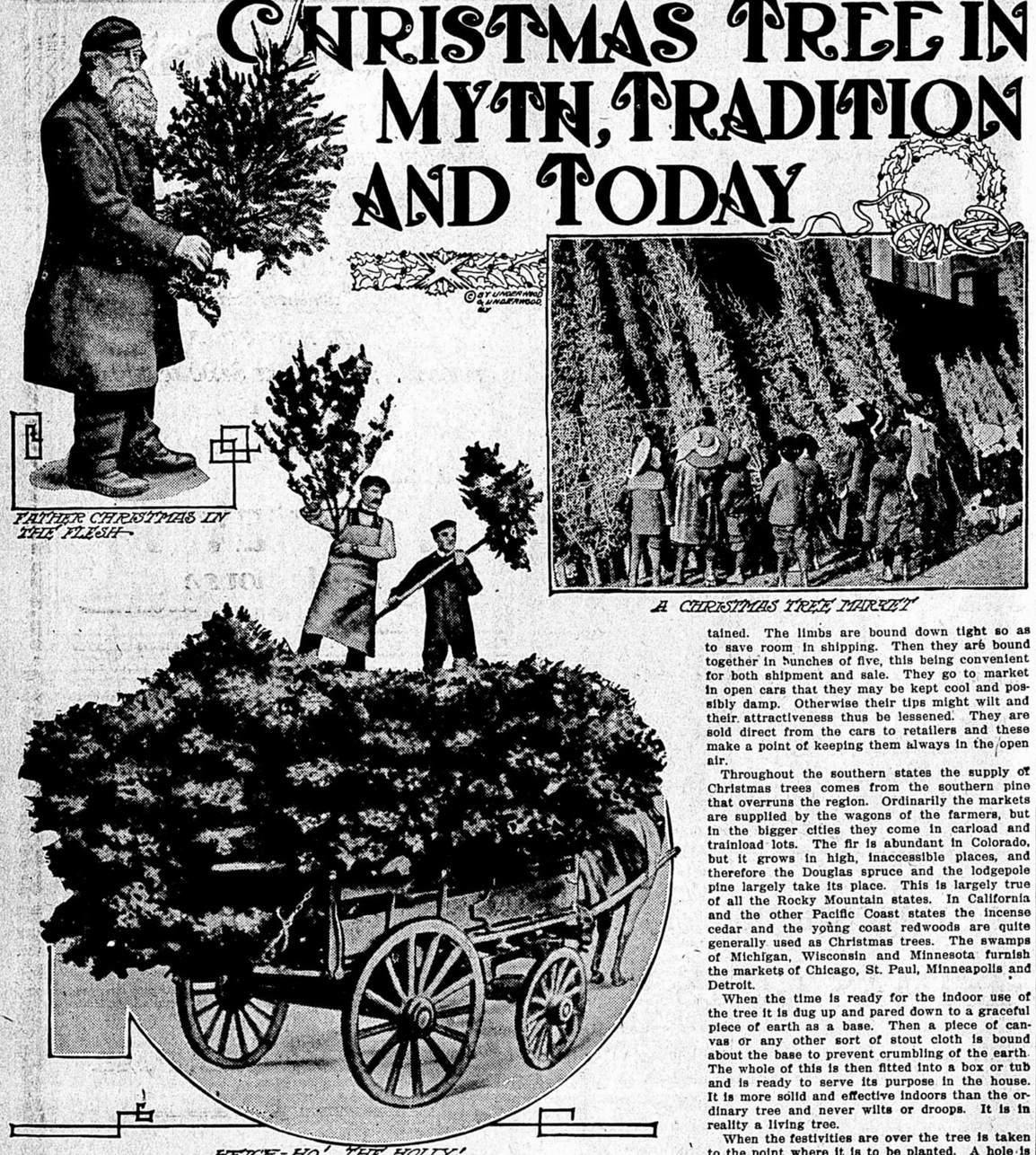
CHRISTMAS TREE IN MYTH, TRADITION AND TODAY



FATHER CHRISTMAS IN THE FLESH

A CHRISTMAS TREE MARKET

HEIGE-HO' THE HOLLY!

