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WORKING BIG GUNS. An Exciting Scene on a Great Battleship.

How a Thirteen-Inch Cannon Throws a Projectile Weighing 1,100 Pounds—Clearing for Action.

"I am told," said Capt. Higginson, of the battleship Massachusetts, now of the flying squadron, "that the Indiana put a shell from her 13-inch gun through a target at 2,500 yards, and then went through the same hole with a second shell. Pretty good work for one of these fellows," and the muscular little captain stroked the muzzle of one of the four 13-inch guns that make up the main battery of the big ship of the line.

Don't get out a tape measure or a foot rule and measure off 13 inches and wonder to what portion of the gun that refers, because it would avail you little; but rather listen to the account of the stupendousness of this greatest engine of destruction, of modern days. A "13-inch breech-loading rifle," as the big-gun men used in the navy is technically described, is a piece of metal weighing 136,000 pounds, a few inches over 39 feet in length, and with a powder space 15.5 inches in diameter and 80.5 inches long.

The only reference to 13 inches is in the diameter of the steel projectile fired. This monstrous gun throws a projectile that weighs 1,100 pounds, and each shot so fired is 530 pounds. The explosion of this powder sends this weight of 1,100 pounds of metal from the muzzle at the speed of 3,100 feet per second, and with an energy of 53,627 tons—enough to send it through 24 inches of steel at 1,000 yards, and 21 inches at a mile distant; and while the mechanism of this gun is complicated, and while every part after every shot must be cleaned, so complete is the discipline aboard that it may be fired once every three minutes. And there are four of these terrible engines.

It is a bright, clear day, and the Massachusetts has sighted an enemy's warship. The preliminary work of clearing for action has been accomplished; railings, ladders and boats are down and have been stowed away, and everything movable in the big ship fastened. The gun's mechanism is closed, the electric plants for lighting the ship, turning the turrets and working the ammunition lifts, started; the ammunition magazines opened, and, lastly, the sick bed prepared.

In the forward turret with the great pair of 13-inch rifles stands a crew of 13 men, six to each gun. In the hood of the turret, just above the men, sits a senior officer and a junior officer. "Silence!" is the first command, and grimly the half-naked men of the gun crew stand behind the guns. "Cast loose and provide," sharply rings the order, and every man is instantly working.

The gun captain and numbers two, three and four, who are the practical gunners, unshackle the great monster from its peeing fastenings; one sees that repair tools and cleaners are placed, gets water and hose ready; another opens the safety valves and exhaust pipes, starts the smoke fan, and ships the water; and another provides drinking liquid and does a dozen other things. But all is done within a space of four minutes, and again each man in his place stands like a statue of bronze.

The ammunition has come up prepared with fuses, and then come the orders, in quick succession: "Open breech, sponge, land shell." The great hydraulic rammer pushes in the big 1,100-pound steel projectile. "Load first cartridge," and the brown powder, one-half the quantity necessary, goes in. "Load second cartridge," and in the ammunition "down lift," and the gun is again in position for firing. "Close breech," comes the order quickly, and followed in an instant by "Prime," when the captain parts in the electric primer.

Then the captain of the gun, seeing everybody clear, says "Ready," and the officer in the hood above responds with "Point." Slowly both turret and gun are moved until the range finder indicates that the muzzle is pointing at the enemy. Then, quick as a flash, the officer in the turret hood closes the electric circuit and the big projectile goes on its path of destruction.—George Edward Graham, in Leslie's Weekly.

A Buoy's Long Journey. The inhabitants of the lonely isle of St. Kilda were astonished not long ago at the appearance of a great blood-red conical object floating on the wild Atlantic billows to the westward of the isle. With much difficulty the derelict was brought to shore, and as the St. Kildans had never before seen such a queer-looking thing and could make no guess as to its purpose or place in the scale of created things, they indulged in wild visions of its valuable nature. But when the factor came across on his yearly visit from the neighboring but distant island of Great Britain, he identified it as a great iron buoy, which, it subsequently appeared, had broken away from its moorings in New York harbor and drifted in the Gulf stream across the Atlantic. It had taken two years in the passage.—Chicago Inter Ocean.

