The Sorceress of the Strand

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

There is such a thing as being haunted by an idea or by a personality. About this time Vandeleur and I began to have nightmares with regard to Mme. Sara. She visited us in our dreams, and in our waking dreams she was also our companion. We suspected her unseen influence on all occasions. We dreaded to see her visible presence in the street, in the park, at the play—in short, wherever we went. This sort of thing was bad for both of us. It began to get on our nerves. It takes a great deal to get on the iron nerves of a man like Vandeleur; nevertheless, I began to think that they were seriously shaken when I received, on a certain afternoon in late October, the following note:

"My Dear Druce: There are fresh developments in the grand hunt. Come and dine with me tomorrow evening to meet Prof. Piozzi. New problems are on foot."

The grand hunt could, of course, only mean one thing. What was up now? What in the name of fortune had Prof. Piozzi, the greatest and youngest scientist of the day, to do with Mme. Sara? But the chance of meeting him was a strong inducement to accept Vandeleur's invitation. He was our greatest experimental chemist. Six months ago his name had been on every one's lips as the discoverer of a new artificial lighting agent which, if commercially feasible, would take the place of all other means hitherto used.

Prof. Piozzi was not yet thirty years of age. He was an Italian by birth, but spoke English as well as though it were his native tongue.

At the appointed hour I found Vandeleur standing by his hearth. A table in a distant recess was laid for dinner. He greeted me with a gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

"What is the new problem?" I asked. "It goes without saying that it has to do with Mme. Sara."

"I am glad you were able to come before Piozzi put in an appearance," was Vandeleur's grave answer.

He paused for an instant, and then he burst out in vehemence:

"I owe Sara a debt of gratitude. Hunting her as a recreation is as good as hunting a man-eating tiger. I am getting at her now by watching the movements of her victim."

"Who is the victim?" I interrupted.

"No less a person than Prof. Piozzi."

"Impossible," I answered.

"Fact, all the same," he replied. "The professor, notwithstanding his genius, is in many ways credulous, unsuspicious and easily imposed upon."

"Nevertheless, I fail to understand," I said.

"Have you ever heard of the subtle power of love?"

As Vandeleur spoke he stared hard at me, then burst into an uneasy laugh.

"The professor is in love," he said. "Madame's last move is truly prompted by genius. She has taken to exploiting one of the most extraordinary-looking girls who have electrified society for many a day. It isn't her mere beauty that draws every one to Donna Marta; it is her peculiarity. She has all the ways of an unconscious siren; for never was any one less self-conscious or more apparently indifferent to admiration."

"I have not heard of her," I said.

"Then you have allowed the talk of the town to slip past you, Druce," was Vandeleur's answer. "Donna Marta is the talk of the town. No one knows where she has sprung from; no one can confidently assert that this country or the other has had the honor of her nationality. She belongs to Mme. Sara; she accompanies her wherever she goes, and Professor Piozzi is the victim.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Certain. He follows them about like a shadow. Madame is keeping more or less in the background for the present. Donna Marta is the lure. We shall next hear of an engagement between our young friend and this girl, whose antecedents no one knows anything about. Madame has an object, of course. She means mischief."

It was my custom never to interrupt Vandeleur when he was explaining one of his theories, so I sat back in my chair and allowed him to proceed without comment on my part.

"At the present moment," he continued, "I happen to know that the professor has run to earth another of his amazing discoveries in the carbon compounds. No one but himself knows what it is as yet, not even his assistants. Next week he is going to explode the bombshell in the scientific world at a lecture at the Royal Institution. Every one will flock there on the tiptoe of expectation and curiosity. The thing is at present a dead secret, and the title of the lecture not even mentioned. He means to electrify the world. It is his little amusement to do this, as he did the ethylene light affair. The man is, of course, a phenomenon, a genius, probably the most brilliant of our times. He is absolutely unsuspicious and absolutely unworldly. I am not going to see him ruin himself if I can help it."

"I perceive that you are in earnest," I said; "but how are you to prevent a man who is his own master from adopting his own methods, even in the subtle cause of love? Suppose your young professor loves Donna Marta, how are you to stop him?"

"Time will prove how," he remarked; "but stop him I will."

The bell whirred, and the next moment Professor Piozzi entered. I looked at him with keen interest. From his photographs, reproduced freely in the illustrated papers, I had expected to see a young and good-looking man, with a keen, intelligent face; but I was scarcely prepared for his juvenile appearance. He was tall in figure, well made, somewhat slender; his hair was of a fair flaxen shade; his eyes were wide open and a clear blue. He had a massive forehead, dark eyes and a clean-shaven face. His whole appearance was that of an ordinary, good-looking, everyday sort of young man, and I examined his features with extreme curiosity, endeavoring to detect anywhere a sign of genius. I could not do so. The professor's whole appearance was everyday; not a doubt of it. He was well dressed, and had easy, courteous manners, and upon a finger of his left hand there gleamed a ring, a royal gift from the king of his native land.

