FAST-FLYING BIRDS.

RAISING CARRIER-PIGEONS—HOW GOOD ONES ARE KNOWN.

Some Examples of Wonderful Endurance—The Best Long-Distance Record—Notable Flights.

"Homing-pigeons," said a noted fancier to a reporter for the New York *Mail and Express*, "open up a curious study to those who will take the trouble to note their peculiarities and actions. While their personal appearances are not as attractive to the eye as those of some other high flyers, still their symmetry is exceptionally pretty, when their fine robust constitution is considered. They vary in color, but the chief breeds are all red, red checkers, all blue, blue checkers, all black, black checkers, silvers, whites, and splashers. The whites are very rare. I know of only a single pair at present breeding in this vicinity. For all that they are no dearer to purchase than those of the other kinds. Antwerp, Belgium, is the paradise of the homing-pigeon. All of our cracks either possess parents which were born there or they themselves came direct from its sacred precincts. England and Germany, too, have secured an important part of its progeny. They make a regular business of carriers there. Every fourth person about the city is a raiser of pigeons. In this immediate neighborhood, where the operation is a mere pastime, Husson, Baldwin, Whitely, and Van Opstal are the principal buyers of the foreign production. They have spent a great deal of money in securing the pick of the market, and their extensive lofts prove that they have succeeded. Of course, the majority of the pigeons brought from Antwerp are for breeding purposes alone, it being generally understood that foreign and domestic birds produce wonderful flyers. They breed about five times a year, something which no other member of the world of feathers is capable of.

"Any of the nine different characters of pigeons which I have specified, if tutored while young, will gradually develop into a perfect carrier with a capability of travelling a distance from fifty to five hundred miles. Frequently some are so well trained to fly after a year's trial a much longer distance. I own two mates which have flown seven hundred miles. The price for birds is as changeable as the heavens. When sold to start a loft, the youngsters, or squealers, as they are appropriately termed, fetch from $3 to $4 per pair, and the old ones cost all the way from $10 to $100 per set. In buying, care should be taken as much as possible to get the brothers and sisters of birds which have distinguished themselves by some good flight for record or distance. Otherwise the loft will become a regular white elephant, eventually degenerating into a house of refuge or hospital for useless, decrepit stock. Much concerning the health and ambition of the pets depends on comfortable quarters being secured. If they are penned up in narrow, ill-lighted, and poorly-ventilated apartments, the natural consequence is that they will waste away. A carrier-pigeon after its first lesson is like a lively school-boy. If he is deprived of his liberty the result is fatal, for not only will he harrow discontent and destruction, but he will create a regular purgatory for those around him. Food, too, is another necessity to the prosperity of a loft. Only the best of the market is received with favor by the birds. After an abundant supply of clean, fresh water, the demand of the flyers is for hard corn, Canada peas, hemp-seed, and a little quantity of wheat occasionally. They are particularly fond of salt, and would sooner lose their grain and corn than be refused it. I cannot tell why it is so, but it seems to be essential to their very existence. They will devour it by the bushel if permitted, but are usually satisfied when a little is mixed with their more solid food. Green food should also be given them at regular intervals. The quantity should be small, however. Attention is the modern dessert before and after each meal. They must have a good stock of it to appease their appetites. The number of meals each day is three. An exception is made in the case of the hen that is caring for a young brood. She is supplied with an extra meal late at night. Numerous visits should be made to the loft or coop by the attendant every day. The oftener he pays a visit the tamer they become, until finally they entirely forget to flutter and grow alarmed when he appears.

"There are a hundred ways of recognizing a well-bred, promising bird. When you see one with strong feathers closely connected to the body, with the wings substantial and finely pinioned to the form, with a full head from the end of the back, with the shaft of wing feathers almost inflexible at the end, with a deep broad chest, and a wide overlapping which stops the air from rushing through when in flight, you can bet all the wealth accumulated since Adam that that bird will carve out a memorable record. As the speed of the bird is dependent on his shape, resolution, and endurance, those in charge of breeders cannot be too particular in seeing that they are bred short. For difficult work and long journeys birds between two and five and a half years are the best. Their ambition is then at its height. Frequently a few birds will indulge in long flights until they reach the age of eight years. After that time they are available only for breeding purposes. The system employed in training is quite simple when once understood, but lately some fanciers have changed this mode. To start a loft a person has to take birds which have never flown out of the coop, because they will be over-restless to return when liberated at any distant point. The best way to train, in my opinion, is to send them out first on short flies, beginning at 2 or three miles, then 7 and 10, 15 and 20, 40 and 60, 100 and 225, 375 to 500 miles. The short races are chiefly to make them familiar with the position and neighborhood of their home or loft. It is rank folly to start training a bird before it has reached the age of at least five weeks. It should be allowed to fly about the loft until it gets that old. A long bamboo pole, with a noticeable object attached to it on a string, will be found requisite in rearing and setting the young in motion. They will have to fly a trifle when frightened, and in a little time they will know they are expected to fly, and, what is more, they will do it. There should be a trap to every coop, and also bob, or, as they are better known, drop wires. By these means the trainer can catch any bird he chooses. The Keyport Giants are not believers in the policy of gradual training. They take a bird three months old and send it on a hundred-mile trip first. If he fails to accomplish the task they refuse to place him in the loft, and sell him to the adherents of the short-distance system.