MYRIAD are the myths and legends that cluster around the Christmas tree. Its origin takes us far back into prehistoric times when our skin-clad savage ancestors were tree worshippers and believed that a god or goddess dwelt in the evergreen. Long prior to the Christian era, the fir tree was used in Rome in the December holiday festivities of the Saturnalia and its branches were decked with little yellow jeweled images of pagan divinities, especially of Bacchus.

In the Yuletide celebrations of the Druids of ancient Britain, the evergreen had a distinctive place with ivy, holly and mistletoe. The Druids believed that the evergreens sheltered the good spirits of the air who fled to them at the approach of cold weather.

There is a Scandinavian myth that tells of the tree that sprang from the blood-soaked ground where two lovers met a violent death, and of mysterious lights that hovered about the tree at Christmas time. At the period of the winter solstice, the ancient Egyptians decorated their houses with palm leaves which symbolized immortality and the starry sky. At this period of the year the ancient Persians decorated the plane tree with ornaments and jewels.

An old German tradition gives Saint Wilfred the credit of transforming the tree worship of the savage Teutons to a Christian ceremony. It was about the year 725 that he led a party of priests into central Germany for the conversion of the worshipers of god Thor. Prince Gregor, the grandson of a king, was with him, having been intrusted to his care by the abbess of the cloister Phalzel. On Christmas eve they were fighting their way through the snow of the forest when they came upon the heathen tribe of Geismar. They were assembled under the thunder oak, symbolic of the power of Thor, and were prepared to offer up sacrifice. The white-haired priest of the heathens had chosen the young son of the chief as the fairest possession of the tribe, and he was to be offered, for the god was very hungry and needed the utmost atonement.

As the venerable priest raised his stone hatchet on high and brought it down to kill the boy, who was ready, prepared for the stroke, Winfred appeared and warded off the blow with his staff. The people were gratified at his saving of their favorite and allowed him speech and he gave them the Christian creed. Then he and the Prince Gregor took their axes and cut down the Thunder Oak. As it was ready to fall the lightning came and split it in many parts and it fell asunder. The waiting tribe then beheld in its place a slender fir tree, green and sparkling and odorous. Winfred bade the tribesmen bear this tree to the hall of Grundhar, the chieftain, to there assemble about it and make merry. About this first Christmas tree the wild men of the woods first heard the tale of the shepherd boy and the fields of Judah and it gripped their sturdy hearts. The tribes became Christian and ever after used the fir tree as a token of the day of Christ's birth.

The Christmas tree in its present style of usage cannot be traced back farther than the sixteenth century. It then existed only in the Rhine valley, to which narrow limits it was restricted for more than 200 years. At the opening of the nineteenth century it spread to the rest of Germany, and fifty years later had reached Bohemia, Hungary, Paris and England. German immigrants had already brought the custom to our own country and here it has become so popular that the supply of trees in the city markets is never equal to the demand.

Linking the present with the dim past of unnumbered centuries, there will this Christmas be displayed in American homes 5,000,000 evergreen trees. There are about 20,000,000 families in the United States, and one in four of these will make the Christmas tree a part of the celebration that is at hand. This does not mean that only these will participate in the festivities of the season, for there is still the stocking method of dispensing gifts. But in this great number of homes it has become the custom to use the trees in accordance with the old-fashioned custom of sturdy, rural Germany.

New York, the metropolis of the nation, uses far more Christmas trees than any other city in the world. Yet the city is so admirably located from the standpoint of available forests that the supply is always abundant and prices low. A quarter of a million Christmas trees are each year brought to New York, and all of them are sold during the week before Christmas. Over on Riverside Drive, where are the homes of the wealthy, expensive trees are sold. These are elaborately prepared, often being specially grown for the purpose and bring prices as high as $50. Yet the East Side gets its due proportion, and so abundant is the supply that good shrubs may be had for 25 cents and 50 cents. The little trees grow quickly and the farmers are often glad to have them cleared off their land. As a result the people who count the pennies closely find the Christmas greens within their reach.

Father Knickerbocker lives right in the midst of the most productive Christmas tree section. The state of New York yields them abundantly. Straight down from the Adirondacks they come in trainload lots. Northern Pennsylvania also produces them without stint, and so are all the nearby cities guaranteed an abundance. All through New England there is a general use of the Christmas tree.

