is to say, he was remotely suspected of removing horses from the premises of their owners; he had also been interested, so rumor said, in a money making scheme in the mountains, said money being counterfeit. In other respects he wasn't much better."

"He was a member of your State Legislature, which you should have also enumerated," smiled the Bishop.

"Yes," laughed the Congressman, "he was that, too. Well, a law to repeal the fox law had been introduced, and as the fox scalp receipts were about the largest actual money receipts the constituents of this statesman saw, he was anxious to keep them coming as long as possible and he made a noble fight against the repeal of the fox law. Mr. Speaker and fellow members of this body," he said, during the course of a long and able effort, 'the repeal of this law will be a deadly and fatal blow to the grand and beautiful cause of religion in my country, and will plunge us all into the vortex of the darkness of the middle ages. Yes, gentlemen of this House, if you repeal this grand and powerful instrument for the common good and let the foxes run wild in our midst at their own sweet will, they will eat up all our chickens, so that there will be none for the Methodist preachers. Without chickens, fellow citizens, there will be no Methodist preachers in our section, and that is the only kind we have. Therefore, gentlemen, you see what this repeal will end in and what will become of the gospel among my constituents.'

"'Well?' inquired the Bishop in doubt.

"'They wouldn't repeal the law, of course, under those circumstances,' responded the Congressman, and the Bishop went after the Member on another tack.

"The gentleman from Texas was conversing. "'There may be some people,' said he, 'who don't think Senator Coke, who used to be in the Senate from our State, is a great, big man, but there are more who know that he is, and that while he may not be an everlasting blaze of glory, he is a mighty good steady light to go by. Sometimes away back yonder, when he was making himself a power, he was pitted in some kind of race, I don't recall just what, against a man named Cole, and Cole was no slouch, either. His chief weakness was his mouth, and he could not keep it from talking, do what he would. In other respects he was Coke's equal, for he was at least ten years older and had had a great deal more experience. As the race progressed it was seen that Cole was getting rather the better of Coke, and the Coke crowd made a superhuman effort, so to speak, and got one of the best speakers they could find to stand at a big barbecue they were to give.

"'When the time came, much to the dismay of the Coke party their best speaker was taken sick and could not be on hand. What to do was the question of the hour, and calling a meeting of the committee they discovered in a very short time that no talent was available except a rough-and-tumble sort of a fellow who had been a coal miner in West Virginia before he came to Texas. He consented, of course, when called on, and the committee was in fear and trembling, wondering what he would do. But they didn't fear and tremble long.

"'Fellier citizens,' said the speaker in a voice that would shake the slate roof off of a vein of coal, 'I am here to-day to talk to you about Coke and Cole. You know me and you know Coke, and you know what I'm talking about, and I ain't to ask you if you know the difference between Coke and Cole. But it ain't necessary; every man of you knows that the difference between them is the gas that is in the Cole.'

"I don't remember the rest of his speech," concluded the Texan, "and I don't believe anybody else did, but I'm mighty sure that Cole never forgot that much of it. And what's more, I believe the effort he made to do less talking killed him, for he died before he was forty."

Expert Knowledge of Dressed Poultry.

"They say," said a citizen, "that the expert poultryman knows at sight just where a dressed chicken is from. Of course, he knows a Philadelphia chicken when he sees it, but they tell me that of Western poultry, for instance, he can tell at a glance whether a chicken comes from Ohio or from Illinois, and so on. It is a fine thing, no doubt, to be able to do this, and still I should be satisfied to be without this refinement of knowledge concerning the chicken territorially if I could tell, before buying it, whether it was tough or not."

SIGNOR AZZAMONTI'S ART.

IT DEALS WITH THE FEET OF THE PEOPLE OF THE STAGE.

Services He Renders to Actors and Actresses by Providing Them with the Proper Shoes—Observations of the Feet of Players—Some Gorgeous Creations.

In Fourth avenue, just north of Union Square, there is a window full of shoes. That's not remarkable. But the fifty pairs of shoes in that window represent $5,000. That's different. These great mousquetaire boots of snow-white ooze leather, for instance, are—but there! no one but Signor Azzamonti himself can do justice to these products of his art.