"There is a difference of opinion among fanciers as to whether the birds take their flight exclusively by sight or by instinct. I sustain the latter belief, and am positive that no other faculty is employed. How can a pigeon which has been expressed on the cars for hundreds of miles manage to return to his loft exclusively by sight? It is true that in rainy weather, or when the atmosphere is laden with fog, he will not attempt to fly, but that is not sufficient proof that he cuts out the direction of his travels by sight, but he assuredly cannot see his loft several hundred miles away."

"Do homers ever fly at night?"

"No and yes. In England, according to a number of letters which I have received, they claim birds which roam about several miles after dark on wagers. But I regret to say I doubt the truth of my informant's statement."

"Suppose a bird loses his bearings after being caught in a fog?"

"He invariably flies with the wind until it clears up. Then he resumes his journey."

"How are they prepared for long flights?"

"They are placed in large baskets and shipped to the race secretary or to a responsible person appointed by him. No name is allowed to be on the wings of the birds except that of the secretary. This is done to prevent any possible fraud, because if the name of the owner were stamped on the wing some friend at the starting point might express the birds back to their destination by rail, and thus claim increased record for fast travel. The words 'if shot or caught, address," with the secretary's name and residence, with a registered number say A. B. C., 70, are generally printed under the bird's wing, so that in case an accident befalls the birds the hunter can see at a glance that they had been racing. A man representing the secretary is generally put to watch at the birds' destination, and if they succeed in escaping the huntsman's gun or trap and arrive safe he records on a printed blank the number and private mark which were placed on the wing by the secretary. After filling up that portion of it he fills in the time of the bird's arrival. This blank he retains. In case no watchman is appointed at the destination, as often happens, a telegram is sent to the person who started the birds announcing their arrival, and also the registered number, counter-marks, and private signs. As another preventive against false claims the telegraph-operator is required to dispatch to the starting place the time the message was given to him. This is called a certified telegram."

"On long-distance races, how long do birds fly without stopping?"

"Until they are completely exhausted and have to fall to the ground. They can continue the flight incessantly for two days, but after that time their endeavors are useless. When a bird stops from sheer exhaustion it takes him sometimes as long as a week to fully recover, and he will not proceed until he has entirely regained his lost strength. Herein lies the danger, for while a bird lies in this state of collapse he becomes the prey of the hawk, hound, or huntsman. An instance, in fact, came to my notice a few months ago. A man on Long Island was out walking with his retriever, when the latter rushed forward while crossing an open field and picked up a pigeon. The poor thing was half dead from exhaustion, and the man took it from the mouth of the dog. He examined it closely and found the name Arnold on its wing. It belonged to the great fancier of that name in this city, and the man communicated with him. The reply came by wire and asked him to keep the bird until it got strong and then let her go. He did so, and the homer arrived on the loft the same day she was released. Now, had this been a huntsman of the regular frame of mind the pigeon's fate would have been sealed in short order."

"What is the best long-distance record at present?"

"One thousand and fifty miles. It was flown last year by Alabama and Montgomery, who were then the property of Samuel Hunt, of Fall River, Mass. They flew from Montgomery, where they had been sent by rail, to Fall River. This was a test of the homing instict, and it was a grand success. Alabama is now dead, but Montgomery is in the loft of J. R. Husson, on west Sixtieth street. The next best distance was also made last year by Arnoux, belonging to A. P. Baldwin, of Newark, N. J., who has some of the finest birds in the country. The route was from Pensacola, Fla., to Newark, a distance on the air-line of 1,010 miles. Philadelphia has three birds which travelled 935 miles last year. Red Whizzer is the champion of the trio. When this feat was performed it broke the record of the world for distance, and a gold band of honor was put on one of Red Whizzer's legs. This year the long-distance record has not been beaten. A bird belonging to Charles Mink, Jr., made the best showing, but only accomplished 875 miles. Perhaps one of the best fast-records for the year was done by Ariel, of T. Brooks, of Germantown, who won the *World's* purse for best average speed (175 miles or over) at the beginning of the season. His record was 451 miles in nine hours, eighteen minutes. F. B. Thurber also gave a cash prize for speed. Birds from W. B. Garrabrants, Newark Five club, and Thomas Bowman, Scranton club finished together. The latter consequently offered a prize for the best young bird flying 230 miles or more. It was captured by a little fellow from the loft of Mr. Iverson, of the Hudson Homing Pigeon club. W. Verrinder, of the Hudson and Newark club, offered a handsome prize for the best speed (200 miles or over), for old birds, and another for young birds. These trophies, together with two others, offered by J. R. Hurson for young fliers, were won by the Germantown club. For 860 miles the Governor Hall of M. B. McGuire, of the Kings County club, is the only bird in this State that has flown the distance.