For a month past there have been hundreds of men preparing the Christmas tree harvest for the youngsters who dwell in the towns and cities. In the smaller communities, provided the region produces the right sort of trees, the farmer himself cuts them down and brings them to market. He sells these trees to market men, to grocers, to florists and decorators. They are bought from him by the wagonload and cost little. Then they are properly prepared and set upon the sidewalk.

But preparation for the larger markets are different. In the hills around the greater cities making ready for Christmas is begun two months before the arrival of the day to be celebrated. In Maine, for instance, the men go out in gangs of four. They know their business, for they have gathered this self-same harvest for a generation. They have bought the trees as they stand in the field, paying the farmer five cents each for them. The butt of the tree is sawed off smoothly and painted over in order that the sap may be retained. The limbs are bound down tight so as to save room in shipping. Then they are bound together in bunches of five, this being convenient for both shipment and sale. They go to market in open cars that they may be kept cool and possibly damp. Otherwise their tips might wilt and their attractiveness thus be lessened. They are sold direct from the cars to retailers and these make a point of keeping them always in the open air.

Throughout the southern states the supply of Christmas trees comes from the southern pine that overruns the region. Ordinarily the markets are supplied by the wagons of the farmers, but in the bigger cities they come in carload and trainload lots. The fir is abundant in Colorado, but it grows in high, inaccessible places, and therefore the Douglas spruce and the lodgepole pine largely take its place. This is largely true of all the Rocky Mountain states. In California and the other Pacific Coast states the incense cedar and the young coast redwoods are quite generally used as Christmas trees. The swamps of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota furnish the markets of Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Detroit.

When the time is ready for the indoor use of the tree it is dug up and pared down to a graceful piece of earth as a base. Then a piece of canvas or any other sort of stout cloth is bound about the base to prevent crumbling of the earth. The whole of this is then fitted into a box or tub and is ready to serve its purpose in the house. It is more solid and effective indoors than the ordinary tree and never wilts or droops. It is in reality a living tree.

When the festivities are over the tree is taken to the point where it is to be planted. A hole is dug to fit its base. This may be successfully accomplished even where the ground is frozen. The tree is lifted from its tub, the cloth is taken from around its base and it is fitted again into the earth from which it came. The protected roots again take hold and the tree goes on growing without even a knowledge of its holiday experience. It is in no way injured.

Nurserymen specially prepare trees for just this purpose. Individuals may do the same thing with no more explanation than that given above. Trees from the native woods around any village may have their roots pruned in advance or they may be dug up with no preparation whatever. There is a better chance of their flourishing when they have been prepared for the transplanting. But any evergreen dug up with a bit of earth about its roots should grow.

There is also a manner of permanently marking trees without injuring them or interfering with their growth. A tag fastened to a piece of wire will remain attached to a tree for a century. This tag may be of metal and on it may be stamped the date and whatever legend is desired. The home of a growing family may thus be left with a permanent monument of all the Christmases that have passed over the heads of the children that have dwelt within it. When these return to the ancestral hearth in their old age they can recall the planting of the trees and the events that hover about the occasion in question. Incidentally, the landscape will have been beautified, and aside from the sentimental phase of it, much valuable timber produced.

The Christmas tree industry of the United States has assumed great proportions and Uncle Sam is making plans to place the industry upon a permanently profitable basis through reforesting large areas. Incidentally the new industry has furnished an opportunity for hundreds of boys and girls to earn their Christmas money in a new way by harvesting the cones of evergreen trees.

Of the nation's forest land, 60,000,000 acres are today covered with mature timber, while 40,000,000 acres are well seeded with young growth. This leaves 100,000,000 acres that are either non-productive or only partly productive. It is for this 100,000,000 acres that seed are to be gathered, and it is upon this vast expanse that they are to be planted until the whole is developed into its greatest possible yielding capacity, making it one of the finest forests that the world has ever known.

YULETIDE.

The wind across the snowclad hills,
A restless spirit, roves.
The murmur of the frozen rills
Still echoes in the groves.
The stripped trees, bending to the earth,
Their tale of sorrow tell;
Hushed are the sounds of recent mirth
That peeled in every dell.

Old winter breathes along the plain
Its chilling breath of snow;
The billows bounding o'er the main
An added fury know;
The sky is frowning, gray and cold,
The earth is brown and sere,
Yet on each barren waste and wold
The Yuletide bells ring clear.

PECULIAR MARK OF REGRET

Tortoises, Appropriately Marked, Liberated at Death of the Emperor of Japan.

