

The Story of The Sun 1833 to 1918



BARNEY WILLIAMS THE FAMOUS ACTOR WHO WAS THE SUN'S FIRST NEWSBOY.

THE SUN.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1833. [PRICE ONE PENNY.]

PUBLISHED DAILY,
WILLIAM ST. SEW, PROPRIETOR.
This paper is to lay before the public, at the best of every one, ALL THE NEWS of the day, and at the same time afford an advantageous medium for advertising. The sheet will be enlarged, as the increase of advertisements requires it—the price of the same.

Advertisements, (without the paper,) Thirty Dollars per annum; at the usual price charged by papers.

Subscriptions will be received, if paid in advance, at Three Dollars per annum.

FOR NORWALK.
The new & splendid low pressure steamboat Fairfield, Capt. Curtis Perry, will leave for Norwalk at 8 o'clock, every Tuesday and Friday, at 8 o'clock. Returning, leave Norwalk at 8 A. M.

Stages will be in readiness on the arrival of the Fairfield to carry passengers to Bangor, Mt. Fairfield, Bridgeport, Stratford, Milford and to Newtown, Southbury, Woodbury and Litchfield, Danbury, &c.

VISION TO SANDY HOOK AND THE FISHING BANKS.
The low pressure steamboat Hercules, Capt. S. W. Titus, will leave the foot of the city, Catharine street at half past 8, and all dock at 8 o'clock, every Tuesday and Friday, at 8 o'clock, and return in the afternoon. Fare 75 cts. Boat furnished on board.

NEWPORT AND PROVIDENCE.
The splendid steamboat BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Capt. E. S. Bunker, and the PRESIDENT, Capt. R. S. Bunker, will leave for Newport, Providence, and other places, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for information apply to the Captains on board, or at the office, 41 Broad st.

BARTFORD—PASSAGE 1 DOLLAR.
Through by DAYLITER.

HERSCHEL'S FORTY FEET TELESCOPE.
This celebrated wonder of science was constructed by Sir W. Herschel, in his grounds at Slough, near Windsor. Its proportions were prodigious. The length of the tube is 30 feet four inches; it measures 4 feet 10 inches in diameter, and every part of it is of rolled or sheet iron, which has been joined together without rivets, by a kind of seaming well known to those who make iron funnels for stoves. The concave face of the great mirror is forty-eight inches of diameter. The diameter of the secondary mirror is 6 inches. A few days since members of the



JOHN W. FARMER, 1st. 1819-1869. WHO SOLD THE SUN IN ITS EARLY DAYS AND WAS LATER SHERIFF OF NEW YORK AND A WELL KNOWN PHILANTHROPIST.

Revelation of the Source of the Moor Hoax Only Added Prestige to the Penny Paper

This is the third of a series of articles narrating the history of THE NEW YORK SUN and giving a vital, intimate view of New York life and journalism during more than eighty years. The first article told of the founding of the paper by Benjamin H. Day in September, 1833, and of its rapid rise to success. The second began the account of the memorable moon hoax, which made THE SUN famous all over the world.

By FRANK M. O'BRIEN.

PERHAPS the pretended method of measuring lunar mountains was not interesting to laymen, but it may have been the cause of an intellectual tumult at Yale. At all events, a deputation from that college hurried to the steamboat and came to New York to get the wonderful supplement. The colleagues saw Mr. Day and voiced their desire.

"Surely," he replied, "you do not doubt that we have the supplement in our possession? I suppose the magazine is somewhere upstairs, but I consider it almost an insult that you should ask to see it."

On their way out the Yale men heard, perhaps from the "devil," that one Locke was interested in the matter of the moon, that he had handled the supplement and that he was to be seen at the foot of the stairs, smoking his cigar and gaining across City Hall Park. They advanced upon him, and he, less brusque than Mr. Day, told the scientific pilgrims that the supplement was in the hands of a printer in William street, giving the name and address.

As the Yale men disappeared in the direction of the printery Locke started for the same goal and more rapidly. When the Yale men arrived at the printery, primed by Locke, told them that the precious pamphlet had just been sent to another shop, where certain proofreading was to be done. And so they went from post to pillar until the hour came for their return to New Haven. It would not do to linger in New York for Prof. Denison Olmsted and Elias Loomis were that very day getting their first peep at Halley's comet, about to make the regular appearance with which it favors the earth every seventy-six years.

But Yale was not the only part of intellectual New England to be keenly interested in the moon and its man-bats. The Gazette of Hampshire, Mass., insisted that Edward Everett, who was then running for Governor, had these astronomical discoveries in mind when he declared that "we know not how soon the labyrinth of nature would grasp some clue which would lead to a new universe and change the aspect of the world."