"The best gentlemen fanciers about this vicinity are Alfred de Cordova, the Wall-street broker; Henry Rover, of Brooklyn, the father of the sport, who was one of the first to have a 500-mile bird; F. H. Platt and Albert Daggett, of this city; Branshaw, of South Brooklyn; Bennett & Baldwin, of Newark, who have several 860-mile birds, and William Arnold, of Arnold, Constable & Co. Mr. de Cordova has put his stock to practical use, saving this season alone hundreds of dollars on telegrams by dispatching the birds with messages from his summer residence in Summitt, N. J., to this city. Mr. Arnold has the palace loft of this neighborhood. It is on west Eighteenth street, over a stable. The place is divided into three separate compartments—two for breeders and another for young birds."

"Which stock do you find to be the best?"

"The get of Baby Mine, which was owned by E. H. Conover, of Keyport, N. J. This was the first young bird to make 350 miles in a day. Ten years ago, during the centennial, an award was offered to the first American-bred bird that would cover 500 miles in one day. To illustrate how rapid has been the progress of the sport since, I need only mention that last year, at the American Institute fair, one man, Dr. Johnson, of Keyport, N. J., showed fourteen birds which had accomplished the undertaking. The great trouble was to cover the journey in one day. Last year T. Fred. Goldman's Ned Damon recorded 506 miles as an effort during the daylight, and George Waitt, of Keyport, had two to do it this year. The rules of the Homing Pigeon Federation of American Fanciers govern all record flying. This organization meets once every year and elects executive officers and a racing committee. Another surprising thing which has been proved within a few years is that pigeons can be bred and raised at sea. Captain Watson, the dock master of the Cunard Line, informs me that on several voyages between California and England the vessel arrived at her destination with from twenty to thirty birds; this, too, after a number of squabs had been used for food. The breeding of carrier-pigeons has taken a big upward move within the past five years, but I think it will have reached perfection before the nineties appear."

Here and There.

A Polish couple called on the clerk of courts in Luzerne county a week ago for a marriage-license. A few days after the damsel came back with another swain for a license, stating that the first young man was too poor to marry, and had relinquished his right to her for the consideration of $5.

A Swedish authority states that Swedish iron has almost lost its place in the English market. Hardwares exported to that country are being returned unsold, even though offered at the very lowest prices. The East Indian market is almost as completely closed against Sweden, and such sales as have been made there have been effected at a ruinous loss.

Carpenters have begun work at Washington Park, Brooklyn, on a toboggan-slide which is expected to put all others in the shade. The plans call for a descent of 200 feet and a level run of 400 feet. The chute will be 12 feet wide, divided into three compartments. It is expected to be in operation next week, should "Jack Frost" put in an appearance.

Superintendent Foot, of the Mexican railway, says that 20,000 steel ties have been laid between Vera Cruz and Mexico since 1883, and 40,000 have been ordered for this year, and it is proposed to lay 40,000 to 50,000 yearly hereafter. He puts in 2,000 per mile, brought from England, where they cost about five shillings each, and delivered on the road at not more than $2 in Mexican silver. The wooden ties used to cost 90 cents to $1.62 each.

The most dangerous whirlpool on the New England coast is that near Deer Island Point, opposite Eastport, in Passamaquoddy bay. At times, when the tide backs up against a strong wind, a great roaring is heard; the whirlpool, fully an acre in extent, swells up to a height of twenty feet, like a great hill of yeast; then, falling back, forms a deep, black, infernal looking bowl. The fishermen in the neighborhood shun the whirlpool as they would the sulphurous pit.

Competition had a remarkable effect on certain bidders for a contract to remove offal from the streets of Brooklyn. The proposals were opened a day or two ago. The Board of Estimates had appropriated $5,500, but Thomas F. White, it seems, is willing to remove the stuff to his place on Barren island for $2,300; Francis D. McLellan wanted to do it for $1,800; Andrew Wessel for $800; and Edmund S. Wilson offered to remove it for nothing. The contract was not awarded.

A gentleman who has arrived in Montreal, says the *Witness*, from Winnipeg, states that there has been a large influx of settlers into Manitoba during the present year, who have abandoned their lands in the Northwest Territories on account of the summer frosts which, at times, prevail and destroy their crops. Farmers are beginning to find that in certain parts of the Territories grain cannot be raised with any certainty of the crop being harvested in a good condition on this account.

A sleeper is one who sleeps. A sleeper is that in which the sleeper sleeps. A sleeper is that on which the sleeper which carries the sleeper on which he sleeps runs. Therefore, while the sleeper sleeps in the sleeper, the sleeper carries the sleeper over the sleeper under the sleeper until the sleeper which carries the sleeper jumps off the sleeper and wakes the sleeper in the sleeper by striking the sleeper under the sleeper, and there is no longer any sleeper sleeping in the sleeper on the sleeper. This view of the matter is taken by the apparently wide-awake Salem *Era*.