In connection with the funeral of the late emperor of Japan, a strange ceremony was performed. A Japanese correspondent writes: "Following the custom of carrying birds in large cages at Buddhist funerals, to be liberated over the graves, the Tokyo city and the Tokyo branch of the Red Cross society joined together in the ceremony of freeing three large tortoises as a mark of regret at the death of Emperor Meiji. The shell of the largest specimen was three feet five inches long, and upon the shell were engraved the characters: 'We humbly beg leave to show our deepest regret at the death of our Meiji Tenno. Let free in the sea off Ogasawara island on the day of the state funeral, September 12, 1912. Hiroshi Abe, governor of Tokyo.

On the back of another tortoise was signed the name of the president of the Tokyo branch of the Red Cross society. At first it was planned to inlay the characters on the back of the tortoises in gold, but, fearing that they might be captured again for the sake of the gold, the characters were done in black lacquer. On the evening of September 13, just as the gun gave the signal for the starting of the imperial funeral, officials who had been waiting in a boat off Ogasawara island gave the tortoises their freedom.

"All three of the creatures appeared to be delighted to be once more at large in the ocean, and put their heads out of the water as much as to say 'thank you,' and then disappeared from sight."

Birth and ancestry, and that which we have not ourselves achieved, we can scarcely call our own.—Ovid.

SET FORTH WAR'S CRUELTY

Charles Sumner's Eloquent Condemnation of the Horrors of the Battlefield.

I need not dwell now on the waste and cruelty of war. These stare us wildly in the face, like lurid meteor lights, as we travel the page of history. We see the desolation and death that pursue its demoniac footsteps. We look upon sacked towns, upon ravaged territories, upon violated homes; we behold all the sweet charities of life changed to wormwood and gall. Our soul is penetrated by the sharp moan of mothers, sisters and daughters—of fathers, brothers and sons, who, in bitterness of their bereavement, refuse to be comforted. Our eyes rest at last upon one of these fair fields where nature, in her abundance, spreads her cloth of gold, spacious and apt for the entertainment of mighty multitudes—or, perhaps, from the curious subtlety of its position, like the carpet in the Arabian tale, seeming to contract so as to be covered by a few only, or to dilate so as to receive an innumerable host. Here, under a bright sun, such as shone at Austerlitz or Buena Vista—amidst the peaceful harmonies of nature—on the Sabbath of peace—we behold hands of brothers, children of a common father, heirs to a common happiness, struggling together in the deadly fight, with the madness of fallen spirits, seeking with murderous weapons the lives of brothers who have never injured them or their kindred. The havoc rages. The ground is soaked with their commingling blood. The air is rent with their commingling cries. Horse and rider are stretched together on the earth. More revolting than the mangled victims, than the gashed limbs, are the lawless passions which sweep, tempest-like, through the fiendish tumult.—Charles Sumner.

The most important part of every business is to know what ought to be done.—Columella.

TO DETERMINE NORMAL CHILD

Some Points Which Scientists Declare Will Settle Question of Interest to Parents.

If a child of three years knows his name and can thrust a chubby finger to his nose, mouth and eyes, when asked about those organs, he's a normal kid. If he can't, then it's time papa and mamma got busy with Petty's little think tank, or he'll grow up to be a boob.

This, in plain Bowveryesque, is the translation of the formula given in scientific terms by the medical savants of the Mental Hygiene Conference and Exhibit, who are holding "tests of children" in the hall of the city college.

"A child of 4," continues the scientific formula, "is expected to know its sex and to be able to recognize such objects as a key, knife or a penny, and to tell the comparative length of lines.

"At 5 a boy or girl should be able to draw a square and to repeat sentences. When a child is 6 we ask for definitions. I might ask: 'What is a fork.' If a boy answered: 'I eat with a fork,' it would be sufficient for that age, but if he inserted the word 'something' in his definition, as 'A fork is something to eat with,' it would place him in the 8-year class. If he said: 'A piece of tableware,' he would be in the 12-year class."

A child of 10 is asked what he would do if he missed a train. Here the answers vary. Any reply that is an answer is accepted. One child said: "Wait for another." Another said he would "run and catch it." While a boy from the Bronx said he would go home for the day.