THE PALACE OF GATSKINA. A Sanctuary of Safety for the Cause of All the Russians in Time of Troubles.

The palace of Gatschina cannot be compared with such castles as Versailles, Sanssouci or Schoenbrunn. It has nothing of the artistic embellishment of the one or the landscape beauty and comfort of the third. Situated in the middle of a wide and desert plain, it has no pretty surroundings, and built without luxury, its exterior does not make an imposing impression. Gatschina lies between Taarskoje Selo and Krassnoje-Selo, and the roads from each of these places to the imperial palace, which have private court railway stations, are placed under particular supervision, and may not be used except by the court. A high wall incloses the park, in the center of which is the palace, and this wall is protected by patrols, which never leave the outer circle nor the park itself for one moment out of sight.

Entrance is only permitted by special order. Through the superintendent is so strict, it is said that the inhabitants of the palace are not, and must not be, aware of it. Their pleasures and comforts are not impaired by it, and all the amusements that could be agreeable to the emperor and his family—drives, hunts, riding and rowing, evening parties, theatrical representations, etc.—can be partaken of. Adjoining the well-tended park is an extensive wood—like the park, surrounded by a wall and guarded. In the park itself are two lake-like basins of water; the palace contains splendid saloons, and two colonnades which afford agreeable promenade in bad weather; all this aids in preventing the inhabitants from feeling anything of the anxious and never-tiring supervision held over them and the want of more charming surroundings.

Sometimes the royal family inhabit Peterhof, but always return to Gatschina. Peterhof is more magnificent, Oranienbaum prettier, but Gatschina is considered safer and quieter. For many years before the accession of Alexander III the palace had been unused; he caused it to be restored and comfortably furnished. It has been known spoken of and scarcely more seldom than that the imperial household were kept there. The Gatschina race was celebrated, and a dog from the imperial area used for the cause was preserved.

Still Gatschina has its history. Peter the Great made a gift of it to his favorite sister, Natalie; Catherine II. gave it to her favorite Orloff, who furnished it at great expense, and built additional edifices, by which, after the plans of the Italian architect, Rinaldi, it received quite a different form. After Orloff's death the empires rebought it from his family and gave it to Archduke Paul, who inhabited it for some length of time. The palace forms a long square, at each corner of which is a stately tower. The dwelling rooms are in three stories. The colonnades run along the sides, and the pillars are of Finland marble. The rooms are not architecturally beautiful, but are adorned with valuable pictures and sculpture from the imperial hermitage in St. Petersburg, from the Antschkow palace and from the winter palace. The views are limited by the park and wood, which, however, have been beautifully laid out by the celebrated St. Petersburg landscape gardener.—London News.

Military Powder. Of powders now made, there are probably a hundred kinds. They may be divided, however, into three classes—blasting, sporting and military. The military powders look as little like ordinary gunpowder as it is possible to conceive. That intended for the 30-caliber rifles, with their lead-pencil bullets and 2,000-yard zone of effect, is a very good imitation of clean, yellow, well-grained sand. Then there is a powder intended for similar use that is of reddish brown, and is cut into thin, minute squares. Powder to be used in some of the field guns looks like nothing in the world so much as sheet glass, one-sixteenth of an inch thick and broken into irregular bits. The powder for the Hotchkiss gun is in blocks, one-fourth of an inch square and as solid as coal. There is a spheroidal kind, whose grain is something larger than an ordinary musket. It looks like a bit of lead, hardened into globular form. This is also a field-piece powder. The 13-inch guns take the brown prismatic and the black prismatic. The black, which is the quicker of the two, is used merely for purposes of ignition. These powders are called "prismatic," because they are many-sided, like a prism. Each grain has a hole through its center, also an aid to the general ignition. A grain of these powders is one inch in height and two inches in circumference. These explosives are of saltpetre and charcoal bases. They make much smoke and much noise.—Golden Days.