Imitation-amber has largely taken the place of real amber in the manufacture of pipes. This is the last information from the Konigsburg coast, where amber has, time out of mind, been sought by dragging at Schwartzort, and by mining for the last twenty years at Palmnicken. The company pays 2,000,000 marks (about $500,000) to the German Government for the right of mining for amber. The mines produce 3,000 hundred-weight a year, and large pieces fetch $30 per kilogram as taken from the mine. The largest manufacturer of pipes with mouth-pieces of amber is at Vienna, and there the sham article is very much used. In the mines at Palmnicken about 1,600 men are constantly employed.

The Criminals of the Future.

Mr. Angell, of Boston, in speaking of the urgent need of humane education in our schools, says:

Pretty nearly all the criminals of the future are in our schools to-day, and we are educating them—the men who will throw our railroad trains off the track, put dynamite under our churches, commit outrages and murders, perhaps burn half a city some windy night.

They are in our schools to-day, and we are educating them!

The churches do not reach them. It is said that all the churches in New York city, with every seat filled, will seat only about 250,000, while the population is about 1,400,000.

The Sunday schools do not reach them. I have seen recently in the *Sunday-School World* that of sixteen millions of children in this country of school age only about seven attended Sunday schools. The other nine millions never go. Many of them have no parents, or worse than none. They have little or no thought of God or immortality.

They can be reached in our schools; and neither they nor their parents can be reached anywhere else.

I believe it is infinitely more important to the future of this nation that they be taught kindness and mercy than grammar or arithmetic, and I am sure there is no way under heaven in which you can better teach them kindness and mercy than by teaching to do kind acts and say kind words a hundred times a day to the lower creatures by whom they are constantly surrounded. Every such teacher in our schools is not for the protection of animals alone, but for the protection of property and life; nay, more, it is laying in the human hearts of these neglected children preparing to become criminals a foundation of mercy and humanity on which every Church can build.

Americans as Athletes.

The love of out-door sports and athletics in general is getting to be almost as distinguishing a characteristic of Americans as of Englishmen. G. D. Baird, of New York city, says:

"I heartily recommend to the athletic fraternity the use of Alcock's Porous Plasters. They have been a standard remedy in our family for years for all chest and lung disorders, as well as for treating inflammations."

ASTRONOMICAL.

THE PLANETS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER.

Celestial Beauties Viewed Through the Telescope—Mercury and Saturn—The Winter Solstice.

[Providence Journal.]

VENUS closes her record as morning star on the 1st of the month, and commences her reign as evening star on the 2d at 11 o'clock in the evening. She is then in superior conjunction with the sun, passing beyond the great luminary, and reappearing on his eastern side to fulfill her appointed course as evening star. Henceforth she will shine after sunset in the west, instead of before sunrise in the east. Although she is now blotted from the sky as far as terrestrial observation is concerned, she wins the place of honor on the monthly annals, for the goal she passes will soon bring her into place as chief among the shining throng that adorn the early western sky. She is beautiful when she hangs resplendent "under the opening eyelids of the morn"; but she is more beautiful when "fairest of stars, last in the train of night," she descends with charming grace to the horizon, and the golden glow of twilight, following closely in the wake of the great day star, from whom she borrows her light. She will take on this lovely aspect before the first month of the new year closes, and we shall enjoy her serene light in the evening sky through the winter, spring, and summer of the next year, for she will be evening star until the 20th of September. She will not be visible during the present month, for the simple reason that she is hidden in the sun's intense brightness. She is, however, traveling eastward from the sun, "true as the needle to the pole." In about six weeks she will be far enough away from him to be visible to bright observers just after sunset, and the beauty of the star floating on the tremulous waves of light that follow the sun's departure will repay the diligent watcher for the trouble required. The present is a favorable opportunity to follow the movements of our nearest celestial neighbor, for she will oscillate eastward, increasing all the time her distance from the sun until July, when she will begin to retrace her steps. The proof of this is found in the fact that she grows brighter and her stay above the horizon in the evening grows longer with every reappearance of the radiant star.

The right ascension of Venus on the 1st is 16h. 35m., her declination is 21° 53' south, her diameter is 10.''4, and she is in the constellation Scorpio.

Venus rises on the 1st just before 7 o'clock in the morning; on the 31st she sets about a quarter before 5 o'clock in the evening.