What to do if struck by a playmate was the most puzzling of all questions. Boys invariably looked at their mothers when the question was put. "Forgive him," was the answer only a few times.

The best examination passed so far was by 7-year-old Donald Grant of 507 West One Hundred and Thirty-eighth street, who passed the examination for the child of 10.—New York Journal.

Crystals of Vitality Save Lives.

About ten years ago a Japanese researcher, Takamine, in the laboratory of Columbia university, made the discovery that a certain substance, secreted by a gland of the ox or sheep, when injected into the blood of other animals, had the power of greatly increasing their blood pressure and consequently their vitality. He called this substance adrenalin and succeeded in refining it to light yellow crystals. When the suprarenal glands which secrete this substance were removed by an operation from the living animals, they invariably died, showing that it was necessary to the life of the animals. However, only small quantities are needed by the animal, and hence but little is secreted by the glands, and then only in very weak condition, being mixed with other substances. The crystals are pure and have extremely great power. One part of the adrenalin dissolved in 100,000 parts of water is strong and capable of performing miracles. In fact, one-half thimbleful, or about that much, has been used in hospitals all over the country, time and time again, to enable a man to pass a crisis when his natural strength would have failed him. Hundreds of men and women can thank adrenalin for their lives.

Makes for Smooth Existence.

There is a good deal said about the loss of individuality, a loss when real which we all deplore, but a man is more likely to keep his individuality, with his life, if he follows in his motor the formulated lines of traffic rather than meet another man in his motor on the wrong side of the road. If both men happened to be in a civic parade there would be no loss of individuality to the man who kept his place behind instead of driving out from his place in order to get farther ahead of the man behind him, or in order to slip in ahead of the one ahead of him. Keeping in line means a simple thing often, but it is one of the trifles that make for a perfectly smooth existence.

There are seeming restrictions in life that hamper, but there are a great many others that forward. It is easy to understand the gains when compliance of a purely mechanical sort—but very necessary—has been made. By reasoning from their analogy we may find out to our advantage that there are many others less tangible, a compliance with which would do wonders in making the world go round, and in making ourselves the happiest and most successful people.

Stolen Turkey.

Rev. Algernon S. Crapsey, in an interview during the Little Falls strike, said of a very religious and very notorious child-labor millionaire:

"This man reminds me of Uncle Calhoun Clay.

"Uncle Cal was accused of stealing a turkey, and the Sunday after the accusation being communion Sunday, the old fellow was one of the first communicants at the little white church.

"His pastor, Rev. Washington White, said to him reproachfully, after the service:

"'Calhoun Clay, I'm ashamed of you. The idea of your coming to communion after stealing a turkey!'

"'Lands-a-massy, parson,' said old Uncle Cal, 'do you think I'd let a skinny old turkey, hardly worth ten cents a pound, stand betwixt me and the Lord's table?'"

Another Whistler Story.

In "A Book of Famous Wits," Walter Jerrold recounts a story of Whistler for which Sir Rennold Rodd is the authority: "I remember a breakfast which Waldo Story gave at Dieudonne's. Everyone there was by the way of having painted a picture, or written a book, or in some way or another having outraged the Philistine, with the exception of one young gentleman, whose raison d'entre there was not so apparent as was the height of his collars and the glory of his attire. He nevertheless ventured to lay down the law on certain matters which seemed beyond his province and even went so far as to combat some dictum of the master's, who, readjusting his eyeglass, looked pleasantly at him, and said: 'And whose son are you?'"—Exchange.

Triumph for American Dentistry.

Children in the public schools of Stavanger, Norway, are treated with the aid of American dental apparatus by a dentist who received his post graduate dental education in the United States.

Blessed Are the Peacemakers.

The Village Grocer—"What are you running for, sonny?" The Boy—"I'm trying to keep two fellers from fightin'." The Village Grocer—"Who are the fellows?" The Boy—"Bill Perkins and me!"—Puck.

IN THE LIMELIGHT

STARTS PLAN FOR MODEL DANCE HALLS

"The supervised dance hall is a paying proposition."