Harriet Martineau, who was touring America at the time, wrote in her "Sketches of Western Travel" that the ladies of Springfield, Mass., subscribed to a fund to send missionaries to the benighted luminary. When THE SUN articles reached Paris they were at once translated into illustrated pamphlets, and the caricaturists of Paris newspapers drew pictures of the man-bats going through the streets of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow made haste to issue editions of the work.

Herschel Unaware of Tale. Meanwhile, of course, Sir John Herschel was busy with his telescope in the city all unaware of the celebrated fable in the North. Caleb Weeks of Jamaica, Long Island, the Adam Forepaugh of his day, was setting out for South Africa to get a supply of giraffes for his menagerie, and he had the honor of laying in the great astronomer's hand a clean copy of the pamphlet. To say that Sir John was amazed at THE SUN's enterprise would be putting it mildly. When he had read the story through he went to Caleb Weeks and said that he was overcome; that he never could have believed that the fable that had been heaped upon him.

THE FIRST ILLUSTRATION EVER PRINTED IN THE SUN HAPPENED TO BE OF THE HERSCHEL TELESCOPE. PERHAPS THIS IS WHERE LOCKE GOT HIS MOON HOAX IDEA.

The genuineness of the extracts from the Edinburgh Journal of Science with which a gentleman connected with our office had furnished us, was a matter of course. Certain correspondents have been urging us to come out and confess the whole to be a hoax, but this we can by no means do until we have the testimony of the English or Scotch papers to corroborate such a declaration. In the meantime let us read of the account examined and enjoyed by our readers. Many intelligent and scientific persons will believe it true, and will continue to do so to their lives' end, while the scepticism of others would not be removed though they were in Dr. Herschel's observatory itself.

The Moon Hoax on the Stage.

The New York showmen of that day were keen for novelty, and the moon story helped them to it. Mr. Hannington, who ran the diorama in the City Saloon—which was not a barroom but an amusement house—on Broadway opposite St. Paul's Church, put on "The Lunar Discoveries," a brilliant illustration of the Scientific Observation of the Surface of the Moon, to which will be added the Reported Lunar Observations of Sir John Herschel. "The Deluge" and "The Burning of Moscow," but the wonders of the moon proved to be the more attractive of his patrons. THE SUN approved of this moral spectacle.

The Author Confesses.

"Don't print it right away," said Locke. "I wrote it myself."

The next day the Journal, instead of being silently grateful for the warning, denounced the alleged discoveries as a hoax. Mr. Bennett, who by this time had the Herald once more in running order, not only cried "hoax!" but named Locke as the author.

Probably Locke was glad that the suspense was over. He said to have told a friend that he had not intended the story as a hoax, but as satire.

"It is quite evident," he said, as he saw the whole country take the moon story so seriously, "that I am in an abortive satire, and I am the best self-hoaxed man in the whole community."

Not less popular than Hannington's panorama was an extravaganza put on by Thomas Hamblin at the Bowers Theatre and called "Moonshine, or Lunar Discoveries." A SUN man went to review it and had to stand up; but he was patient enough to stay, and he wrote this about the show:

It is quite evident that Hamblin does not believe a word of the whole story, or he would never have taken the liberties with it which he has. The wings of the man-bats and lady bats, who are of orange color and look like angels in the faunades, are well contrived for effect; and the dialogue is highly witty and pungent. Major Jack Downing's blowing up a whole flock of winged lunatics with a combustible bundle of Abolition tracts, after vainly endeavoring to catch a lone aim at them with his rifle, is capital. There are also his puns and jokes upon the splendid scenery of the Ruby Colosseum. Take it altogether, it is the most amusing thing that has been on these boards for a long time.

Poe Thought Idea Stolen.

Poe wrote the first part of "Hans Pfaall" and published it in the South-Western Literary Messenger, of which he was then editor, at Richmond, Va. Three weeks afterward the first installment of Locke's moon story appeared in THE SUN. At the moment Poe believed that his idea had been kidnapped.

Earlier Suggestions of the Story.

As for the inspiration of the moon story the record is nebulous. If Poe was really grieved at his first thought that Locke had taken from him the main imaginative idea—that the moon was inhabited—then Poe was oversensitive or uninformed, for that idea was at least two centuries old.

Called It "Mere Banter."

Poe may have intended to fall back upon a style half plausible, half bantering, as he described it, but there is not the slightest plausibility about "Hans Pfaall." It is as near to humor as the great, dark mind could get. "Mere banter" as he later described it, "I found" that he could add very little to the minute and authentic account of Sir John Herschel—but the poet took pleasure in later years in picking THE SUN's moon story to bits.

