IN A FIRE BALLOON.

THE SENSATIONS EXPERIENCED BY THE SUMMER AERONAUT.

He Takes Big Chances and Adds to Them by the Parachute Exhibition. How the World Looks When Viewed from a Great Height.

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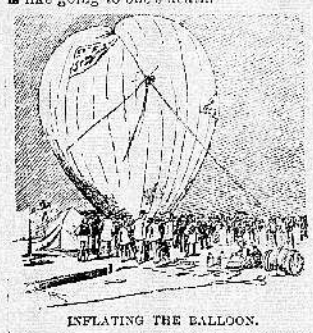
AT THIS time every year the managers of county fairs and circuses may be sure that they will receive letters with gorgeous printed headings, together with lithographed posters exhibiting men and women in tights in the act of plunging from a height. These indicate that the balloon season has arrived and that the aeronaut and parachutist is preparing for his season's work. However much romance there may appear in ballooning, it is nothing less than a trade, and a difficult one, requiring long years of training and experience for its mastery.

In the first place it differs from other occupations in its constant excitement. To the aeronaut each ascent means a fresh danger, and it is on this account, perhaps, that comparatively few engage in it.

Few people who witness a balloon ascension comprehend its fascinations, its perils or its methods, and only those who have made the trip into the clouds can accurately describe its accompanying sensations. Professor Mortimer McKim, an aeronaut of experience, gives it as his opinion that the aeronaut lives a lifetime in the few brief moments of his voyage. To those interested in aerial navigation a description of the airship is necessary. The material employed in the construction consists of a superior quality of sheeting, the breadths being stitched together firmly, with the edges felled. The average balloon being 150 feet in circumference and 75 feet in height requires 800 or more yards of cloth. At the mouth of the balloon a hoop the size of a wagon wheel and made of wood is attached to keep the mouth open while the hot air is being forced into it, and this orifice remains open during the ascension. The inside of the fire balloon is coated with a sizing of glue, whiting, alum and other noncombustibles, as a precaution against sparks, which, with the hot air, arise frequently to a height of thirty feet during the inflation.

On being released, the balloon rises at first slowly until at about a height of fifty feet, when its velocity is at the rate of forty-five miles an hour. At the expiration of two minutes the balloon has attained an altitude of a mile and a half; then it commences to sail with the air current which strikes it. This drifting about continues for a period of four minutes, when the escaping hot air causes a gradual shrinking of the balloon and its consequent descent. The unique sensations of the aeronaut begin with the moment he mounts the trapeze bar attached to the balloon. Grasping the ropes, the feeling is much like that of being seated in a swing. For the first 100 feet there is a realization of the ascent; objects below appear smaller and smaller until gradually they fade from view. At a height of 200 feet the air, rushing past with tremendous velocity, gives one the impression of leaning out of the car window of a limited express, the sounds of earth die away in a murmur, and it is then that the balloon seems stationary, the earth falling away from it.

Looking downward from the height, all surfaces appear level, mountains and valleys are alike and the world looks as if spread out and flattened by a rolling pin. Roads and rivers resolve themselves into narrow ribbons; forests, fields and meadows are clumps of green, red and black, with green as the dominant color. At two miles earth is lost to view, as in a fog. Presently the balloon begins to sail, driven by an air current. There is now no apparent motion. The aeronaut experiences a feeling of oppression, the air, deprived of its vital principle, exhausts at each inspiration; ringing sounds are heard in ears, and one can, so to speak, hear the stillness. The breath comes in quick, successive gasps that do not satisfy the lungs. It is like going to one's death.



INFLATING THE BALLOON.

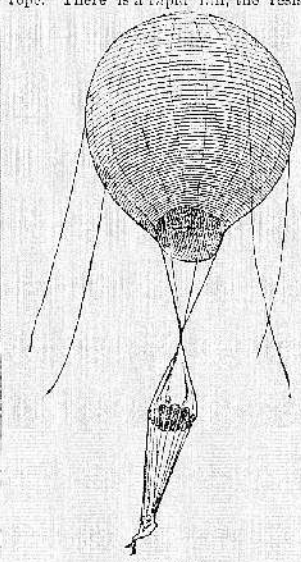
Looking upward, the horizon is bounded by the big black ball—the balloon—dark against the milky opaqueness of the atmosphere. The airship is swaying and swinging, while the clouds, floating in a contrary direction, produce a vague giddiness. There is, however, no time for tremors. Seconds seem hours, the mind and memory traveling with electric flight. Conjectures, recollections and retrospections flash across the bewildered brain as one reels through space. Suddenly the top of the balloon comes in contact with a cloud, there is a slight jar, and the next instant all is enveloped in fog, from which the aeronaut emerges soaked with spray. And now for the spectacle! Sublime, dazzling. Mountains of iridescence, fleecy white clouds tinged with creamy pink, like the plumage of the cockatoo. Swirling combinations of color, blending and shifting as in a gigantic bubble. Golden greens, that melt into purple and bronze and crimson, with the sun dissolving and overflowing upon their tops. Wonderful tints, such as artist never dreamed of. To comprehend color it is necessary to have seen the magic canvases of the clouds. The balloon sails on and drops slowly away from this panorama, once more into the colorless atmosphere.