For over 300 years the Azzamontis have been shoemakers. No wonder that Giovanni (who calls himself John since he came to this country) knows how to make shoes for the Cardinals and Bishops of stageland. Giovanni's great-great-great-grandfather used to make the shoes for the really-truly Cardinals. As long as the nobles and prelates of Italy wore shoes upon which the Azzamontis could lavish their genius, the family served them. When at last all art and individuality disappeared from the footwear of the people, these men still stuck to their own beloved variety of last and made the shoes for the mimic people of the theatre.

Before Giovanni came to America, fifteen years ago, he shod the heroes and heroines on the Scala stage. Now, his shoes strut, as it were, across the stages of the whole world. The queer, cluttered shop which is behind that window of gorgeous footwear is full of interesting things. Here are dozens of photographs of great dramatic and operatic stars. They are all signed, and most of them have a line or two of appreciation whose depth may be explained by the fact that it literally came from their feet. Here is Calvé, who inscribes her photograph "To a veritable artist," and Ancona, who sends his to his friend "M'amico." There are others to "the king of shoemakers" and "to the champion," and "Al mio caro amico," and so on. Bernhardt, Irving, Salvini, the De Reszkes, and a score of great singers and actors recognize in this Italian shoemaker a

BYZANTINE SHOE. THIRTEENTH CENTURY SHOE.

man who is an artist as they are artists.

There are hundreds of letters from them, too. One from William H Crane acknowledged the receipt of some shoes which he wore as *Falstaff*.

"If the public had liked *Falstaff* as well as I liked the shoes," he said, "the play would have been a success."

Signor Azzamonti is a small, hollow-eyed man, so fair of skin and of hair that one would never dream of his coming from Italy. He is as proud of being the shoemaker that he is as any of the famous people for whom he works are proud of their triumphs. In fact, sometimes he thinks he is a greater success in making shoes than the others are in wearing them.

"See this boot?" he exclaimed, picking up a mousquetaire boot about three feet high. "I can make six characters out of this," and, kicking off his slipper, he thrust his foot into the boot. With a deft twist here and a push there, he actually made that one boot express several characters, from the devil-may-care d'Artagnan to a courtly exquisite and a stupid lout of a soldier.

"You see?" he said. "But the actors don't always do justice to the things I make for them. I have seen men, great actors, too, put on a boot like that and wear it so that they made the boot and themselves ridiculous."

Then he picked up other strange and gorgeous creations, and handled them lovingly while he talked.

"Here," he said, taking up a high-strapped boot made of the one-time coat of a brindle cow, "here is a shoe I made for poor Lawrence Barrett only four days before his death. This low shoe with the turned-up gold tip I made for Salvini to wear as *Othello*. This tiny riding boot was made for a little boy at the Academy of Music. This red morocco mousquetaire was also for Salvini. Here's Lewis Morrison. I built him up two inches to make him the same height as Louis James, with whom he was playing. Do I often do that? I should say I do! I built Margaret Mather up four inches when she played Joan of Arc."

"By the heels principally?"

"No, inside of the shoe. Oh, I have my own tricks. See this picture?" showing a photograph of a comedy actress with her feet conspicuously crossed on a hassock. "That woman was thought to have a very bad foot, a foot that was a real drawback in her parts, in most of which she wore either tights or short skirts. Well, it was my business to make her foot look pretty, even when it wasn't.

"There was Anna Held, too. She didn't have a bad foot, but it was spoiled by her shoes. I studied what was wrong, made my own last, and it was another foot she had."

"Do stage people pinch their feet to make them look small?"

"No. They have to act, and in order to act properly they have to be comfortable. It is the shape of the shoe more than the size that counts, anyway."

"Perhaps actresses have small feet and don't need to pinch them."

"That depends. You won't find any small feet among the artists on the stage. Sometimes a young chorus girl has them. There's a foot up at the Casino now that's so small it looks like a Chinese foot. But these Shakespeare people usually have a good dose of feet."

"How about Bernhardt?"

"Oh, she has a very fair foot. It is pretty slender, and she wears about a number four. She uses a good many shoes. When she was over here last I made her sixty-six pairs of shoes in as many days."

"Do you go and take the measure, or do the people come to you?"

"They come to me generally, although, of course, in the case of a great actress or singer I sometimes make an exception. But when it comes to making the shoes for an entire company, they come to me. For instance, Mr. Daly wants 185 pairs of shoes for his production of 'As You Like It.' Well, if the people come here, I seat myself comfortably on this hassock and take the measurements at my ease. If I did that at the theatre, they'd laugh. I'd have to kneel down and bend over. I've almost ruined my back as it is. I can't do that any more."