New Habits of Birds. Starlings, which have been newly introduced into New Zealand, are acquiring a taste for honey, and an entomologist says that he has observed the birds killing and conveying grubbees to their nest to feed their young. The tau, or parson bird, has been detected in a similar act. The case is quoted as illustrating how new habits are acquired or family habits are developed in some species of birds when certain conditions are present.—Chicago Record.

RAILWAY ACCIDENTS. The Effect of Grade Crossings in Connection with Accidents—Small Number of Fatalities in Great Britain.

With the casualties that are properly classified as due to grade crossings are generally included accidents to trespassers—that is, to persons who attempt to cross or walk at grade upon the lines between the prescribed crossings.

This class of accidents forms a large factor in the sum total of deaths and injuries, and great care is taken by the foreign companies to protect the public in this particular. Fully one-third of all the accidents to persons on the English roads belong to this class; and while it is generally regarded that these accidents are the result of carelessness on the part of those who take the risks of entering upon the lines, it is nevertheless noticeable that no reasonable precautions are neglected. In America, as a whole, scarcely any provision is made for preventing this class of accidents.

In the state of Massachusetts alone there are about half as many deaths from this cause as in the whole of Great Britain and Ireland; and during the last 15 years nearly one-half of all the fatalities upon the railways in that state have been of this class. By averaging the fatalities occurring in Great Britain and Germany, and comparing with the average for Massachusetts and Connecticut, the proportion is about as seven to one in favor of the foreign countries. Certain classes of accidents are now almost unknown in Germany. Accidents to pedestrians at road crossings, or to passengers from crossing the tracks at stations, are hardly possible at the present time. Any one attempting to walk upon the track is sure to be stopped, and very severe penalties are imposed for any defiance of the orders of an employe.

In this connection a few broad comparisons are very significant. In the city of Buffalo, for instance, it was reported, a few years ago, that 61 fatalities occurred at grade crossings in 18 months, being two more than the number reported for the whole of Germany for the previous five years. Again, in Chicago, it was stated that over 200 people lost their lives at the grade crossings in that city in 1891. This is nearly as many fatalities as occurred in the whole of Great Britain and Ireland from the same cause during the succeeding five years. These figures seem to indicate that these two cities afford from three to five times as many fatalities of this class as the whole of Great Britain and Ireland and Germany combined.

Generally speaking, the objections to grade crossings were clearly foreseen in England, and the remedies were applied in the cities where the railways were established. In the country districts there are still a considerable number of grade crossings. They are by no means so numerous, however, on the continental lines. Under the regulation of railway acts, 1868 and 1871, a penalty of 40 shillings is provided for the offense of entering or being upon a railway, except for the purpose of crossing the same at some authorized crossing. It is provided, however, that the offending party shall first have been warned by the agents of the company. This latter fact somewhat reduces the efficiency of the regulation, as it is often difficult to give satisfactory proof of warning.

The board of trade have made regulations and recommendations as to the arrangements at stations, and regarding the protection of grade crossings where they exist. Platforms are to be not less than three feet above rail level, except in rare instances. Each passenger track is to have its separate platform, and stress is laid upon the principle that passengers should find it difficult, and always unnecessary, to descend upon the tracks. The character of gates, and the manner of operating them, are prescribed. Private road crossings are also provided with gates; and under the law of 1845 a penalty is provided for persons who neglect to close them after passing through, and persons using them enter upon the track at their own risk. The comparative freedom from accidents of all classes on the English roads is due to much investigation by parliamentary commissions, many of the reports by these commissions being very suggestive and valuable. Among other tangible results of these investigations has been a wise extension, in 1871, of the powers of the railway department of the board of trade. Since that time, and largely through the efforts of the board, there has been a marked decrease in railway casualties throughout Great Britain, as indicated by the statistics covering these matters.—Franklin B. Locke, in Century.