We sat down to dinner, and the conversation was light, pleasant and sufficiently witty to cause the moments to fly. No one knew better than Vandeleur how to make a man feel at home in his own house, and I could see that Piozzi was enjoying himself in a boyish way.

It was not until the meal was nearly over that the professor caused us both to start and listen with extreme attention. He began to talk of Mme. Sara. He spoke of her with enthusiasm. She was the cleverest woman in London, and, with one exception, the most beautiful. Her scientific attainments were marvelous. He considered himself extremely lucky to have made her acquaintance.

"The sort of knowledge you allude to," replied Vandeleur, in a very grave tone, "that scientific knowledge which madame possesses, and which is not a smattering, but a real thing, makes a woman at times—dangerous."

"I do not follow you," replied the professor, knitting his brows. "Madame is the reverse of dangerous; she would help a fellow at a pinch. She is as good as she is beautiful."

Vandeleur made no reply. I was about to speak, but I saw by his manner that he would rather turn the conversation.

One more we chatted on less exciting topics, and it was not until the servants had withdrawn that Vandeleur proceeded to unfold the real business of the evening.

"So you are going to astonish us all next week, professor, at the Royal Institution? Is it true that you, and you alone, possess the key of the discourse that you are to give us?"

"Quite true," he replied, with a smile. "I cannot help having the dramatic instincts of my race. I love an artistic effect, and I think I can guarantee you English chemists a little thrill on Saturday week. My paper was ready a month ago, and since finishing it I have been having a pleasant time. Until a month ago your London was more or less a closed book to me. Now, Mme Sara and her young companion, Donna Marta, have been taking me round. I have enjoyed myself, not a doubt of it."

He leant back in his chair and smiled.

"That woman does plan things in a most delightful manner," he continued, "and whether she entertains in her own wonderful reception rooms at the back of her shop in the Strand, or whether I meet her at the houses of mutual friends, or at the play, or the opera, she is always bright, vivacious, charming. Donna Marta, of course, adds her share to the delights. Yes, it is all happiness," continued the young professor, rubbing his hands together in a boyish manner. "You English," he added, fixing his bright blue eye on Vandeleur's saturnine face, "are so dull, so—I might add—triste. And yet," he added, quickly, "you have your charm. Oh, undoubtedly yes. Your sincerity is so marvelous, so—I ought to add—refreshing. One can rely on it. But madame has also the sincere air, and yet to her are given the brightness and vivacity which come from living under bluer skies than yours."

The professor's face was flushed; he looked from Vandeleur to me with eagerness. Vandeleur drew his chair a trifle closer. Then, without warning, as though he could not help himself, he sprang to his feet.

"Prof. Piozzi," he said, "you have given our nation, perhaps unwittingly, a rare and valuable tribute. You have just spoken of our sincerity. I trust that we are sincere, and I trust also that, so long as England remains England, an Englishman's word will be his bond. The best inheritance an Englishman can receive from his forefathers is the power on all occasions to speak the truth. You are my guest tonight. I have the greatest respect for you; I admire your genius as I never thought to admire the genius of any man. It is most painful to me to have to say a word that may seem discourteous to you, an honored guest, but my heritage as an Englishman forces me to speak the truth. You know what I am—an official criminal agent of the police. I will be quite candid with you. My invitation to you tonight was not purely the disinterested one of enjoying the honor of your company, but also to give you a warning with regard to Mme. Sara and the young girl who accompanies her into society. They are both dangerous, I speak with knowledge. It is true that the girl herself is in all probability only the tool, but the woman——! Professor, I have met that woman before. So has my friend Druce. Our acquaintance with her has not been agreeable. May I proceed?"

The professor's face had now turned almost crimson; his blue eyes were starting from his head; he kept clenching and unclenching his right hand as though he could scarcely contain himself. Vandeleur's words, however, seemed to force him into an attitude of attention. He listened as though mesmerized.

My friend then proceeded to give a vivid sketch of some of the episodes which had fallen to our share in the life of Mme. Sara. He spoke slowly, with great emphasis and precision. He stated his case as though he were addressing a jury in a court of justice, scoring point after point with brevity and brilliance. When at last he ceased to speak the professor was silent for half a minute, then he rose with a jerk to his feet. He was trembling, and his eyes flashed fire.

"Mr. Vandeleur," he said, "we are acquaintances of only a year's standing; in that time we have had some pleasant interviews. Your business is not an attractive one, even when confined to its official precincts; but to introduce it into private affairs is not to be tolerated. You exceed the limits of propriety in dictating to me as to the choice of the list of my friends. Please understand that from that list I erase your name."

He bowed stiffly, and, walking across the room, took up his hat and coat and slammed the door behind him.

I glanced at Vandeleur in amazement. His eyes met mine.

"The man must have his fling," he said. "I did what I did for the best, and am not sorry. He is in love with the mysterious girl, who has been brought to England, doubtless, for the express purpose of working his ruin. We must find out all we can about her as quickly as possible. Poor young professor. I should like to save him, and I will, too, if in the power of man. His powers of research much not be lost to the glories of the scientific world."