"What are these shoes?" picking up two pairs of odd-looking sandals with jingles in the heels and extra wooden soles.

"They're Richard Carroll's shoes from 'Brian Boru.' I have to put new wooden soles on them every week. See how these are split. If an ordinary shoemaker made these for him they wouldn't last an hour the way he works. People have an idea that all stage finery is mere tinsel, but I can assure you that the shoes we make for the stage are made of the very best materials, and are put together with much more care than even the best street shoes are. Well, you can get some idea of it from the price. There is a pair of brown ooze mousquetaire boots for John Drew. Those cost $25. Here are the boots for inferior characters in

ITALIAN BISHOP'S SHOE. SALVINI'S SHOE IN OTHELLO.

the same play. They are of calfskin, you see, and they cost only $10. However, I doubt if there are many people off the stage who realize that the chorus people often wear $10 boots.

"Here is a beautiful shoe," picking up a high-strapped boot in rain pink leather, trimmed with imitation pearls and jewels. "That pair is worth $150. These white mousquetaires are worth $75. Here is an interesting boot representing the history of the world. And here is an astrologer's boot."

The last named was of dark green leather. Carefully drawn figures representing the signs of the zodiac had been cut out of gilt leather and stitched over the green.

"People have an idea that these figures are of gilt paper and are simply pasted on," said Signor Azzamonti, lovingly handling the gorgeous creation, "but you see they are of the very best quality of leather, and are beautifully stitched. If we did not make them that way the boots would fall to pieces in one or two performances, whereas you can see by this letter that they often last two seasons."

"Do you ever make ordinary shoes?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Sometimes, but I don't like it. My heart and soul are in the theatrical work. The art, and I love it. Everybody on the stage has been so poor, though, for the last two years that we have to take anything that comes along. I got that order for 185 pairs of shoes for 'As You Like It' the other day, and that means a rush for a little while. I have to finish them all inside of two weeks. That isn't so easy as you might think, even though I have seven men to help me. For instance, look here."

He opened a box and showed a lot of pieces of paper in which were pinned samples of brocaded velvets and satins. Each slip of paper contained written directions.

"I, to match every one of these samples with a leather of the same shade, you see. That in itself is no small task. Next I have to take the measurements of every one of those 185 people. Well, if you know anything of stage folks, you'll know that it isn't easy to do that. Here it is almost noon. The women were to come at 9 o'clock this morning, but just one girl has been here! You have to have the patience of Job! Ah, here comes number two."

The new candidate for measurement sat down. Signor Azzamonti placed her foot on the book, and prepared to draw the outline.

"Don't make my shoes broad-toed," said the girl.

"I'll have to."

"But I don't like 'em broad," hastily removing her foot from the book.

The shoemaker looked up impatiently.

"I have to make them to suit the part, and not to suit you," he said. "These shoes have to have puffs coming through slits across the toe. Well, I can't make puffs in a piccadilly toe," and he put the protesting foot back in its place and went to work.

HINTS FOR THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

The Newest Things in Decoration—How to Adorn It Inexpensively.

"Is the Christmas tree as popular as ever?" THE SUN reporter asked a man who knows as much about Christmas as old Santa Claus himself. He looked as if some one had asked him if Christmas had gone out of fashion.

"Of course!" he said, and that settled it.

"Well, is there anything new in decorations?"

"Yes, new in detail; perhaps not new in the general idea. The main thing in Christmas tree decorations is to get anything that will shine. For that reason tinsel in different forms is the popular thing."

"But that's old."

"If old friends happen to be best, people will stick to them. Tinsel comes in new shapes this year, but it's tinsel just the same. Here is something new and good, these lanterns. The safe lighting of the tree is always a problem, so these lanterns ought to take. They have red and green mica sides; there is a sponge in this tin cup at the bottom and a wick. You saturate the sponge with kerosene and light the wick. They make a pretty illumination and burn some time."

"But have you no original ideas for trimming?"

"There are some, but not many. You can load the boughs with artificial snow, hang them with these glass icicles, put these Esquimau dolls here and there and make a wintry tree of it. That has been done and is wonderfully beautiful. Or you can fill it with this cobwebby tinsel and hang will-o'-the-wisp lights on the branches, and put these fairies among them. That makes a fairy-land tree which sets the children wild. Or you can hang it with several dozen of these diminutive Japanese lanterns and have the little Japs walking around under these tiny parasols. That's another type. Or you can have a Brownie tree. In that case, you must have the old-fashioned popcorn and cranberry strings, because the Brownies must have something to eat.