The wonderful strides made in the science of gunnery since 1840 are shown by the fact that at that period a 68-pound projectile fired with a charge of 18 pounds of powder gave a muzzle velocity of between 1,000 and 1,100 feet a second, while at the present day a 100-pound shell, fired with 14½ pounds of cordite, gives a muzzle velocity of 2,630 feet a second.—Boston Budget.

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THE MAN IN THE TRUNK. A New Way the Thieves of Paris Have of Getting the Burglar Into the House.

Two well-dressed men from Paris drove up to the best hotel in a country town in the department of the Eure, and engaged a Paris correspondent, and engaged a double-bedded room. They deposited a very heavy trunk in a corner, and then went out to see the town, telling the landlady, a widow, that they would return at night. But night came and the two men did not come back at the time specified. The landlady waited, much surprised, and kept her establishment open after the usual hour for closing. This was soon observed by the local gendarmes on duty, who entered the hotel and reminded the proprietress of the place that the curfew, or its modern substitute, had tolled the knell of parting day, and that it was full time to extinguish lights in all inn and cafes. The widow said she was waiting for two men who had left a big trunk behind them. This caused the gendarmes to reflect a little. One of them, well versed in criminal annals, suddenly remembered the Gouffé case. He also thought of the young chauffeur who was murdered in Paris a few years since, and whose body was thrust into a trunk. Anxious to secure all the credit of a discovery which might lead to promotion and glory, the gendarme learned in criminal lore asked the widow to let him see the trunk, and told his companion to wait for him at the bar or brette of the hotel. The landlady accordingly led the man to the room, and he began to gauge the weight of the big box, when suddenly the lid flew up and out jumped a wigged little man, who brandished a big revolver in his right hand. The widow screamed and the gendarme was temporarily thrown off his guard, but he soon pulled himself together and grappled with the person who had been getting jack-in-the-box. The other gendarme, hearing the landlady's shrieks and the scuffling overhead, was soon on the scene of action and helped his colleague to manacle the mysterious person who had jumped out of the trunk and to take him to the lock-up. Then the fellow refused to give his name, so they said to his companion, "Go and say anything about his companions to Paris, leaving him to plunder the inn when the owner and her servants were asleep.—St. Louis Republic.

Homes of the Aethnetic Boxes. Each little house, with the boxes, cubby-holes, and fences about it, has been built by the man who lives in it. And he is a laborer, a struggler for mere existence, not deft in the use of tools, nor with an eye for the symmetrical, nor with an appreciation for anything beyond the most primal facts of living. The roofs of the buildings slant at all angles, with no two sides of the same length or deflection. One portion will have eaves, while the companion will scorn the luxury. The same incongruity prevails everywhere. Some of the small openings used for windows are high, while others are low. One door will open in, and another out. The hinges have evidently come from the company scrap-heap, and the staples and latches and locks from the same source. Some of the roofs have shingles, others weather-boards, while others are formed of great pieces of rusty sheet-iron.—Jay Hambridge, in Century.

Ten Dishes. Two ounces of butter, four ounces of bread crumbs, eight ounces of cheese, one cupful of sweet milk and three eggs. Cut the butter and cheese into small pieces and put in a large bowl with the bread crumbs. Pour on this the scalding milk and add the well-beaten yolks of the eggs and a little salt. Mix well together, scald the bowl of the stove and stir until all is dissolved, then add the whites beaten to a stiff froth. Put in a buttered pie plate and bake 20 minutes in a hot oven. Serve immediately.—Boston Herald.

Thousands of Trial Records. In the big rooms of the criminal office in Paris, known as the tomb, where all the documents relating to secret trials are stowed away, a whole regiment of cats is quartered by order of the government to protect the papers from rats. These cats live in clover and are commanded by a splendid animal called Joseph, who is death on rats. The place contains 100,800 dossiers of various trials.—N. Y. Sun.