Poe and Locke—A Curious Parallel.

All this time there was a disappointed man in Baltimore; disappointed because the moon stories had caused him to abandon one of the most ambitious stories he had attempted. This was Edgar Allan Poe, and the story he dropped was "Hans Pfaall."

Seen as a Satire.

Some persons of little faith but great good nature, who consider the "moon story" as it is vulgarly called, an adroit fiction of our own, are quite of the opinion that this was the amiable moral which the writer had in view. Other readers, however, construe the whole as an elaborate satire upon the monstrous fabrications of the political press of the day, which has valleys not less deep than those of the Ruby Colosseum, of the Unicorn or of the Triads, and which has not inferior facilities for the dissemination of those possessed by the verpestilence homines, or any other homines whatever?

Life Insurance Actuary.

He became a master of English and through his knowledge and his own mathematical genius he was able to assemble for the use of the French life insurance companies all that was known and much that he himself discovered of actuarial methods, this being incorporated in his letter to M. Outrequin on "Assurances Having for their Basis the Probable Duration of Human Life." He also wrote "Memoirs Upon the Measure of an Arc of Parallel Midway Between the Pole and the Equator" (1826) and "Course of Mathematics for the Use of Mariners" (1830).

Credits It to Nicolle.

I have no personal knowledge of either story, but as the poor man had to endure the first, it is but right that the second should be told with it.

De Morgan's Notes on Nicolle.

The Englishman who believed that Nicolle was the author of the moon hoax was Augustus De Morgan, father of the late William De Morgan, the novelist, and himself a distinguished mathematician. He was professor of mathematics at University College, London, at the time the moon pamphlet first appeared in England. His "Budget of Paradoxes," a collection of literary curiosities and puzzles, which he had written but not carefully assembled, was published in 1872, the year after his death.

The Career of Jean Nicolle.

Is there any doubt that the moon story was the sole work of Richard Adams Locke? So far as concerns the record of THE SUN, the comments of Locke's American contemporaries and the belief of Benjamin H. Day, expressed in 1838 in a talk with Edward P. Mitchell, the answer must be

Comment on the Great Story Was Worldwide, but Author Never Told of How He Conceived It

It is unlikely, W. N. Griggs, a contemporary of Locke, insists in a memoir of that journalist that the narrative was read by Arago to the members of the Academy and was received with mingled denunciation and laughter. But hoaxing Arago in a matter of astronomy would have been a difficult feat. Surely the discrepancies pointed out by Poe would have been noticed immediately.

Much of It Technical.

It is, however, easy to understand De Morgan's belief that Nicolle was the author of the moon story. Much of the narrative, particularly parts which have here been omitted, is made up of technicalities which could have come only from the pen of a man versed in the intricacies of astronomical science. It seems unlikely that Locke, clever student though he was, could have set down these intricate demonstrations entirely from his own knowledge of astronomy. They were not put into the story to interest readers, for they are far over the layman's head, but for the purpose of adding verisimilitude to a yarn which, stripped of the technical trimmings, would have been pretty bald.

The Second Fragment.

The second fragment reads as follows: "The Moon Hoax; or, The Discovery That the Moon Has a Vast Population of Human Beings." It was published in the New York Sun, an edition of 60,000 was sold off in less than one month.

French Comments on the Moon Hoax.

Let us see what the French said about Nicolle and the story that he told to THE SUN from "a medical gentleman immediately from Scotland," a sketch of Nicolle printed in the "Biographie Universelle" (Paris, 1884), the following appears:

There has been attributed to the article which appeared in the newspapers of France, and which was the subject of a letter dated from London, the name of an instrument in the moon invented by the learned astronomer, Herschel, who was then at the Cape of Good Hope. It has been generally admitted with much probability that the name of Nicolle.

With the aid of the astronomical movement Herschel was supposed to have discovered in the surface of the moon five hundred mountains of various kinds, and many other objects of interest. The astronomer to attain his purpose, he detailed and covered with a variety of scientific details, and the general public was startled by the announcement of the discovery. The North America hastened to publish the news.

It has even been said that the astronomers and physicists of the country were taken in for a moment, and seems hardly probable to us, that any man so possible that with one of the best eyes in the world, he would have been deceived by Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope.

Crut, consistent Locke never had written down the details of the conception and birth of the moon story that ever so good the world has given the French to wonder what the method employed by the astronomer was. The French biographer was not told that it was "a hoax written by a learned and a miscellaneous man." We can be certain it is that Nicolle was the author of the moon story, and that Locke wrote much of it, and that the calculation of the moon's distance from the earth might have been made by him.

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