"A splendid idea for a tree, and one which I have never seen carried out, is to make a Swiss Family Robinson tree. Cut out some of the branches half way up the trunk, but not too high for the little folks to see in. Be sure, too, to set your tree on the floor and not on a table. Make a platform there and build a staircase around the trunk reaching up to it. Put in partitions of pieces of wood or pasteboard, which you can paper yourself. Then add the furniture and the dolls. These can be of the cheapest. Hang the tree with lanterns; make cookouts here and there; arrange a rope and pulley for raising and lowering things from the ground. There! That is the idea in the rough. I'll wager it would turn the little folks crazy with delight, and especially would please older children who are past the doll and gewgaw age.

"Almost everybody tries now and then to devise something different from the traditional tree. They do not desert the tree, but they want a change for one year, at least. I know of one woman who got up an ingenious substitute which was so satisfactory that she threatened to make it a regular thing. Instead of putting up a tree, she had a carpenter construct the skeleton of a wigwam, and this she set up in the corner of the room. It was five feet from the floor to the peak, and was almost as much in diameter. She covered it outside with white muslin, and this, in turn, she covered with white cotton, which she tacked to the muslin. In the first place, though, she covered the floor in that corner of the room with white canvas. Over her cotton wigwam she sprinkled snowflakes until it shone like snow gleaming in the sunlight or the moonlight.

"The three poles crossed at the top, and from these she hung icicles and colored lanterns. On the centre she perched a snow-maiden, and she had small Esquimaux toboggans on the sides. Inside of the tent she put all of the presents for her two children, both of whom were girls. Christmas morning she led them into the room and showed them the tent, whose flap was then down. She said that it was a mysterious wigwam which she had discovered in the night time while she was fast asleep. Santa Claus must have set up, sure enough! there were the stockings they had hung up the night before in the sitting room. They had disappeared during the night, and were now dangling by a string which was apparently fastened to one of the poles, but the reality only went over. She got them to reach up and pull their stockings down. This lifted the flap in front, and disclosed the contents of the wigwam.

"There was plenty of room for two of three children to play inside, and the tent was so capacious that the little people who came to the house that it was kept in its corner for fully a month after Christmas.

"Another woman, whom I know, got up a regular estate one year instead of having a tree. She had a platform about three feet high made for a table, but it was spoiled by her house, barn, stables; the clothes lines, the vegetable and flower gardens, walks, shrubbery, trees, and a fence. The nurse was wheeling the baby carriage on the front walk; the coachman was driving out of the barn; the maid was at the bower, and in fact everything was complete, and by doing the greater part of the arrangement of the things herself, having bought them separately, it was not so expensive as one would think.

"One of the most beautiful and convenient trees I ever saw was made of evergreens and excellent electric lights of different colors. They were strung through the tree, and it needed but a twist of the screw to turn them all on or off. Unquestionably the Christmas tree of the future will be lighted by electricity, but it present that method is only for the favored few.

"A unique Christmas tree would be one tenanted by animals alone; everybody that understands children at all will know how they would like it. I planned such a tree one time, but have never carried it out. Of course, one would have to add 'shiners' to the scheme in order to make it showy, but that is easy.

"What is the cheapest way of making an effective tree?"

"Tinsel and assorted balls. Buy the loose tinsel that comes in envelopes. Cobweb the tree with it and hang red and green and yellow balls here and there. There is no brighter tree or a less expensive one except those strung with popcorn, cranberries, and chains of gilt and silver paper. These cost little for decoration, but are proportionately less effective.

"A German custom which is not followed in this country is to have a cave with the *crèche* and the Christ child in it. The children's presents are then put in the cave, too. There are more or less spasmodic attempts on the part of individuals to have something different from the tree, but nothing else has ever approached it in popularity and nothing else ever will."

TWO BOYS AND A WILDCAT.

They Were Looking for 'Possum, but They Got the Cat After a Hot Fight.