"You must admit ,Vandeleur," I said, "that you were a trifle harsh in your dealings with him. Granted that he is in love with Donna Marta, can you expect him to take your warning tamely?"

Vandeleur was silent for a minute.

"I do not believe my severe words will do any harm in the long run," he said then. "The man is a foreigner; he has not an Englishman's knack of keeping his temper under control. He will cool down presently and what I have said will return to him. They will come to him when he is talking to Donna Marta: when Mme. Sara is throwing her spells over him. Yes, I am not sorry I have spoken.

(To be continued Monday.)

PROF. PIOZZI ENTERED.

Brown—"Don't get gay, or I'll be forced to pound a little sense into your head."

Green—"Huh! It would take a dozen men like you to pound any sense into my head."—Chicago News.

A FULL-GROWN GILA MONSTER.

ITS BITE IS FATAL

Gila Monster is the Most Dreaded of Reptiles.

NO KNOWN REMEDY

INCREASING IN NUMBERS IN THE SOUTHWEST.

Hualipis Have an Antidote, the Nature of Which They Will Not Reveal.

Written for The Evening Star by Dr. Frank Romain.

That the Gila monster is the most dangerous creature to human life in the desert regions of the southwest, and that there is no remedy known to science which will act as an antidote to its poison, is the opinion of Prof. William Wetherbee, who for nearly a year has been making a scientific study of this reptile in the interests of experiments which for some time have been prosecuted by the state of California.

To prove his assertion that death ensues in almost every instance where the poison of that creature enters the human system, Prof. Wetherbee gives the results of his long sojourn in the deserts of Arizona and California, where during twelve months of experiment twenty cases came under his notice, all but three of which ended fatally. In proof of his assertion that since the thinning out of the Indians the Gila monster is rapidly increasing in number, and that it is becoming a serious menace to life in those regions, he points out that more deaths have occurred from its bite during the last two years than are recorded in the previous five.

During this time five little children, four women, seven white men and nearly twice as many half-breeds and Indians have fallen victims of the Gila's bite, and it is probable that there are other cases which have never been heard of. Several of the fatalities occurred during the sweltering summer weeks that I was with Prof. Wetherbee.

A Secret Remedy.

So formidable do these facts appear that President Diaz has been asked to use his influence in discovering the remedy which has long been known to exist among the Hualipis, a Mexican tribe of Indians who have always kept their antidote a secret, and have baffled the attempts of many scientists to secure it, among them the famous Dr. Shufeldt. This is not the first time that President Diaz has been interested in the matter of securing a remedy for the Gila's bite. A number of years ago the medical authorities of California asked him to secure the prescription used among the Hualipis, and it is said that not only did Diaz detail special officers to the work, but when they failed, the president went personally among the Hualipis in his efforts to secure the antidote. Because of a superstitious belief that the remedy, which is also said to be efficacious in combatting the fatal effects of rattlesnake poison, was a direct blessing from their gods, and should be kept secret, the Hualipis refused to disclose it. Afterward, Shufeldt and several California physicians went personally among the Indians, but with as little success. That an antidote must be found is realized by both the medical authorities of California and Arizona.

The regions infested by the "mottled terror" are rapidly becoming inhabited, and each year sees a big increase in the white population. For many years, perhaps for hundreds of them, the Pima, Apache, Maricopah and Yuma Indians, who little feared the bites of rattlesnakes or centipeds, waged a cautious and systematic war of extermination against the Gilas, but as these tribes have thinned out the "monsters" have increased alarmingly, until there are now some places where scores of them may be met with in a single day. With the increasing population of white people, the majority of whom as yet bear no especial enmity toward the Gila, it is thought that the annual death list from their bites will rapidly grow.

In Their Natural Homes.

To prosecute his experiments Prof. Wetherbee followed the course of the Gila river, where the "monsters" have always been found in the greatest numbers. For weeks at a time he watched the reptiles in their natural homes before attempting to capture them. In his cabin near Castle Dome mountains he at one time had fifty of them captive, and it was then that he succeeded in securing for the first time enough poison to experiment with. Irritating the creatures, he succeeded in getting them to bite viciously at the edge of a thin plate, where the poison gradually accumulated in the form of a thick, syrupy secretion. In contrast to most serpent venoms, which are acid, the Gila's poison was of an alkaline nature. During these experiments one of the reptiles caught a Mexican assistant by the thumb. Screaming with terror, the man beat the creature frantically against the side of the cabin, until Prof. Wetherbee secured a knife and chopped it in two. Every stimulant and remedy at hand were in turn employed, but the Mexican gradually fell into a stupor, and within twenty minutes was dead.

It was after this fatality that I became personally interested in Prof. Wetherbee's work and began working in conjunction with him in his little Arizona cabin.