With the descent, earth appears to rise and the balloon to remain fixed; and now the operator is occupied with one idea, speculation as to where and how he will reach earth, for distance is incalculable and perspective a myth. The balloon is the sport of chance, and is liable to deposit its passenger anywhere from the top of a church steeple to the bottom of a ditch. The aeronaut takes his life in his own hands when he ascends with the airship. Should it take fire, burst in midair, or descend too suddenly in striking a cold current, the result is collapse and disaster, for there is no safety valve to the fire balloon.

The aeronaut is invariably an enthusiast until he meets with an accident, after which discretion becomes the better part of his valor and he is content to rally substitutes for an ascension. After a few years he is apt to retire altogether and leave to others the hazardous occupation. Up to a period of six years ago there numbered but twenty aeronauts in the country, and these were in great demand at county fairs, settlers' and soldiers' reunions and upon legal holidays, rural celebrations being considered incomplete without the daring balloonist, who, for the time being, was of more importance than the president and entire senate, and, it may be added, that no occupation is more conducive to conceit and self sufficiency than that of the aeronaut. There is less profit in the business now than formerly; the novelty of the ordinary balloon ascension no longer exists for Americans. Realizing this, nearly every aeronaut now makes the sensational parachute descent.

On reaching the desired altitude this is effected by cutting the connecting rope. There is a rapid fall, the resistance of the air forcing open the parachute, which is nothing more than a ribless umbrella twenty-eight feet in diameter. The operator on cutting loose darts downward, as if fired from a catapult, until within a few hundred feet of earth, when he is sustained by the parachute. Should this fail to operate, death is inevitable. Abroad the balloon is still an attraction, and especially in Mexico, Australia and the West Indies. Professor McKim, who has toured the civilized world, is one of the few experienced aeronauts who find it difficult to abandon the profession, about which there exists a fascination, even in the danger. Taken all in all it is as great a game of chance as ever played by man, with this difference—that the aeronaut has no opponent, and should he fail no one is gainer through his defeat.

MARIE PETRAVSKY.



IN MIDAIR.

Where Fish Are Plentiful.

Fresh fish, especially of the smelt variety, are a drug on the market in the state of Washington just now. Some of the rivers are choked in their most narrow parts by the finny inhabitants. A fisherman can stand on the bank in many places, and with a few sweeps of a common dip net get more fish than he can carry away. Thousands of pounds have been salted. Old residents say that this is the most phenomenal run of fish they have ever seen.

Royalty Will Stay Away.

The big race meeting at Ascot this year will probably not be as well attended as usual, as owing to the death of the Duke of Clarence no member of the royal family of England will be present. The queen is sincere in her grief over the loss of her favorite grandson, and has gone to the length of ordering that the royal stand at the Ascot track be kept tightly closed, with all the blinds closely drawn, during the progress of the meeting.

The Question of Weight.

"How to Reduce Your Weight or Increase It," is the title of a valuable work recently issued by Celia Logan, who has gained repute both as an actress and as a writer. Having a tendency to embonpoint, she has tried various reduction methods, and the story of her personal experience and final triumph over a superfluity of flesh is highly entertaining and instructive.

It Is Not a Horn.

Few persons know that the so called "horn" of the rhinoceros is not horn at all, but merely a protuberance of agglutinated hair. Cut in two and examined under a microscope it will be found that it is made up entirely of little tubes, precisely like the hair structure.

THE BARD OF AVON.

JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE WRITES OF THE REAL SHAKESPEARE.

Above Everything He Was Practical. His Actual Life Almost Unknown. He Did Not Keep the Commandments—His Plays the Result of Unaided Genius.