MERCURY is evening star until the 3d, and morning star for the rest of the month. On the 3d, at 7 o'clock in the morning, he is in inferior conjunction with the sun, passing between the earth and the sun, appearing on his western side as morning star. Venus and Mercury, therefore, present opposite phases at almost the same time. The former is in superior conjunction only eight hours before the latter is in inferior conjunction. The one, if visible in the telescope, shows a small round disk like the full moon; the other has his dark side turned towards the earth, like the moon at new moon. Although Mercury is at his nearest approach to our globe, and Venus is at her greatest distance, the two planets, if visible, would seem to be close together. They are in conjunction on the 3d at 8 o'clock in the morning. Mercury being at that time 1° 14' north. Another noteworthy event occurs in Mercury's movements on the 23d at 2 o'clock in the morning. He reaches his greatest western elongation, and is at that time 22° 6' west of the sun. He is in low southern declination, but the sun is so still lower, so that the planet, which is about 3° north of the sun, will be favorably situated for observation with the naked eye at elongation and for a week before and after. Mercury rises on the 23d about a quarter before 5 o'clock, nearly two hours before the sun, and must be looked for in the southeast, 8° north of the sunrise point, a few degrees northwest of the bright star Antares. On the 13th the swift-winged planet is less than 2° northwest of Beta scorpii, a brilliant star of the second magnitude. These stars will serve as guides to point out the presence of the fitful planet.

The right ascension of Mercury on the 1st is 16h., 50m., his declination is 21° 44' south, his diameter is 9.''6, and he is in the constellation Ophiuchus.

Mercury sets on the 1st about half-past 4 o'clock in the evening; on the 31st he rises about 6 o'clock in the morning.

SATURN is morning star. If Venus and Mercury claim precedence for the interesting epochs that enliven their course, Saturn stands unrivaled on the December annals for his beautiful appearance among the stars, and for his highly favorable position for observation. He reigns alone in the evening sky. Venus and Mercury are hidden in the sunlight. Mars is barely perceptible, and Jupiter illuminates the morning sky. Saturn, when the month commences, rises at 7 o'clock, and is visible during nearly the whole night. His course is retrograde during the month—that is, he is apparently moving westward. The bright planet shines with a serene light, and can be recognized at a glance in the eastern sky in the early evening, with the twin stars Castor and Pollux on the north and Procyon on the south.

The right ascension of Saturn on the 1st is 7h. 24m., his declination is 21° 27' north, his diameter is 18.''8, and he is the constellation Gemini.

Saturn rises on the 1st about a quarter after 7 o'clock in the evening; on the 31st he rises about a quarter after 5 o'clock.

JUPITER is morning star. Observers of the eastern sky soon after 3 o'clock in the morning in the early part of the month will behold the advent of the princely planet, when he will come looming above the horizon with a brightness which surpasses that of any other visible star. The first magnitude star near Jupiter is Spica.

The right ascension of Jupiter on the 1st is 13h. 34m., his declination is 9° 27' south, his diameter is 36.''6, and he is in the constellation Virgo.

Jupiter rises on the 1st at a quarter after 3 o'clock in the morning; on the 31st he rises a quarter before 2 o'clock.

MARS is evening star. He sets nearly two hours after the sun, but he has dwindled to a mere point and is difficult to find in the western sky. He must be looked for near the brightest star in the bowl of the inverted dipper in Sagittarius, low down in the southwest, an hour after sunset.

The right ascension of Mars on the 1st is 18h. 54m., his declination is 24° 4' south, his diameter is 4.''8, and he is in the constellation Sagittarius.

Mars sets on the 1st about half-past 6 o'clock in the evening; on the 31st he sets nearly the same time.

URANUS is morning star. Very bright eyes will discern his presence 3° south of Gamma Virginis. He is also in the neighborhood of the asteroid Vesta. A good telescope will be essential for the best observation of the giant planet and its small neighbor.

The right ascension of Uranus on the 1st is 12h. 43m., his declination is 3° 56' south, his diameter is 3.''5, and he is in the constellation Virgo.

Uranus rises on the 1st about 2 o'clock in the morning; on the 31st he rises a few minutes after midnight.

NEPTUNE is evening star, and under favorable conditions for telescopic observation, being above the horizon nearly the whole night, he may be found south of the Pleiades.

At the close of the month Neptune, Mars, and Venus are evening stars; Mercury, Jupiter, Uranus, and Saturn are morning stars.

The right ascension of Neptune on the 1st is 3h. 37m., his declination is 17° 34', his diameter is 2.''6, and he is in the constellation Taurus.

Neptune sets on the 1st a quarter before 6 o'clock in the morning; on the 31st he sets a quarter before 4 o'clock.

THE MOON.

The December moon falls on the 11th at 4h. 31m. A. M. On the 9th, two days before the full, she is at her nearest point of approach to Neptune at 9h. 13m. A. M., being 3° 20' south. On the 13th she is in conjunction with Saturn at 11h. 58m. A. M., being 2° 59' south. The moon next draws near to Uranus, the day after the last quarter, on the 19th, at 2h. 45m. A. M., being 2° 52' north at the time of conjunction. She next pays her respects to Jupiter on the 20th, at 10h. 29m. A. M., being 3° 24' north. Mercury comes next in her course, the conjunction taking place on the 23d at 8h. 53m. A. M., the moon being 3° 5' north. On the 25th she is in conjunction with Venus at 4h. 39m P. M., being 4° 39' north. She closes the circuit on the 27th by her nearest approach to Mars at 1h. 44m P. M., when she is 3° 29' north.