For several years I had experimented with Gila monsters, but had never regarded them as more dangerous than rattlesnakes. I had had the opportunity of seeing the poison act fatally in the case of human beings, and had experimented with it on animals; but so far was I convinced that what would save a man from a rattlesnake's bite would also save him from a Gila's that I made pets of two Arizona "monsters," and often allowed them to climb up my arms and breast, playing, as it were, with absolute death.

Death Comes Quickly.

That I escaped death seems to me nothing short of a miracle, after knowing more of the nature of a Gila's bite. The poison obtained by Professor Wetherbee was tried on a number of animals. A small quantity injected into one of the wild Indian dogs caused death in less than two minutes. Birds and smaller animals brought for the purpose of experimenting upon died much more quickly.

One afternoon in August we were interrupted in our experiments by a half-Mexican ranchero, who tore up excitedly on his mustang, crying that his daughter had been bitten by a Gila. Less than an hour after the girl had been bitten we were back at her side. The victim was about twenty years old, with a bright, pretty face, and immediately complained that though she was suffering intense pain, she seemed to be paralyzed, and could move her hands and limbs only with great difficulty. A little later, after stimulants had been administered, she began crying out in agony, saying that her head was splitting. Gradually the pain seemed to leave her, and a few minutes before death unconsciousness came to her relief. This case was a singular one, inasmuch as the girl lived for more than two hours after having been bitten. Ordinarily few persons can speak after fifteen minutes, and with the exception of those few who recover, all cases prove fatal within half an hour.

That the whites of the southwest are beginning to realize the terrible effects of the Gila's poison is shown in the case of a ranchman, who, while camping en route home from Phoenix, stepped on a Gila before he put on his boots in the morning. The reptile immediately buried its teeth in the ranchman's big toe, and clung there. Shrieking to his companions, the ranchman called for paper, and while friends severed the Gila's head he wrote down a few last words to his loved ones at home, and gave instructions as to what should be done with his property. A few minutes later the man lost consciousness, and died with his pencil still in his hand.

Saved Her Life.

One case was called to our attention which proves that among the Hualipis exists a remedy for the Gila bite. Among the Yumas was a squaw who was bitten by one of the reptiles over thirty years ago. This woman had lived for some years among the Hualipis, and it is known that at the time she was bitten she quickly made some sort of a decoction which she drank. Years after the army officers of that part of the southwest were instructed to discover what this remedy was, if possible, but then it was too late. The effects of the poison had turned the squaw into a semi-idiot, until now she does not remember what she did to counteract the poison. She is now pointed out by the whites and Indians as the only person in those regions who ever survived a real bite of a Gila monster. In all of the cases where the victims survived, Prof. Wetherbee found that the bites had been slight ones, and the creatures had not caught firm enough holds to allow them to inject their venom.

For a long time there has been a great mass of fiction about the fatal effects of the breath of the Gila monster, and any number of traditions among the Indians and of old soldiers of the southwest concerning the blighting effects left by the crawling of the animal over any living plant or animal. Among the Cocopahs of southern California, where I had previously spent some time, I found a belief among the Indians that the most fearful vengeance that can come to the spirit bodies of bad Indians after this life is to be bitten by a red Gila monster that roams unseen by mortal eyes over the plains, waiting to snap at the red-skinned savages inimical to the great spirit chief.

What It is Like.

The Gila is about eighteen inches in length and in girth about the size of a boy's arm. Its tail is one-third the length of the body, and it has a mottled skin in reddish yellow and dark brown. Its mouth is similar in shape to that of an alligator, and its little black eyes have the sleepy appearance of those of the alligator family. It weighs from three to four pounds. It has four stubby legs, shaped and placed like those of a lizard, but it has none of the rapidity of that animal, and instead of being found in damp, cool spots, it frequents the hottest sands and sunbaked soil. Rattlesnakes cannot remain in a heat that the Gila enjoys, and it is doubtful if even a salamander could stand a daily temperature of 135 degrees for hours, which the Gila grows fat on during midsummer weeks.

The stories which have been generally believed that Gilas will pursue human beings, and that they will crawl into houses in search of victims, have been disproved. The Gila is a stupid creature, and it will not wantonly attack. The great danger lies in stepping on the reptiles, whose skins are much the color of desert sand and sunbaked earth. In these places the Gila will flatten itself out and go to sleep. When stepped on it catches viciously onto the human foot and its teeth penetrate the toughest boots.

These teeth are in double rows, thick and very sharp. They belong to the "bulldog of reptiles," for anything once caught between them is held as if in a steel trap. The Indians have a saying that a Gila will not release a piece of flesh between its jaws until the big spirit causes a thunder, even if it takes all summer. In one instance where Prof. Wetherbee allowed a Gila to bite an Indian dog the reptile maintained its hold for thirty-six hours after the animal's death. It is known by both whites and Indians that it is useless to attempt to force a Gila to release its hold, for that only increases the wound, and the reptile, in a rage, manufactures fresh venom in the poison sacs which are in the roof of its mouth. The chief results of the Arizona experiments are to show that no poison antidotes now known can avert the fatal effects of a Gila's bite, except in instances where the bite is not much more than a scratch, when large quantities of whisky taken internally seem to be good. Next summer Prof. Wetherbee will go among the Hualipis and will try to win by fair means or foul their wonderful secret.