[Special Correspondence.]

NEW YORK, March 31.—The wonder of Shakespeare's genius increases with the passing years. Three poets only have been compared with him—Homer, Dante, Goethe. But what are they, single or combined, to him? Shakespeare stands, and, it should seem, must always stand, alone, unapproached and unapproachable. The language in which he wrote—our rich, sinewy, nervous English—must be immortal, were there no other reasons, from the mere fact of his writing in it. If all the English classics were irretrievably lost, except Shakespeare's dramas, these alone would prove English to have been the master tongue. He appears to have comprehended human nature completely, and he has expressed his comprehension in words so vivid, picturesque and beautiful that they can never die. His works are an inspired abridgement of the history—mental, moral and spiritual—of mankind. He has set the weaknesses, the virtues and the passions of the human family to imperishable music, which will echo, to the last, through the galleries of time.

No marvel that it has been maintained that his writings are the product of many minds. How could one mind create an intellectual world and endow it with typical inhabitants? It is almost impossible to answer the question, but to presuppose anything else approaches the absurd. Throughout the plays now credited to Shakespeare, with perhaps one or two exceptions, run the same matchless expression and quality of thought. There is every reason for believing that they must have come from a single master brain. Two brains that could have so sounded the depths of the soul, so interpreted its passions, are not to be discovered, even in the Elizabethan era. The conviction of the unity of these mighty dramas is overwhelming and irresistible. Unless we accept Shakespeare as their sole author, we are landed in chaos; driven to desperation by any number of opposite theories.

More learned and ingenious nonsense has been written by the critics of and commentators on the poet than would make a good sized library. And it is still written, and will be for future ages, in every civilized land. Who would understand him should go direct to his pages.

Essentially Gothic, original, individual, rule defying as his genius is, it compels sympathy and admiration from every large, penetrating mind. Being northern and Teutonic, it does not appeal to the Latin or Slav races generally, but their intellectual giants are drawn to him instinctively. The French, with their nicety of art, their verbal exactness, their spick and span phrases, can not as a people appreciate him. Voltaire, prodigiously gifted and versatile as he was, called him a barbarian. He is the contrary of Corneille and Racine, and all the grander for so being. But latterly the leading thinkers and scholars of France have grown to his height, while repelled by his lack of form. Taine speaks of his extraordinary character of mind, all powerful, excessive, equally master of the sublime and the base; the most creative that has ever engaged in the exact copy of the details of actual existence; a nature poetic, immoral, inspired, superior to reason by the sudden revelations of his seer's madness.

Commentators yet continue to dispute whether the poet was learned or unlearned; whether he had more imagination or more observation; whether he was a pure genius or a patient laborer.

As a man he must ever remain a mystery. For all that is known of him personally, he might have lived thousands of years ago. His individuality is well nigh as obscure as that of Homer, who preceded the historic period. There is no authentic record of his birth, but it is probable that both birth and death occurred April 23, in 1564 and 1616. His parents' names have been preserved, and the name of his wife, whom he wedded from urgency. He left Stratford-on-Avon, his native place; went to London; was an indifferent actor; wrote his dramas for the theater with profit; returned to Warwickshire in prosperous circumstances, and in a few years died there, as supposed, at the age of fifty-two. Beyond these leading facts and a few others, the rest is chiefly conjecture. Not a line of his manuscript is preserved, except three or four of his signatures. His sole monument is his plays; but they are eternal.

The poet, with data so limited, with a reputation so overshadowing, has naturally been idealized, not mentally—that would be superfluous—but personally, characterally, morally. His so named portraits are innumerable and familiar to everybody, but there is no good reason for believing any one of them authentic. We like to think of him as the author of "Hamlet," "Macbeth" and "Othello" should look, and so we have him to a degree in the Chandos portrait, which is no portrait at all. Could we see him in the flesh today, he would not answer to our imagining; hence we should incline to pronounce him an imposter. Nature seldom incases transcendent genius in a very attractive body—she is not bounteous enough for that. He may have been like so many geniuses—very plain, unwelcome as the postulate is.

Of his character we can form no conception really, albeit we infer it to have been gentle, generous, lofty and wholly practical, despite his grand idealism. This idealism, as often happens, was in his writing, not in his daily round. He was apparently sad, so, by temperament and experience; he was intense, passionate, fond of pleasure, especially in his younger days; trying to forget his brooding thought in excitation of the senses. We cannot help believing that the personage, Hamlet, was to a certain extent autobiographic—borrowed from his ideal and intellectual side. Dramatic as Shakespeare essentially and invariably is, he would seem to have lived what Hamlet acts—to have put into his speeches much of his own mental experience.