THE SUN.

During December the days continue to decrease until the 17th. They then remain of the same length until the 25th, when there is an increase of one minute. On the 1st the sun rises at 6h. 54' A. M. and sets at 4h. 16' P. M., making the day 9h. 22' long. On the 31st the sun rises at 7h. 14' A. M. and sets at 4h 22' P. M. making the day 9h. 9' long. Thus on the last day of the month, the day is 13 m. shorter than it was at the commencement. The days shorten slowly until the 17th, then remain without change for the eight following days, and then the programme changes. The sun turns his face northwards, his extreme point of southern declination 23° 27' has been reached, and the first proof of his returning steps is given in the three additional minutes that mark the increased length of the daylight on the last day of the year.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE.

This joyful time-mark accounts for the new state of events. It receives its name, as is well known, from two Latin words meaning the sun stands still. On the 21st, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the sun enters the sign Capricornus, and the astronomical winter begins. The sun just grazes the tropic of Capricorn, and his southern progress is stayed. Henceforth the nights will grow no longer, the sunrise and sunset points will no longer move southward, and the sun's meridian altitude will no longer decrease in the North Temperate Zone. Henceforth storms may slower, tempest rage, and cold consume us; but the sun has turned his face northwards, the dominion of ice and snow is conquered, and every revolving day draws us nearer to the hour when winter and spring will embrace each other. The winter solstice does not herald the advent of the Christian year, neither is its record accepted on the annals of the civil year; but it is none the less the commencement of the natural year. In the olden times and in the poetic ages of a ruder civilization the nations of the north lived nearer to nature. Their year began when the sun had reached his greatest southern declination and turned his course to bless the northern nations with increasing light and heat. It was the jubilee of the year to their simple natures, the long-anticipated hour when, with music, dancing, and festive offerings they paid homage to the rude deities they worshipped. The venerable yule log was drawn from the depths of the primative forest. Every wayfarer bowed reverently as it passed, for he knew that in its fires all old wrongs and heart-burnings would be consumed, and that it would cause the liquor to flow in the wassail-bowl. The Druids gathered the mistletoe from the sacred oak. Bards sang their rude songs, and from every land of the semi-civilized world arose a universal thanksgiving; in every heart was aroused a feeling of dependence upon a higher power, whose auspicious care was invoked for the coming year with votive offerings and propitiatory sacrifices.

In the strange blending of Christian and pagan rites which make the heterogeneous elements of our Christmas and New-Year's festivities, our thanksgivings for vastly greater privileges are no more heartfelt, our religious vows are no more sincere, and our modern conventionalisms no nearer to nature than were the simple faith and trust symbolized in the observances of the olden times.

THE SIGNAL SERVICE.

A Plan for Reorganization Prepared and Submitted by General Hazen.

General Hazen has a scheme for the establishment of the signal service in the War Department, which he has submitted to the Secretary of War in the shape of a petition to Congress, in hopes that it will receive the Secretary's approval and assistance. General Hazen thinks that some such plan is necessary, as on more than one occasion the legal status of the service has been called into question, and an office charged with carrying out important matters under special acts of Congress should have a fixed and definite organization and a proper legal status. The petition is in the shape of a carefully-prepared bill, which establishes the signal service as a bureau of the War Department, having charge of weather predictions, army signal duty, and the maintenance and repair of military telegraph lines.

COMPOSITION OF THE BUREAU.

The Bureau shall consist of one chief signal officer, with the rank of brigadier-general, such commissioned officers of lower grades as have been or may be provided for by law, 150 sergeants, thirty corporals, 200 privates, two clerks of class 4, three clerks class 1, one at $1,000, two messengers, and such scientific experts, clerks, draughtsmen, copyists, messengers, mechanics, &c., as may be necessary in the office of the Chief Signal Officer; also, such civilian employés, operators, &c., as may be needed at regular signal and telegraphic stations throughout the country.

TRANSFER OF SIGNAL-SERVICE LIEUTENANTS TO THE ARMY.

The bill contemplates the transfer of the sixteen second lieutenants now in the corps to the line of the army, with the respective dates of their commissions, as vacancies occur, and that the President shall be authorized to detail twenty-two officers from the army as acting signal officers, who, when so detailed and instructed, shall not be relieved from signal duty except for unfitness or other sufficient cause.

THE ENLISTED MEN ARE

to be enlisted for four years and classified as 25 first-class sergeants at $1,000, 50 second-class sergeants at $1,400, 75 third-class sergeants at $1,300, 30 corporals at $1,200, 120 privates at $1,100, and 170 privates at $1,000. It is to be the duty of the Chief signal Officer to furnish estimates, and, under the direction of the Secretary of War, to make contracts for the supplies of the Bureau, stations, and telegraph lines. All officers and men intrusted with funds or property are to be required to make correct returns to the Chief Signal Officer, who is to be authorized to draw up a system of rules and regulations regarding such matters. One of the officers detailed to the Bureau is to be made disbursing officer, with sufficient bond.