UNHEALTHY TRADES.

Sanitary Work Rooms Good Investment for Employers.

From the Chicago Inter Ocean.

For centuries the tailor has been the subject of jesting pity because his trade was supposed to make him physically weak, while the stonecutter has been usually represented as the image of strength. So sailors and miners are supposed to follow dangerous trades, as indeed they do if the chances of external injury alone be considered, while bookkeepers and salesmen are supposed to be in little danger from their occupations.

Disease, however, kills scores where accidents kill one, and of all diseases consumption kills the most adults. And with regard to deaths from consumption a life insurance expert has recently prepared a chart, from official mortality returns, which upsets many popular notions as to the relative healthfulness or unhealthfulness of various trades. It covers thirty leading trades and shows the percentages of deaths from consumption to deaths from all causes of workers in each.

In the middle stand the painters and grocers, with percentages of 23.4 and 24.2. From grocers the figures rise through liquor dealers, molders, longshoremen, potters, cigarmakers, silk workers, hatters, salesmen, plumbers, bookkeepers, brassworkers, glassworkers, printers and stoneworkers, of whom 45.1 per cent die of consumption.

From painters the figures go down through brewers, bakers, policemen, weavers, iron and steel workers, masons, butchers, carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths, merchants, sailors, brakemen and miners, of whom only 6.4 per cent die of consumption.

It is certainly something of a surprise to learn that the most widely fatal of maladies is less likely to kill the proverbially weak tailor than the proverbially strong butcher, and that sailors, who must endure the most sudden and violent changes of temperature, are less subject to consumption than printers, who can hardly work at all except in a reasonably even temperature.

In this connection it is interesting to note that large employers of labor are being convinced with increasing ease and rapidity that provision of clean, well ventilated and properly heated and lighted shops is an investment that pays good dividends by increasing the contentment and preserving the health of their employes, and that in this manner the mortality of even the unhealthiest trades may be sensibly diminished.

Harker—"Prof. Jansen is certainly a remarkable man."

Parker—"In what way?"

Harker—"He is the only scientist in the country who hasn't made at least one important discovery relative to radium."—Chicago News.

THE FARMER OF TODAY

He is Better Off Than He Ever Was Before.

HAS MONEY TO LEND

AND HIS MORTGAGE WAS PAID OFF LONG AGO.

Crops Worth Billions—Where Our Prosperity Really Comes From—Talk With Secretary Wilson.

(Copyright, 1904, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

Written for The Evening Star.

I called on Secretary Wilson the other day to ask some questions on capital and labor from the standpoint of the farmer. My interview was held at the Department of Agriculture during the busiest hour of the day, and the Secretary answered my questions between jobs. As he did so I was surprised at his versatility. He is like Napoleon in that he can do four things at a time and do them all well. His mind seemed to jump at a second's notice from the pasture lands of Dan to the grain fields of Bersheba, and when it landed it was all there. Now the question was the appointment of a man to investigate crop conditions in the Philippines, now the arrangement of the new agricultural building to be put up at a cost of several million dollars, and now the importation of a bug to wipe out the San Jose scale and make our orchardists rich. At the same time great bunches of letters were brought in and the Secretary read each one as he signed it.

The Farmer and the Trusts.

I started out with:

"Mr. Secretary, you work as though you had your coat off, you claim to be the representative of the man with his coat off; I want to know what you think of that man in his relation to our big combinations of capital?"

"The only man with his coat off whom I know is the farmer," replied Secretary Wilson. "With the ordinary laborer I have nothing to do. The farmer is a big enough proposition for us here. We are working for him and although we look over the fence now and then at the struggles of labor and capital we keep on our way saying nothing as to anything else, but steadily sawing wood."

"But, Mr. Secretary, adapt my questions to the farmers. What do they think of the gigantic trusts which, like Jonah's gourd, have sprung up in a night?"

"They are anxious about them," replied the Secretary, "but it is from an investment standpoint. They want to know whether they have a substantial basis, how they are operated, what business they are doing and whether they will keep on paying dividends. The farmers are interested in the new Department of Commerce and Labor and especially in its bureau of corporations. If that bureau can give them as satisfactory information about the trusts as the treasury does about our national banks there will be no difficulty in their getting a fair share of the farmer's money."

Our Farmer Capitalists.

"But, Mr. Secretary, I thought the farmer posed as a poor man. He is a chronic whiner, a constant complainer, and he always makes a poor mouth?"