The poet certainly was not moral, as morals are understood now, though sufficiently moral, perhaps, for his time. All men must be judged by their epoch, by the light it diffuses.

We must remember that Queen Elizabeth, good Queen Bess, as she has been styled, was anything but good, to our way of thinking. She was vain as a peacock; she was perfidious, mercenary, suspicious, selfish, irresolute, untruthful, cruel. She swore like a pirate; she struck her courtiers; she frequently behaved after the manner of the most vulgar virago. Her redeeming qualities were intellect, learning, courage, force.

Shakespeare by no means kept or tried to keep the commandments. He would have been a warning, not an example, to Sunday schools and Young Men's Christian associations of today. Of this we may be reasonably sure from his sonnets, which are generally regarded as autobiographic, apart from concealed circumstances of his career. He drank to excess at times, as was the custom in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries in Great Britain as well as on the Continent. Intemperance was a vice of the best society, with which the dramatist had very little to do, either in town or country. The tradition at Stratford is that on the last night of his life he had been overconvivial with some of his boon companions in the village, and, going home at a late hour, he fell into a ditch, and was found there dead in the morning.

"What! I imagine some idealizer of the poet exclaiming; "do you mean to insinuate that such was the fate of the greatest of the world's dramatists? That is an infamous libel—the story is incredible."

It is not pleasant to believe, I admit. Nothing is pleasant that upsets poetic theories. But it may be true nevertheless. Great men are as human as common men, and that Shakespeare was wonted to carousals merely indicates that he belonged to and represented his time. That he perished in a ditch was an accident and his misfortune. It does not tally with the poetic side of his nature, but it does with his actual, his prosaic side. Even Shakespeare was not always at the high level of his creations.

In regard to learning, it is altogether probable that he was without it, in the accepted sense. He was supremely intelligent. Without knowledge of books, he knew where to go for what he wanted. Every one of his thirty—seven plays, now credited to him, was directly taken, as to plot and character, from some earlier work. Plutarch, and Boccaccio and the English chroniclers having been most freely drawn upon. Although he must have been rich in invention, he adopted what he found to his hand. In the development of his personages he proved his stupendous genius, transforming them completely, lifting them from the usual into the enchanting. Human nature was revealed to him as in a vision. What other men learned gradually and laboriously he got by instinct. He had small need of books; he was illuminated from within.

He could not have observed to any great extent. His imagination was unbounded and yet ever in restraint. His vast intellect was all embracing and clairvoyant; it penetrated the thickest darkness with bursts of irradiation. If ever man had commanding and consummate genius—genius that was independent of effort and painstaking—that man was Shakespeare. Wonderful to everybody else, he was not in the least wonderful to himself. He had no care for his dramas beyond their presentation and their pecuniary success. The thought of reputation seems never to have occurred to him, and this denotes a consciousness of capacity immeasurably above performance. The first and last thing that strikes any one who attempts to solve his enigma is his uniform and extreme practicality.

Amazing as are his poetry and his acquaintance with human nature, they are not more so than his imperial ability to write. Notwithstanding that he has seldom produced a speech without some verbal flaw, he still remains the sovereign master of expression. Nobody has been able after the greatest elaboration to say half so well what he said apparently without reflection and at white heat. By the magic of his pen he makes us see and feel what he portrays at the same time that he floods us with despair in any effort of ours to imitate him.

The world is divided as respects expression into mankind and Shakespeare.

JUNIUS HENRI BROWNE.

Norway's North Pole Expedition.

So far back as history extends, the Norseman has been not only the pirate, but the pioneer of the sea. He has led in all sorts of discovery and adventure, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that the residents of Norway delight to retain their ancient prestige and are proud of the fact that the expedition which their countryman, Dr. Nansen, is to lead next year, as they fondly hope, to the north pole, is a purely Norwegian undertaking. The officers and men are to be natives of Norway, the money is being found by the Norwegian government, by the king and by private citizens, and the ship is being built in Norway. But there is a grain of comfort left for the all pervading Scotch, for the name of the person who has been intrusted with the task of building the specially constructed vessel which is to carry Dr. Nansen and his companions to the north pole is Colin Archer, whose parents were both of Scottish birth, though he himself was born in Norway. Mr. Archer is famous throughout Norway for the excellence of the work turned out from his yard, and there is no doubt that everything that skill can do will be done to make the vessel perfect.

