

THE BILLINGS HERALD

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THE SEWING-MACHINE BUSINESS.

An Anomalous State of Affairs—Some Curious Facts.

It was John Stuart Mill, we believe, who established the principle that public confidence could neither be stemmed nor directed by statute, and, perhaps, there has rarely been so apt an illustration of this as is to be had in the experience of the original sewing-machine companies. The original sewing-machine patents were afoot to take advantage of the principle, now become common property. Capitalists invested their money freely, great factories were erected, and doubtless many had already figured out their prospective profits for the year when the time to begin the work of manufacturing was at hand and the great struggle began.

There is reason to believe that the original patents were not a little frightened at the prospect. Indeed, in certain quarters "stamped" would more accurately describe the condition of affairs when the market became "flooded" with sewing-machines, and prices fell to a point at which there was little or no profit, with a premonition that thereafter sewing-machines were to be given away.

This state of affairs had not, however, long continued before the original companies discovered that they were selling about as many machines as before their patents expired, and that, better still, there was a numerous class that did not want the new makes on any condition; whereas they plucked up their courage. The fact is, these companies had for years been striving to turn out a finished, efficient and durable sewing-machine. They would seem to have dealt fairly with their patrons, whose confidence subsequent events proved they possessed. These patrons became accustomed to the mechanism of a certain kind of sewing-machine, and they would have no other. Furthermore they unconsciously acted as agents for their favorite machine among their friends and acquaintances. All this and more the old companies learned, and, like sensible men, they no longer tried to sell for a dollar what had cost them 100 cents.

Do what they would, the new companies, though, no doubt, in some cases turning out an excellent machine, could not get a foothold in the market, and one by one became bankrupt or went out of the business. The fact is, this sewing-machine business is phenomenal, and has characteristics which, there is reason to believe, do not obtain elsewhere. As the wandering tribes of equatorial Africa take with them their own idols, nor can be persuaded to worship other gods, though shown to be more potent, so those who have adopted a certain type of sewing-machine cannot, it seems, be easily weaned from their choice. So too, in the matter of ornamentation; the type of machine being once decided upon, the purchaser is credited with a disposition to put up with nothing less than all the other exterior arrangements for convenience, and it is stated upon good authority, that a certain class of machines being once fitted with a movable top and three drawers, no patroness, however poor, will thereafter, whatever the extra cost, be contented without them.

A psychological fact, possibly new, which has come to light in this sewing-machine business is that a woman will rather pay \$50 for a machine in monthly installments of \$5 than \$25 outright, although able to do so.

The curious process of reasoning by which the female mind is led to regard the lapse of time as a cheeper and a hundred per cent. interest as of no consequence, have not yet, we believe, been discovered.

Seriously, the principal original or parent companies are yearly increasing their sales and realizing a fair profit without any patent rights save those pertaining to certain recent improvements. Nine of the newer companies have got out of the business since 1877, and of the forty remaining not a few exist in little else but the name, the field being monopolized by the old established ones or those which, long before the expiration of the sewing-machine patents, had secured the confidence of a large and growing constituency.

The machines are best classed by the kind of stitch produced. Four-fifths of all the machines now made use the lock-stitch; according to the last census there are in the United States to-day 104 sewing-machine establishments, with an invested capital of \$12,301,830, employing 9,283 persons, to whom are annually paid in wages \$4,636,099. The value of materials used is figured at \$4,829,105, and the value of the products at \$13,865,188. Sixteen states monopolize these manufactures, though nearly half of the invested capital and one-half the value of the products are centered in New Jersey and Connecticut.

The New Fog Signal.

The fog-signal apparatus is now constructed in such a manner that in calm weather its sound may be heard twenty miles. This power is gained by means of two slotted cylinders, one fixed and the other revolving in it. The slots, as they pass one another, stop or cut off the passage of compressed air or steam and thus cause a series of vibrations, and consequently a musical note, the pitch of which depends upon the speed of the revolving cylinder. In order to vary the note, it is only necessary to control this velocity. The double-note horn is formed with a casing within which is a fixed a slotted cylinder and a revolving cylinder moving upon a spindle. The slots are formed in each cylinder at opposite inclined angles, so that the motive fluid impinging against a number of inclined planes causes the inner cylinder to revolve with rapidity, carrying with it two disks, attached to the common spindle, and upon their peripheries are pressed two levers, under the action of small pistons operated by diaphragms, to the outer surface of which compressed air is admitted. When the high note is required, one brake is put on; for the low note, both brakes.

A Sea Cook's Training.

A sea cook is a peculiar character, requiring a special training. He must know how to prepare a sea hash out of salt-horse flavored with onions, incrustated with the variegated browns of polished mahogany, and savory enough to create an appetite in a stomach that the tossing waves have rendered as sensitive as the needle of a compass. He must understand how to make eatable bread, and take his duff out of the kettle on Sunday as light as cotton and as delicate as sponge cake. Besides this, he must know how to economize in the use of water and provisions, and, more difficult yet, he must contrive to keep the crew satisfied with the mess he cooks for them, while, at the same time, he looks out sharply for the interests of his employer and the captain. He must also be proof against the worst weather, and undeviatingly punctual to the hours of meals. It goes without saying that it is not an easy thing to find such a paragon in the galley; but when he is there, he is, next to the captain, by far the most important character on board.

The Girls at Long Branch.

["Manhattan" in Chicago Journal.]
The most slightly and satisfactory things to study at Long Branch are the girls. They are constantly presenting new and curious aspects of femininity. Just now they are engaged in a fight for and against the bang. Shall or shall not the forehead be exposed to view? The curtain of hair is ordered up by a mandate of fashion, but obedience is by no means general. Girls with low brows are willing to denude them, because they know that the effect will be pretty in itself, besides nonplussing the possessors of high foreheads, who are bound to look odd in exposing an expansive portion of cranium so long kept covered. The common result is a kind of compromise cropping of front locks, and a frizzy arrangement like that shown by Mrs. Langtry during her last tour here.

The increase of apparent intellectuality is astonishing, but I am forced to write that there is a corresponding loss of prettiness. The change is improving to only a small minority. Lawn tennis is played in the most picturesque manner possible to art. The girls wear costumes for this game that are doubtless distracting to impressionable observers. Very jaunty jockey caps; Jersey waists that are pliant to every move of joint or muscle underneath; scarfs that encircle shifting outlines, skirts that are short and scant, stockings that are bright in a brief sectional view, and canvas shoes matching the dress in color, that make a show of utility in their rubber soles—all these components of the tennis toilets are highly approved by the admiring eye of man, when the game is pitched on the lawn of a big hotel, and the adjacent veranda holds a crowd of critical spectators. It is a stretch of credulity to suppose that the girls are other than conscious performers; and the success which most of them achieve in an affection of indifference to the staring, of complete absorption in the exercise, and of unstudiedness in graceful posing, is remarkable proof of the American trait of cool self-possession.

The expenditure for dress is extravagant or not, according as the indulgers can not or can well afford it. Hard times have not appreciably lessened the display of costly clothes. A few of the wearers in former years have disappeared, but their places are taken by fresh dressers. On the whole there is no deterioration.

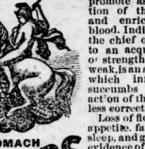
Thoreau: The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or perchance, a palace or temple on the earth; at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them.

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