"That may have been so some years ago," replied Secretary Wilson. "It is not so now. You can't whine on a full stomach, full barns and a full pocketbook. That is the condition of the farmer today. He is growing rich. He has become a creditor instead of a debtor. He is a capitalist hunting places to invest his surplus. He has had good crops and good prices, and today his deposits are rolling in like a golden tidal wave, flooding the western banks with more money than they can handle. The local banks are sending their millions to the east, and New York is taking what they cannot lend out in the west. The farmers, not satisfied with American investments, are sending millions into Canada to buy lands there, and still they have money left. Indeed, what they want most is a safe place to put their surplus where it will bring them a fair rate of interest."

"What do you mean by a fair rate, Mr. Secretary?" I asked.

"Oh, about 5 per cent," replied Mr. Wilson. "That is the best you can expect of money now."

"Why don't they take up their mortgages," said I. "Not long ago it was said that the whole United States west of the Missouri was practically owned by the savings banks of New England."

"That is not so now," replied Secretary Wilson. "Those mortgages have been paid long ago, and vast sums have been spent in improving the farms. There are mortgages still, it is true, but they have been given by the sons of the farmers, who are now buying farms of their own."

Farm Lands as an Investment.

"Do you consider farm lands a good investment, Mr. Secretary?"

"I do at the present prices," was the reply. "Investments differ according to localities, but any farm that will now produce enough to carry itself, that is, to pay its taxes and a low rate of interest, is a good purchase. Our public lands have been largely taken up. We are rapidly increasing in population, and the domestic market steadily grows. We are now the greatest manufacturing nation on the globe, and the domestic market of the future is beyond conception. As to the foreign market, it will always take what we cannot use ourselves. We are farming better every day, and the business of farming will be more profitable as time goes on. We have some of the best food lands on the globe, and are just beginning to appreciate what they will produce."

Thirty-Three Dollars Every Second.

"Have you any idea," said Secretary Wilson as he turned to his desk, picked up a pencil and made some figures on a slip of paper. "Have you any idea of the money Uncle Sam's farmer capitalists bring into this country every year? The steel trust, the shipbuilding trust, and all the other trusts are peanut stands in comparison with it. I don't mean what our farmers sell at home, but what they sell abroad. The amount is so enormous you cannot comprehend it.

In the decade ending 1900 it was more than $7,000,000,000, or on the average more than $700,000,000 a year. In 1901 our farm exports amounted to more than $900,000,000, or almost $3,000,000 for every working day of the year. That means $125,000 an hour, $2,000 a minute or $33 per second. Every time the watch ticked on every one of the days throughout that working year $33 worth of our goods were dropped into the lap of Europe and three $10 gold pieces started on their way back to the United States.

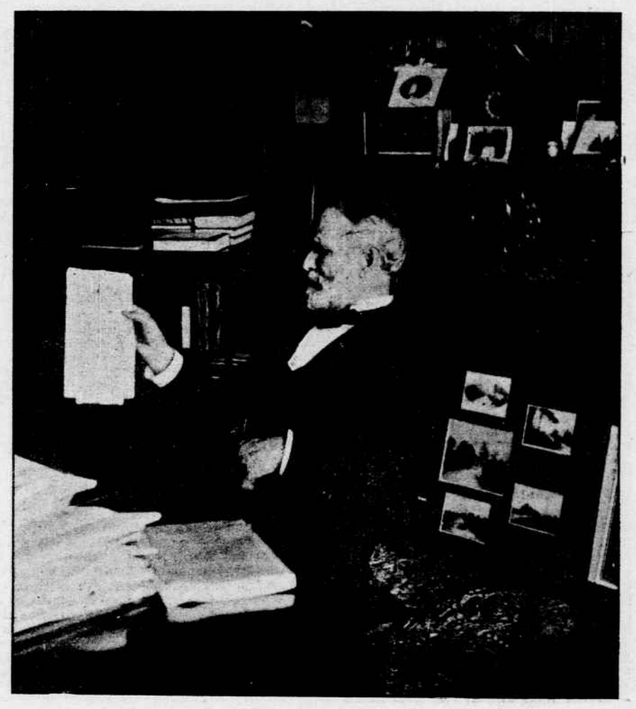
"That was in 1901," Secretary Wilson continued. "Last year our exports were almost as large, and so it is going on year after year. You may talk about your great combinations of capital, your gigantic monopolies and enormous trusts, but, after all, Uncle Sam's most profitable asset is the American farmer."

A Business Which Deals in Billions.

"Give me some of the items of this business of the farmers' trust, Mr. Secretary," said I.

"The farmers are not a trust," said Secretary Wilson, "and to give all the details of their enormous business would require too much space. Still I can give you some of the items. Take cotton, for instance. We got high prices for that last year. Our exports amounted to about 12,000,000 pounds a day, not including Sundays, and our receipts were about $1,000,000 a day, or a gross amount of $317,000,000 per year. This was all cold, clean money brought into the country for stuff sold abroad.