'TIS THE STEEL AGE.

SOME OF THE WONDERS OF MODERN BRIDGE BUILDING.

The Great Structure Soon to Span the Historic River Thames—Other Bridges of Note to Be Found in England and America.

It has been tritely said that while the art of bridge building is ancient and the science of bridge building is modern, the skill of the present engineer has become the special flower and glory of our age of steel.

The earliest timber bridge on record is that which was thrown over the Rhine by Julius Cæsar; but long ages before the Chinese built stone bridges of great magnitude and first introduced in their construction the principle of the arch. One of these is four miles long, seventy feet high and has 338 arches. The Romans followed, and nothing in the way of modern bridges up to fifty years ago equaled the one built by the Emperor Trajan, A. D. 104, over the Danube. During the last two centuries some very beautiful bridges have been erected in France, and in Venice there are no fewer than 350.

In Great Britain the art kept pace with its progress on the Continent, the most ancient bridge being that at Croyland, Lincolnshire, said to have been built in 860. The bridge over the Trent at Burton, in Staffordshire, was built in the Twelfth century. It was 1,545 feet long. Old London bridge was begun in the reign of Henry II in 1176, and its execution occupied eighty-three years. After having served its purpose more than 650 years it gave place to the present structure, which was begun in 1824 and finished in 1831. This is but one of sixteen of the finest architectural works of their kind in the world that span the Thames.

THE TOWER BRIDGE.

The first metal bridge in England was covered in 1779 over the Severn, and it is a curious circumstance that Thomas Paine was a successful contriver of an iron bridge, which in 1787 he proposed to construct without any iron piers over the Schuylkill in Philadelphia, as the stream was apt to be choked with ice in the spring freshets. His backers becoming bankrupt, however, the structure was not finished and the materials were used in England. This work was long regarded as a great triumph of art, its span being 236 feet long with a rise of 51 feet.

Suspension bridges were erected in America as early as 1796 by a Mr. Finlay, who in 1801 took out a patent, and in 1811 eight bridges had been built on his plan. Subsequently, in 1826, a chain cable suspension bridge was built across the Straits of Menai, which until then formed a troublesome obstruction upon the great road from London to Dublin. Many beautiful suspension bridges have since been erected in Great Britain and on the Continent. The most remarkable wire suspension bridge in Europe, on account of its dimensions and height, is that of Freyburg, in Switzerland, which has a span from pier to pier of 870 feet and is suspended at the height of 157 feet above the river which flows under it.

One of the most wonderful achievements of engineering art is the steel bridge across the Firth of Forth, in Scotland. It has the longest span, the greatest weight and the greatest length of any yet built.

The structure shown in the illustration, which thousands of workmen are now hurrying to completion, will be known as the Tower bridge, inasmuch as it will cross the Thames near the Tower of London. It is one of the most remarkable undertakings of the kind in existence, spanning as it does what is perhaps the busiest waterway on earth. The peculiarity of its construction consists in two huge leaves weighing 950 tons, each of which is raised and lowered to a level thirty feet above high water, somewhat after the manner of an ancient drawbridge, thus affording passage for river craft. They are shown in the cut open. A hundred feet above this bridge level is another roadway for the accommodation of foot passengers, who are to be lifted to it in elevators running through the towers whenever the lower portion of the bridge is open and travel is impeded. The cost will be $3,500,000.

A project is now under discussion for spanning the Hudson river with steel wire suspension cables that will support a highway fifteen feet loftier than the great Brooklyn bridge and large enough to accommodate six lines of railroad. Its span, as contemplated by the engineers, will be 2,850 feet long and 150 feet above the water. Compared with the Brooklyn bridge its length, including anchorage, will be 6,500 feet; the former measures 3,700 feet. Each anchorage of the North River bridge will weigh 600,000 tons, while that of the Brooklyn bridge weighs only 60,000 tons. The cost is roughly estimated at $16,000,000.

Among other suspension bridges in the United States is that at Wheeling, which has a span of 1,010 feet; at Niagara, with a span of 821 feet and a roadway 250 feet from the line of the river; at Pittsburg, with a span of 1,325 feet; at Cincinnati, with a total length of 2,220 feet and a span of 1,057 feet. Other examples of advanced bridge architecture and engineering are to be found in many other sections of the country, and the improvements continually made show that American skill is fully abreast of that of any other people in the world.