GENERAL HAZEN'S EXPLANATION.

In a communication to the Secretary of War accompanying the proposed reorganization, General Hazen states that the scheme is prompted by experience and careful observation. Whatever the signal service has done and is now doing, he says, has been the result of disconnected legislation, usually appended to appropriation acts; and while there is no doubt but that the scope of its work is thoroughly defined, it would seem proper and of the highest importance that its organization should be fixed and its work defined by consecutive clauses under one act of organization and establishment, without which the service will continue to be the subject of great embarrassment and criticism. He states that twenty-two commissioned officers are absolutely needed to carry on the present work. The classification of the sergeants is but simple justice to that valuable and meritorious grade of men.

"By transferring sixteen lieutenants of the signal corps to the line of the army," he says, "justice will be done them in the way of promotion with length of service, without which their positions are anomalous and undesirable, and opposed to military practice and utility of all time and all countries. This plan will also admit of the selection of men for these duties of the best ability and training, while some of these officers promoted from sergeants of this service have never had the training necessary to become such."

WEST POINT GRADUATES WANTED.

"This matter is of vital importance, as at present the best officers for this service are not obtainable for it. West Point graduates cannot be assigned to the corps, and the anomaly exists of a nation maintaining a first-class military and scientific school, while its pupils cannot be assigned to this branch of service, one more nearly purely scientific than any other."

THE SEWER BURST INTO FLAME.

A Spark from a Passing Horse's Shoe Ignites the Gas in a Manhole.

[New York World.]

By an explosion of sewer-gas in a manhole at the southwest corner of Bayard street and the Bowery shortly before 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon a horse was severely injured and a man slightly burned about the face. The manhole is located beneath the Bayard-street crossing, and is covered by a perforated iron lid. At the moment of the explosion a two-horse truck belonging to Newss & Brother, butchers, of Allen and Delancey streets, driven by George Page, was passing, and it is supposed that a spark from the granite pavement by the horse's shoe ignited the gas as it filtered through the manhole-cap.

The noise of the explosion brought a host of frightened people to the doors and windows in the neighborhood, and caused a stampede among the pedestrians near the spot. The heavy iron cap was blown several feet into the air, and fell to the street unbroken, fortunately striking nobody. A volume of flame followed, and was blown against the side of one of the horses by the heavy wind, burning it fatally, it is feared, and singing the beard on the face of Page, the driver.

The flame almost instantly expired. After the cap was replaced no evidence of the explosion remained except the injured driver and horse. The former went home and the latter was taken to its stable.

All our physicians recommend Dr. Bull's Cough Syrup for hoarseness and colds. 25c.

ERASTUS BROOKS.

The Dead Editor and Politician.

Erastus Brooks, the deceased editor and politician, was born in Portland, Me., on January 31, 1815. He learned the printer's art, published the *Gazette* in Haverhill, Mass., where also he taught in an academy, edited the Portland *Advertiser* in the Harrison campaign, and was selected to take the electoral vote to Washington before his brother, James Brooks, started the *Evening Express* in New York, on June 20, 1836. As a member of the staff of this successful journal Erastus advanced rapidly in his profession. He was sent to Washington, where he represented the *Express* for seventeen sessions of Congress, and contributed besides to other newspapers. His letters from the start were masterly productions, and their brilliant writer was soon made associate editor of his brother's publication. As editor and proprietor his connection with the *Express* lasted forty-one years, terminating in June, 1877.

In 1844 Mr. Brooks married the youngest daughter of Chief-Justice Cranch. The year before his marriage he spent in traveling in Europe. As a Know-Nothing he was elected to the State Senate in 1853 and 1855. In 1856 he ran for Governor as the candidate of that party. Mr. Brooks was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1866-'67 and of the Constitutional Commission in 1871-'72. It will be remembered that in 1855-'56 he engaged in a controversy with Archbishop Hughes on the Church-property question, which caused excitement. He was a member of the New York Assembly in 1878, 1879, 1881, and 1882. For many years Mr. Brooks was a prominent member of the State Board of Health, the National Health Association, the National Charities Association, and the National Indian Rights Association, and for over a quarter of a century an officer or director of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum and Nursery and Child's Hospital in New York. He was also for a dozen years or more a trustee of Cornell University, and was for many years one of the Executive Committee of the Associated Press, and for a time—after Mr. Simonson's retirement—its manager. Early in life he was a Unitarian in his religious preference, but later became an Episcopalian. He devoted the latter years of his life to his farm, doing occasional literary work for newspapers and magazines.

Mr. Brooks leaves a widow, two daughters, and a son. The eldest daughter is Mrs. Eugene Dubois. The other daughter is Miss Bertha Greeley Brooks. The son, the youngest of the family, is Erastus Eliot Brooks.

CONFEDERATE SURGEON'S WIDOW

Causes the Arrest of a Lawyer on a Charge of Larceny.