"Our grain exports were $600,000 a day. We sent 204,000,000 bushels of wheat and almost half of that went in the shape of flour. We exported $178,000,000 worth of meat and enough beef and pork to have given every man, woman and child of the whole world one-half pound and enough additional to have made a mess of hash for every one of them the next day. Those figures show you something of our agricultural interests. The American farmer is the backbone of the country. He is the biggest institution in it."



SECRETARY WILSON AT HIS DESK.

What Makes Uncle Sam Rich.

"But last year and the year before have been the exceptions, Mr. Secretary. The crops have been much better than ever before."

"That is true to a minor extent," replied Secretary Wilson. "But for years the farmer has been bringing over foreign gold from Europe, Australia and Asia to even up our losses in other branches of trade. In the last thirteen years our average excess of exports over imports amounted to about 275 million dollars per year, and during that time the annual balance of such trade in favor of the farmer was 337 million dollars, that is, the farmer had not only to give the balance of trade in our favor, but he had to pay 62 million dollars in the shape of an adverse balance to other imports. In the last fourteen years the farmers' balance of trade amounted to almost five billion dollars. It was enough to pay all the losses of our other foreign business and to put 4,000 millions of dollars, in round numbers, to the credit of the nation. Those figures give you some idea where this wonderful wave of prosperity which has been sweeping over the country comes from."

Farming as a Business.

"Then, I suppose that farming, as a business, has begun to pay."

"It has always paid," replied Secretary Wilson, "when managed in a business-like manner. But the day has passed when you can take it up as a makeshift. The man who would make money in farming today must know his farm and how to farm it. He must know the nature of foods, and fertilizers. He must understand the markets and bring the same business judgment to bear that is necessary to the success of other businesses. Above all the farmer must keep up to the times and farm scientifically, for it is only in that way that he can get the most out of his land.

"Will we ever have a great farmers' trust, which will corner the market, raise prices and fight the other combinations of capital?"

"I don't think such a thing possible," replied Secretary Wilson. This is a big country and farming is a big business. All the world is more or less engaged in it and you can't control elements like that. Besides each farmer is independent of the other, and while all have to a large extent common interests they are somewhat antagonistic to one another. I think the farmers might be united in opposition to anything vitally against the interests of all, but that matter settled they would as before act as individuals."

The Question of Farm Labor.

"But, Mr. Secretary, how about labor matters? I should think you would have trouble to get men to work on the farms. I understand that most of the farm boys are going to the cities."

"That was so for a time, but more now remain upon the farms. We have had a great immigration of farm laborers and we have been steadily making inventions in farm tools so that the average hand can do more now than the man of the past. Take the rice lands about the Gulf of Mexico. One American farm hand with our machinery can raise as much rice there in one year as four hundred Chinese laborers can raise in China employing Chinese methods and Chinese machinery. The conditions as to other crops are somewhat similar. Indeed, the farm machines enable us to dispense with a large number of hands."

"Is farm labor organized, Mr. Secretary? Do the farm hands have trades unions?"

"Not that I know of. The men are so scattered that it would be difficult to organize them. They are not employed at steady work all the year round, and besides the farm hand of today expects to own a farm of his own a few years from now. He is so busy scheming how he can do that that he has no time to worry over hours and wages."

"How about wages, Mr. Secretary? Is the farm laborer well paid?"

"I think he is," replied the Secretary of Agriculture. "Good men get good wages, varying with the locality. In the northwest, where, perhaps, the most skilled of our farmers are found, hired men get $25 a month and more. That is equal to $40 a month without board, which is good pay for any man. Such a hand will understand how to use farm machinery. He will know all about crops, and he can, if necessary, take the farm and manage it himself. In some other parts of the country the wages are less."

Where Our Money Comes From.

"Are we farming any better now than we did in the past, Mr. Secretary?"

"Very much so," replied Secretary Wilson. "And we shall farm better in the future than we are doing now. We are learning every day and are steadily adding to the aggregate of our crops. What we produce now is beyond conception. Our wheat crop amounts to 600,000,000 bushels every year, and it is worth in the neighborhood of $400,000,00.

"The value of the gold and silver mined in the United States is not half that, and all the gold mines of all the world did not produce as much by $100,000,000 in 1902. The corn crop is worth more than twice as much as the wheat crop. It is now bringing in $1,000,000,000 a year, and for our oats alone we raise enough to equal a value of a million dollars for every working day. The crop amounts to a billion bushels, with a value of $300,000,000. Our hay crop in many years is worth more than the total product of all the gold and silver mines of the world, and the cotton crop last year sold for more than a half billion dollars. These figures are enormous. There is nothing like them anywhere, and we have not begun to approximate the maximum of our farming possibilities."

Uncle Sam's New Crops.

"No," said the Secretary, reflectively, "We do not know what we have nor how rich we are. We are discovering some new thing every day which adds enormously to our national wealth. The Agricultural Department has become one of investigation and research. We have men traveling over the world looking for new plants and seeds. Some time ago it seemed impossible that we could raise figs. We planted the trees, but could get no results. At last, on the advice of our specialists, we imported a little insect from Smyrna to fertilize the trees; that is, to carry the pollen from one place to another. That little bug did the business, and we are now raising excellent figs on the dry highlands of the west. We produced more than 1,300,000 pounds last year, and we are just beginning.