HOW THEY RAISED THE MONEY.

The Manner in Which Otsego's Library Promoters "Got There."

Otsego was never suspected of being among the most enterprising towns of Michigan, but its talented women have lately given it national fame. It has about 2,000 people, two big paper mills and a chair factory, and according to one vexed citizen it also has "more rich men who do nothing for the place than any other two thousand town in the nation." However, that is a common complaint with those who have more enterprise than money.

Early last year forty Otsego ladies organized into the Ladies' Library association, raised money in all the ways known to the sex, such as socials, fairs,

THE OTSEGO LIBRARY.

dances, readings, etc., and built a very pretty structure at a cost of $2,000. They were but forty dollars in debt, and two young ladies started out to raise the amount. When they called on Mr. N. W. Mills, who was its president of the association, he jocularly offered five cents each for kisses and was promptly taken up. Then Mr. Burdeen, owner of one of the paper mills, raised the offer to fifty cents, and thus contributed somewhat.

The ladies declared that this would do for a joke, but a little of that sort of thing was quite enough. They resolved that each of the forty should raise a dollar in some novel way, but not by kissing. The plan was carried out and the reports made at the meeting in the town hall created no end of fun. The little city had a fiddle over it. Miss Maggie Smith bandaged the arm of a law student who had been badly cut and charged him a dollar. Her treatment was correct and the surgery a success.

Mrs. N. W. Mills took a step ladder and washed store windows at the Chicago price till she had earned a dollar. Mrs. F. W. Travis and Mrs. H. L. Miller ran a hand organ, the collections ranging from a penny up to ten cents. The local reporter adds that the organ was "of the Annie Rooney vintage." Miss Hattie Mack H earned a dollar splitting wood. Mrs. George Easton blanked horses. One sold doughnuts from house to house, another sewed on buttons for boarders at the hotel, and last of all Miss Cregan sold a spring poem to the editor. So the money was raised, the fun was all of a good sort, and now donations of books to the library are in order.

A KING IN AMERICA.

He Is From the Gilbert Islands and Has Wealth.

His majesty Tonbramo, king of Baritari and Mankin, is not mentioned in the "Almanach de Gotha," and Europe probably never heard of him, but he is over six feet high, weighs 260 pounds and looks every inch a king all the same. His kingdom (two islands of the Gilbert group) contains but 2,000 people or so, yet he governs it well, has got rich on his income and is visiting the United States to learn all he can about the wonderful white people.

TONBRAMO.

He is perhaps the only modern monarch who makes a revenue out of religion, for each subject who absents himself from church without good cause is fined four cocoanuts. Other taxes are light, and paid in cocoanuts, which are sold to traders as soon as a cargo accumulates. The people are Christians, and far more peaceful than Gilbert islanders generally. They are supposed to have resulted from a fusion of Chinese, Kanakas, Malays and what not, and the king looks very much like an ordinary mulatto.

His name is an English adaptation of his native title, which his interpreter spells Klamora. He has one wife, and she is regent in his absence. While in San Francisco he was the guest of the captain with whom he came, as were his nephew, Prince Antavar, and his interpreter, an old pilot known simply as Jack. The king speaks no English. The Gilbert islands number sixteen, lying on both sides of the equator, about 1,600 miles southwest of Honolulu. The people are semibarbarous, but King Tonbramo lives in a nice frame house, is greatly impressed by the genius of the Americans who trade at his one wharf, and intends to visit the principal cities of the United States to get ideas for the advancement of his people.

Wanted a Sure Thing.

The manager of a small theatrical company traveling in the northwest, having recently some "open time" on his route book, wrote to the proprietor of a hall in a little village in the State of Washington to arrange for a date. The following reply caused him to give up the idea of playing that particular town:

Yours to hand. I won't play on shairs no more. Your company will har to send me ten Dollars for one night and supply thair own kerosene and lamps. They will also har to build thair own stage, becaus the last company broke it down. Thair ain't no money in playing on shairs in this town, and I want a share thing.

Got in a Second Vote.

Some of the French-Canadians who have adopted the United States as their home are proving remarkably apt political pupils, as was shown in Lewiston, Me., where one fellow voted in Ward 2 as Antoine Boisverte and in Ward 3 as Antoine Greenwood. The simple translation of his surname served the purpose of giving him an extra vote.