[New York World.]

At the breaking out of the civil war Dr. Lloyd Carlton Belt, of Atlanta, Ga., put his wife, Elizabeth M. Belt, and his little daughter, now a handsome young woman, into the care of his cousin, Charles J. Jenkins, who afterwards became War Governor of the State, while Dr. Belt went to the front as a Confederate surgeon and was killed. His estate was said to be worth $300,000, some of the property consisting of several large plantations. Governor Jenkins favored selling the plantations, though the widow objected, and he obtained for them $100,000. Of this $23,000 went to pay a debt that Dr. Belt owed; the remaining $77,000 Governor Jenkins used in purchasing Confederate bonds, and when the war was over the widow found that she had lost nearly all her money.

In 1882, when there was a big flurry in London about Confederate bonds, Mrs. Belt, thinking that she might obtain something for her $77,000 worth of Confederate bonds, endeavored to obtain them, but Governor Jenkins had died and the trustees of his estate could not find any trace of the bonds. They, however, found treasury notes to the amount of $44,000, which was the property of Mrs. Belt. It was also ascertained that many thousand dollars of the Confederate money had been collected. General Lucius Gartrell was employed by the widow to bring suit against the trustees for the recovery of the $77,000. The case came before the Equity Court of Georgia, but General Gartrell was ill and not prepared to go on, and the defendants won the case by default. Governor Jenkins was so well liked in Georgia that the suit was considered a libel on his memory. Mrs. Belt and her daughter came to New York in 1883 and lived in the Hotel Bristol. There she was introduced to Nelson Green, a young lawyer, whom she engaged to reopen the suit. She gave him a fee of $250. He went south, where he and General Gartrell talked over the case. He obtained the papers in reference to the matter, and Mrs. Belt was waiting daily for his return to the city when she received a telegram from him requesting $100 more for expenses. Instead of sending the money, however, Mrs. Belt went to Georgia herself, and she alleges that she learned there that he had done absolutely nothing for her. She says he also refused to give up her papers unless she paid him $500 more for his services and expenses. He came to New York and was arrested. Yesterday at the Tombs his lawyer claimed that Green had a lien on the papers. Justice White took charge of Mrs. Belt's papers, which were in dispute, dismissed the case, and the matter will come up again before the Supreme Court on Monday.

Curious Paragraphs.

A sensation was caused at Painted Woods, Dak., sixteen miles north of Bismarck, the other evening by the appearance of a herd of buffaloes stampeding before the storm. This is the first herd of buffaloes seen in that country for over two years, and they must have been driven over 100 miles by the storm. They were going in a southwesterly direction, and crossed the Missouri river about ten miles north of Bismarck. It is estimated that the herd numbered over 300, and many of the animals were exhausted.

It is confidently predicted that in five years the magnesium light will be as familiar as is the electric light to-day. Its high cost has heretofore been a serious obstacle, but that is said to be now removed by a new German process which has reduced the price from $40 to $8 a pound, with a prospect of a still further cheapening. A wire of moderate size equals the light of 75 stearine candles; the cost is now but little more than gas; no expensive works or street-mains are required, and it is absolutely safe. The magnesium is simply burned in lamps provided with clock-work movement to feed the ribbon of metal regularly.

Harry Hill, of New York, was greatly excited all day Sunday over the discovery, near his hotel on Flushing bay, of a curious fish of enormous size. It is a stranger in those waters, and no one knows as to its species. Two fishermen found the fish on the beach fronting the hotel. It had apparently been stranded by the tide. It is about five feet in length and weighs about 125 pounds. Its skin is smooth, tough, and quite dark. Its eyes, which are small, are in the back of the head. There are no fins, but two paws under the fore quarter, on which there are immensely long claws or nails. Its tail is similar to that of an ordinary fish. It was placed in a tank of salt water, and Fish-Commissioner Blackford has been invited to look at and name it.

They do not do things in Berlin like they do in Chicago. Officers are not given to men simply because they want them, but because they are supposed to have some special fitness for serving the people in official capacity. Nor is a man allowed on account of any whim or dislike of the service to decline to give the public the benefit of his services when asked to do so. A German paper gives an account of a Berlin merchant who, having been appointed a member of the Berlin School Board, refused to assume the duties of the office, or, as we would say, respectfully declined. The matter was under the jurisdiction of the Common Council of the city, and that body, instead of taking the American way and adopting resolutions regretting the refusal and appointing some one to take his place, proceeded to mete out punishment to the merchant for his offence. By solemn resolution he was—first, deprived of the privilege of voting at municipal elections for the term of three years; and, second, his municipal taxes were increased one eighth of 1 per cent.

Mrs. Terry, of Chicago, daughter of a merchant said to be worth $20,000,000, is driven, she claims, by the cruelty and meanness of her husband to sue for divorce. As a sample, here are the rules given her for the ordering of the household: "First, she should not allow two servants to go out together; second, servants must never use a kerosene-lamp