"Do you see that macaroni?" the Secretary went on, as he picked up a paper to which some pipe stems of white macaroni were sewn. "That macaroni was made in America from American wheat, which grows on land that will raise no other grain. We studied the wheat and the soils which produced it, and this is the result. We raised 10,000,000 bushels of macaroni wheat last year, and the day will come when we will be shipping it to Italy.

New Cotton for the South.

"There on the mantel," the Secretary continued, "you may see a frame containing samples of cotton. The cotton at the right has a short staple. That is the common cotton raised on the uplands all over the south. Those long, silky fibers on the left are from the famous sea island cotton, the highest priced and best known to the world. That cotton will grow only on the islands off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina. We have planted its seeds on the uplands, but could get no results. Then we took the upland plants and married them to the sea island plants, and the result is we have produced the cotton which you see between the two in the frame. It is not so long as the sea island cotton, but it is far longer than the upland cotton. That cotton, the child of the two other kinds, will grow on the uplands and the breeding of it will add millions of dollars to the value of our cotton crop. We are now experimenting on the best varieties of the Egyptian cottons, of which we import $7,000,000 worth every year. We have had good results, and will soon raise all we want.

"Another important item is rice," said the Secretary. "We used to import nearly all we consumed. We raised 300,000,000 pounds last year, and are now sending rice to Cuba and other countries. We are doing a big business in sugar. We have begun to raise it from sugar beets and our product last year of that kind of short sweetening was 520,000,000 pounds, enough to give thirty pounds to every family in the United States, or six and one-half pounds for every man, woman and child in the country. We have fifty factories now running making that sugar, and we could if the matter were properly handled produce every pound of sugar we use.

A Great Scientific Institution.

"Indeed," said the Secretary, "I doubt if the people know what a scientific institution the Agricultural Department is. Aside from its other business it is now a post graduate university devoted to training men to original scientific research along agricultural lines. We have had 496 students here, most of them college graduates whom we have been training for this kind of work. About half of that number have already been given positions in the Agricultural Department and elsewhere. Indeed, I could find places for scores more if I had them. The British minister asked me for a man to send to the Bermudas to investigate some matters there. Another of our specialists has been recently employed by the government of Cuba and I understand he is to get $5,000 a year. I have an application now for a man to take charge of a new agricultural school which is being established in the middle west at a good round salary and there are other openings along other lines. Indeed, the day of the old-time farmer is passed and the day of the scientific agriculturist is here."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Coffee in War Times.

From the New York Press.

In the civil war there were numerous coffee substitutes. The principal was potatoes, which were cut into small cubes and parched. The beverage was declared to be potable. A Texas regiment used corn, parching the grains till they were a blackish-brown. It was common to make coffee out of rice and other cereals beside corn. Many of the southern troops made a drink of the tender roots of the sassafras by boiling them in water. Many a gallon of sassafras tea have I drunk, and the effect is gloriously stimulating. A pint of it will enable a fatigued person to labor on indefinitely. The taste is deliciously aromatic.

A St. Petersburg Experience.

From the World's Work.

An American wished to move from the Hotel Europe, the principal hotel in St. Petersburg, to a smaller hotel around the corner. He came down with his bag packed ready to go. "Sorry," said the manager, "but you cannot leave this hotel or register at another hotel until we get your passport from the police; and that will take a day and a night. You must go through exactly the same procedure as if you were leaving the country."

Missed.

S. E. Kiser in Chicago Record-Herald.

The reply of a lonely husband whose wife has asked in one of her letters: "Do you miss me, dear?"

"Do I miss you, dear," you ask me,
"Since you've journeyed far away?
Am I conscious of your absence?"
Ah, my treasure, I should say.

I have ceased to lock the windows
When I go to bed at night,
I have ceased to care a cookey
Whether everything's all right.

If the kitchen gas keeps burning
I don't know it and don't care;
'Neath the bed thieves may be hiding,
I've sworn off on looking there.

Darling, I have ceased to bother
With the bird and with the cat,
They're attended to by Maggie,
Who has full charge of the flat.

I have ceased, my dear, to worry
When the busy day has fled,
And I get to feeling sleepy
I just tumble into bed.

No more peering round in corners,
No more nightly chores for me;
From a score of vexing duties
For the present I am free.

Do I miss you, dear, you ask me?
Yes, oh, yes, my heart's delight;
I've quit getting up and hunting
After burglars in the night.

If it storms I lie and listen
To the drops splash on the pane,
Never minding if the curtains
And the rug are soaked with rain.

In your absence I am getting
Gladly rested, sweetheart, mine;
You will hardly recognize me,
People say I look so fine.

Maggie has your sofa pillows
All in her room now, my dear—
Yes, I miss you every moment,
I'm so free from bother here.