INEZ, Ky., Dec. 11.—Word reached here of a serious time two boys had while 'possum hunting recently near Kenton Furnace. John and William Anderson, 15 and 17 years old, went out with their dogs after opossums. They had been out only a short time when the dogs treed what was supposed to be an opossum. By the dim light of the lantern the boys could see the animal in the tree, and William at once proceeded to climb it to shake the game down to the dogs. When he came near the animal it made a savage spring toward him and he lost his hold and fell with the animal to the ground. The animal proved to be a large wildcat, and it quickly killed both dogs and then jumped on William, who was lying on the ground with a broken arm and a wrenched leg. The younger of the boys drew his barlow knife, his only weapon, and tackled the cat, which left his brother and came at him. After a hard fight the boy came out victor, but he was badly scratched and his clothes were almost entirely gone. The boys got back to their home, but both will be laid up for some time. The wildcat measured over three feet, and is the first one seen in this county for some time.

A Mouse's Quarter-Century Run.

From the Albany Express.

A wheelman hung his bicycle from the ceiling of his cellar, and not far from a swinging shelf on which food was kept. A mouse jumped from the wall on to the tire of the front wheel, evidently hoping thereby to reach the shelf. The wheel started, and mousie naturally ran toward the highest part of it. It was able to stay on the top of the tire, but couldn't get enough of a foothold to jump to the wall. When found next morning the mouse was very much exhausted, though still running. The cyclometer showed that it had traveled over twenty-eight miles.

VERY QUAINT CUSTOMS.

A UNIQUE COLONY OF FARMERS IN PENNSYLVANIA.

Their Worship Is After the Manner of Reformation Days and Their Lives Are Regulated by Primitive Notions.

From the Philadelphia Times.

"Drive right around into the lower lane, boys, and we'll take out your horse and feed him."

Such was the welcome, modified, of course, to fit circumstances attendant upon the newcomer, that greeted each visitor who drew up at the gate of a Lancaster county farmhouse where an Amish meeting was being held one glorious Sunday not long ago. The stranger might have thought there was a lack of cordiality about it; it really didn't sound like the fulsome and conventional phraseology of what is known as polite society; but without asking us two Gentiles who we were, where we came from, what we wanted, &c., they simply made us welcome.

And what a sight that was! There were sixty-five yellow canvas-covered wagons dotting the avenue under the trees, and sprinkled over the landscape back of the barn; sixty-five vehicles so nearly alike in pattern that you would have thought you were visiting a wagon factory, and that here were the results of large efforts on the part of the builders who had followed one sample. When we got better acquainted with their various owners we asked how they ever told them apart, how they got the right horse to the right shafts. "Oh, we just look at 'em; we know 'em!" One man said he recognized his because the back of it was peppered full of shot, the result of a target practice by the boys at home, who hit the wagon instead of the mark. Another said he had a little block nailed to the floor of his wagon for the comfort of his short-legged wife; the block couldn't be moved without taking up the floor of the wagon. And so the fine distinctions were developed until the whole sixty-five wagons did appear different after all, and what may have seemed an awfully easy mark for the evil-minded small boy, whose propensities were duly considered by the astute Amishman, wasn't so easy as it looked.

It might be proper to observe here that the wagons were not furnished with whips. Neither is there a whip socket nor even a hood over the front. If you should look very carefully in the bottom of the wagon, however, you might find a rather tough hickory switch or two, but that is only a probability. The Amishman observes the spirit of the injunction implied in the saying: "A merciful man is merciful to his beast." It would take nothing less than a horse show to get together a finer collection of equinity than was seen at Friend Abraham's that day. Many worldly Lancastrian owners of roadsters are ready to admit that the dust doesn't drop on Amish outfits when there is opportunity for a "test of speed"—it is no race, you know—on the excellent roads there, even if the broad-brimmed driver doesn't happen to have a wheelwright to touch up his nag with The heavy harness used is strong enough to draw a load of coal, while it is equally serviceable at speeding a few miles with a half ton or more of Amish wagon and family.