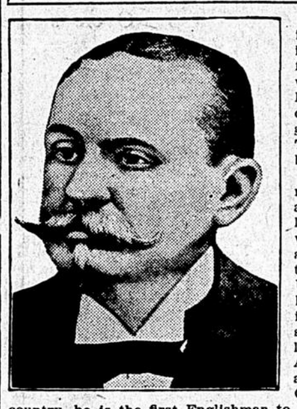
This is the verdict of Mrs. Charles H. Israels, who is known by reputation to every dancing hall proprietor in New York. As chairman of the committee of amusement resources for working girls, Mrs. Israels has made a detailed study of the dance hall problem for the last four years. With a committee of seventeen, she has investigated dance halls of every type and in every district; she has secured legislation resulting in the dance hall license act of 1910, and as an evidence of her belief that the supervised dance can be made to pay she has started plans for a series of model dance halls in all the larger eastern cities.

Mrs. Israels and her committee are at present making vigorous efforts to drive the "turkey trot" and its popular companions from the field and substitute a less objectionable style of dancing, but the popularity of those figures makes the task difficult.

"If the public could be made to realize," said Mrs. Israels, "that a large share of the amusement available for young girls of the poorer classes in New York city, a great army of them, is in the hands of organized gangs, the importance of the problem would be brought home to them. I am not just now emphasizing the organized white slave traffic in its relation to the dance hall; that evil is well known and obvious. But considered apart from that situation, as much so as it can be, the plan which the organized gang occupies in this system of dance halls is a pretty large and serious one.

"I have been working, especially during the past year, to trace out and put my finger on these gangs. A few gangs run hundreds of public dances."

PERU'S PRESIDENT OF ENGLISH DESCENT



Doubtless with a view to the opening of the Panama Canal no country in western South America is doing a finer stunt of advertising that Peru, with an immense coast line on the Pacific ocean extending from Ecuador on the north to Bolivia and the aggressive state of Chili on the south. The new trade opportunities should be of great interest to Pittsburgh.

Peruvian newspapers have just arrived giving an account of the inauguration of Guillermo Eduardo Billinghurst as president of the Peruvian republic, and it is something of a story in view of the near inauguration of another president of the United States. While President Billinghurst is a native Peruvian, having been born at Ario in 1851, he is a scion of one of the oldest real English families, tracing his lineage to Adam de Billinghurst, who was given a manor of that name by William the Conqueror. While native to the country, he is the first Englishman to be elected to a presidency in any of the Latin republics. This has been a matter of comment to some extent, but the story of the inauguration has had no more than a passing mention in papers outside of Peru.

It was a "halcyon and vociferous occasion." President Leguia had resigned his office, and the Anglo-Peruvian, Billinghurst, with another Leguia, Roberto E., as first vice-president, and Miguel Echenique as second vice-president, were elected. That is the Peruvian provision for succession, and two vice-presidents have at times been necessary in that country, used to war alarms, but now growing more peaceful every year. The grandfather of Billinghurst was a distinguished officer in the British army, who in some rather inexplicable way fought for the independence of Argentina. His son, the father of the present president, remained in South America, and that explains the nativity of the president, Billinghurst, the most remarkable name that has been connected with high office in any of what are called the "Latin republics," Latin only as being given a local habitation and a name.

CALLS CHINA A NEW UNITED STATES

"So many of us Chinese republicans, graduates of American colleges, are Americans through and through, that, in the intervals of fighting against the imperialists at Nanking, we actually discussed football like any other American college men."

So says Ching-Chun Wang, M. A., Ph. D., Yale '08, veteran of the battles that overthrew the oldest empire in the world, now back in this country as a member of the fifth international congress of chambers of commerce, held in Boston. Also, he is associate director of the Peking-Mukden railway. A man of many titles—titles hard to remember. But there is no difficulty in remembering Dr. Wang's words when he talks about the new China. He is an enthusiast, a sayer of startling things, a describer of conditions that you would not imagine possible in the phlegmatic east, a prophet of the fire of his enthusiasm, still appear so nearly incredible as to make you gasp.

"The new China is a new United States," he declares; and he certainly makes plenty of convincing statements to prove his contention. In the province of railroading alone he shows a China that mighty few people ever dreamed could be evolved—a China playing the role of apostle of progress, complaining bitterly because Japan, a backward nation, is thwarting Chinese plans for the betterment of Manchuria. China progressive!—Japan retrogressive! A huge bite for us of the west to swallow—for us, who have always looked upon China as the perfect type of the "stick-in-the-mud," on Japan as the land whose every step is forward.

We rub our eyes. We ask, "Isn't it a dream?"