The passengers of the sixty five yellow wagons crowded the two large lower rooms of the farmhouse, and left a large overflow for the porch, where the droning voice of the minister, who preached in pure German, could be plainly heard. While the speaking was but a few feet deep for the Gentile listeners, there was enough in the way of pictures everywhere to entrance, and it was good perhaps that we couldn't get too far gone in the sermon. Just opposite us, in a row, were a lot of youngsters ranging from two to six years ago, and their conduct throughout the meeting generally was as demure as if they had been ten times those ages. Beside us, around us, were big, lusty Amishmen, in their queer-looking clothes, sitting in thoughtful attitudes, following carefully every word spoken, and finally half of the younger men in whom the spirit was willing doubtless, but the flesh weak, dozed and bobbed their heads. The whole scene was one that was with difficulty given a place. So close to Philadelphia and so pretty that the stranger did not need to be told that he was witnessing one of the most curious survivals in America—one which, by the way, excited the attention and comment of Prof. E. B. Tyler, the noted English archaeologist, when on a visit to a country some years ago. The people are worshipping after the manner of Reformation days and they present a curious phase of life to the student of religion and history.

It is not difficult to understand why the rest of Pennsylvania doesn't know more about the wonderful settlement of Amish people in this bit of the land "green walled" in Lancaster's hills and watered by the Conestoga, the Cocalico, or the Pequea. For conscientious reasons the hard-working farmers of Amish-Mennist persuasion there give scant encouragement to the tourist who wants to "see the Amish" and the intensely picturesque quality of an all-day meeting is a comparatively unknown quantity. Philadelphia gets a glimpse now and then of a Lancaster county Amishman on Chestnut street, and one man is enough to cause people to turn their necks for a second look. But think of sixty or seventy of them in a crowd! All with broad-brimmed hats, long, straight hair "banged" at the forehead and cut straight across the back of the neck—around a bowl. Previous to the seventy-fifth year, with the lapels of buttons, hooks and eyes being the accepted mode of fastening their clothes; and in trousers of a fashion of generations ago! And then to get into an argument with them on the subject of dress or the propriety of using tobacco or of driving upon Sunday when it is red—well, it is a treat that falls to few of the world outside of Lancaster county. "What do you suppose the Lord turned that water into wine for at the marriage in Cana of Galilee?" was the well-known dose one of them administered on a recent occasion to the total discomfiture. "The only thing I am sorry about now is that I wasn't on hand to get some of that. My, it must have been good!" and he smacked his lips, perhaps in the joyful anticipation of a more glorious feast that is to be spread for all good Amishmen some day.

No Amish meeting would be complete without the big dinner that is served to all the congregation at its close. While the men were talking religion or crops out under the trees when the services were over, the women folks had fed the dinner ready. There weren't enough tables to feed everybody at once, so the crowd went in in relays. We followed about fifty Amishmen in party No. 4. When they entered the dining room they threw their low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats into the nearest vacant seat. It was full up to the top of the lower sash. The hats were more nearly alike than their wagons; but every man seemed to catch his own headgear when he went out without any trouble. Following the example of an elder, each table, each man bowed his head in silent prayer before starting at the *shunkafesh*, the *gebrota hinckel*, the *lod rorreck*, &c., with which the tables were most generously laden. It simplified the dish question very much to use the same cups and saucers right through the meal. The cups were used by body, without washing or rinsing between times, and the coffee cups consequently had quite a deposit of grounds in them by the time relay No. 4 appeared on the scene. It is also customary at the end of each meal to "return thanks" in a slender and rich tea severely, although I am afraid this latter quality was somewhat impaired for three of the congregation when a sly wink from the Irish farmhand John broke in upon the solemnity of the thanksgiving. After that the men retired from the dining room to make room for another relay, while the women replenish the stock on the tables and make a few minor changes in the chinaware.

And the Amish children! Where can they be more picturesque? The youngsters have the same proclivity for sport that others have, and the unanimous of the situation strikes one, as he sees them playing tag, or teasing the dog or chasing butterflies. They dress exactly like their grandfathers or grandmothers; it seems rather beneath the dignity of these sober-looking little pedagogues to go capering around the yard, raising the same kind of racket that you'd expect from St. Mary street kids.

As soon as the girl can walk around she appears in long skirts, to which a white cap, a white kerchief and a white apron add their unique finish. The dresses worn by the girls are of various colors for various girls, the skirt and waist being the same in every case. Deep purple is much affected, while dark brown, drab, and black are also popular. The only one style of weaving is used, and there can be no improvement on it for the Amish girls. It is parted accurately in the middle and combed smoothly down toward the temples, where two small plaits start, which are carried around and gathered into a knot just back of the top of the white full cap above the nape of the neck.

As soon as the little Amishman is entitled to his first "pants" he is jumped at once into long trousers of the "broadfall front" variety, and with drawing strings around the waist to keep them attached to his person, just like his older brother's, his father's