Apparently not. To Dr. Wang the new China, the United States of the far east, is anything but a dream.

JOHN SINGLETON MOSBY REPORTED ILL

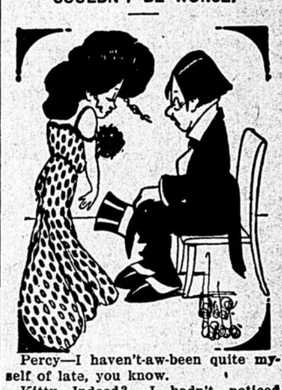
News from Washington of the serious illness of Col. John S. Mosby brings into prominence again one of the few remaining prominent officers of the army of the Confederacy. Colonel Mosby stood in the front rank of Confederate raiders in the Civil War, being particularly harassing in the 1864 campaign of General Sheridan in the Shenandoah valley which ended with his brilliant victory at Cedar Creek. There was a long line of communication to be guarded from Baltimore to Harper's Ferry and then down the valley, and from Washington by way of Manassas and Front Royal. Colonel Mosby devoted himself to breaking these lines and raiding his enemy's forces wherever possible. No one else in the army was so anathematized as was he. That such a rebel against the government could not only have escaped with his life after the surrender, but should actually later have been appointed to office under the government he sought to destroy, will always be one of the marvels of history. For his case was unlike that of Lee and his generals. It was persistently maintained that he was a lawless, barbarous raider, who violated the laws of war and of humanity, and it was generally known that if he had been captured he would speedily have been hanged.

It is almost impossible, after this lapse of time, for anyone to appreciate the bitterness of the feeling in regard to Mosby. Toward the latter part of 1864 his name was used by the mothers and nurses of the northern states to frighten unruly children into obedience. There was nothing this cavalryman was not accused of, from the wanton killing of women and children to being a wizard who could disembody himself for the purpose of making astral visits to the headquarters of the northern generals to learn all their secrets. Within a few years after the close of the war, all the deeds he was accused of were pracically forgotten, and no doubt some of the very children who were admonished in 1864 are today scanning the newspapers quite calmly for news of him.

Nothing is more annoying than a low man raised to a high position.—Claudianus.

Though ambition in itself is a vice, yet it is often the parent of virtues.—Quintilian.

COULDN'T BE WORSE.



Percy—I haven't-aw-been quite myself of late, you know.

Kitty—Indeed? I hadn't noticed any improvement.

Lost Trousers Playing Poker.

William Verne appeared in a Detroit police court attired in a dress coat and some underwear—he had bet the trousers in a poker game the evening before and lost. His cash, his watch and his diamonds preceded the trousers into the "bank." The trousers were of good quality, so William bet several blue chips on them. But his luck didn't turn, and when he was cleaned out again he broke up the game by quitting. He begged the loan of the trousers to go home in, but the bank took no risks and declined. So William started in dress coat and underwear and was arrested.

Made-to-Order Kind.

"My wife is always bringing home so much toothpowder," complained a man the other day to a friend. "It's a waste of money. As for me I just take the bathtub cleanser and scrub my teeth."

The pair were walking down Chestnut street and his companion stopped in amazement. "What! Doesn't it hurt your teeth and gums, too?" he exclaimed almost in horror.

"No," came back the surprising reply. "You see they're the kind you buy at the dentist's."

Good Job.

"Now Johnny," said the teacher after she had explained the meaning of the word. "I wish you would write a sentence containing defeat."

After a struggle which lasted for about twenty minutes Johnny announced that he was ready to be heard.

"Please read your composition," the teacher directed.

"When you git shoes dat's too tite," Johnny read, "it's hard on de feet."

One Fisherman's Idea.

First Angler—Look, this fish was almost caught before; see the broken hook in its mouth.

Second Angler—It should have had sense enough to steer clear of hooks after that.

First Angler—Oh, come, you can't expect a fish to exhibit more sense than a human being.

Plain Facts.

"Men are a lot of four-flushers."

"How now?"

"They tell a girl that all they want is to bask forever in the sunshine of her smile. And after marriage they expect her to cook, mend clothes, keep house and do an endless lot of plain hard work."

Helping Bob Along.

May—I've just been reading about a Boston physician who tells you what ails you by holding your hand.

Jane—I must tell that to Bob tonight. He's thinking of studying medicine.