

## THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S POINT.

BY CLEVELAND MOFFETT.

It has long been considered a difficult thing for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, but the science of these latter days—the same science that has given the world the telegraph, the telephone, and the electric railway—has made it possible for men, women and children, for camels, yes, and entire menageries, not only to pass through the eye of a needle, but to pass through the point of a needle, and having thus passed through, to sing and speak, to roar and bark and whinny—in short, to make whatever sounds they please, and be heard after making them thousands of miles away. To-day the great Patti can sing her immortal songs in her castle in Wales and be heard, through the needle's point, in San Francisco and Honolulu and a hundred other places at the same time. And so of the world's great orators and entertainers, the great thinkers who stir the heart, and

the merry people who aid digestion. In fact, whatever the cities have in their theatres and churches and concert halls that is best worth hearing may be heard quite conveniently, and with only the slightest falling off in quality, by the denizens of the most remote village, by dwellers on the distant alkali plains, by lonely huntsmen in the woods—and all through the point of a needle—the needle of the gramophone, which traces the undulations of the sound-waves as they are preserved on indestructible records and reproduces them through that wonderful little instrument.



THE GRAMOPHONE.

Aladdin's trick seems to have literally been performed in our time, and New York, Boston, London, and Paris may be picked up now by whomsoever will, and whisked off through hundreds of miles and made to strike all their beautiful instruments, pianos and blaring horns, and sing with full chorus of voices, and otherwise disport themselves for the amusement or instruction of the humblest provincial.

Whoever buys a gramophone buys a box at the opera, rents a pew in a city church, secures permanent admission to the best music halls in the country, can order out the most dashing military band our army has at a moment's notice, can make the great piano-players of the day his obedient servants, and can do a great many other things which would have put somebody in danger of being roasted for witchcraft had they been attempted by our forefathers.

And let it be understood clearly at the start that this is no expensive arrangement, to be easily injured, nor is it anything that requires batteries or electric contrivances for its running. It is as simple and compact as a music box, and is wound up in much the same way, while the disks which preserve the sound records are flat surfaces of gutta-percha, about the size of giddle cakes, and are practically indestructible. They may be thrown about or scratched, or left with the children to play with, and when put back under the needle after months of this treatment, they will give out the original words or music with unchanged sweetness and distinctness. That is the first point, and another point is, that the singing of the gramophone really is singing, not squeaking, and the talking is real talking, as if the speaker were there before you. When you hear a street fakir selling his corn cure, through the gramophone, you are almost in doubt whether the man is not actually in the room, and a person blind-folded, who knew nothing of the gramophone, would be quite sure he was in the room. So perfect is the method of reproduction that the human voice comes out of the receiver, whether in speech or song, practically as it went in, and thousands of people may listen to it at one time, for there is no need of bending anxiously over an ear-trumpet; you hear what is going on whether you will or not. A concert solo played in the Metropolitan Opera House from the gramophone fills the whole auditorium.

And now let us see what this wonderful little instrument is going to do for people who live in the towns and smaller cities all over this country. In the first place, take the young ladies, for instance, who, after four years at Vassar College or Smith College, or some other institution, return to their little homes with many graces and accomplishments, particularly an appreciation of the best classical music. They find themselves suddenly in uncongenial surroundings, where most of the pianos are out of tune, and most of those who play on them play badly. The gramophone gives them a breath of art life in the rendering of the great compositions they love by the finest performers. With this they have masters to imitate in their own parlors, sources of inspiration ever present.

Then take the boys. What one of them does not love to hear the banjo played, a lively strumming of the strings by a cunning hand? The gramophone gives them what they want, and the best banjo playing gives it to them whenever they choose to listen. And if they tire of the banjo they can turn on a crashing brass band, with marches and songs of the regiment until their hearts beat with valor.

And the old folks themselves, with hearts ever fresh for the old emotions, will find themselves won over by the gramophone on many a winter's evening, otherwise lonely, when they will gather about fires of crackling logs, in farmhouse and country home, and listen to the dear old songs, "Annie Laurie" and "Down on the Swannee River," and "The Last Rose of Summer," and the old glees from yea's ago, sung to them, not by amateurs from the village choir, but by the greatest artists of the day—sung through the needle.

And then the comic songs—every one likes these now and then but few who live away from the cities ever hear them sung in the best style; they must content themselves with the whistlings of the village lads, who pick the airs up as best they may a year or so late. But now the gramophone, with its disks kept closely up to date, gives the country the best that the city has—those much advertised entertainers from the music halls of London and Paris, whose enormous salaries are told of in the newspapers. All these the country may have now almost as soon as the city has them, and at nothing like the price.

One of the most remarkable uses to which the gramophone will eventually be put is in the teaching of modern languages. There will be no reason why American boys and girls should not hereafter learn French, German and Spanish, as well as other European languages, without journeying to distant lands or taking expensive courses under professors who often teach them little. The difficulty with the present system of language instruction is that the pupils do not get an opportunity, at least not sufficient opportunity, to hear the sounds of the language they are learning often enough and distinctly enough to acquire them by imitation, which is nature's method, and the only efficient method of acquiring languages. He or she who does not learn French or German or Spanish as a little child would learn them, never learns them well. This matter of language acquirement is entirely a trick of the tongue, and no amount of theoretical study or delving in musty grammars will be sufficient for excellence if there is wanting constant and daily practice in imitating the actual sounds. Take the French "u," for instance. How can any one possibly learn to pronounce it, or the German "oe," unless he have unceasing opportunity to hear these difficult sounds spoken as the natives speak them? Nor is it sufficient that the professor or teacher be an expert linguist, for with large classes and a limited number of hours' instruction per week, not even the aptest pupil will be able to seize in memory, and reproduce in speech, sounds that have no equivalent in his own tongue. It is a matter of common knowledge that children who have grown up under the care of French or German governesses acquire French and German without study and without effort and yet acquire them perfectly, as their companions in the schools seldom do, simply because the former have daily and hourly opportunity for learning by imitation. That is whole secret of mastering languages—learning by imitation—and the gramophone, with its unerring facility in reproducing sounds, will yet give boys and girls all over the country, yes, and grown people as well, such opportunity for really acquiring the accent in modern European languages, and for picking up useful phrases of ordinary talk, as has never been offered before by any system of instruction, whether by speech or books, and could not be enjoyed save by those who have the time and money for years of foreign residence.

There seems to be no reason why the whole Meisterschaft system, which has been found so valuable in our schools and colleges, may not be put down on the rubber disks with parallel sentences in English and French, English, German, etc., and the student learn these, not through the eye as heretofore, but through the ear, making the instrument speak them as many times as is necessary until the tongue is able to give perfect imitation of the rolling "r" or the guttural "ch" or the various nasal sounds so difficult for Americans to acquire without actually living among the people who use them. Whoever purchases a gramophone with a set of modern language disks, would then have at his service day and night a whole corps of polyglot professors. And it is likely that in the near future modern languages will be taught in our schools and colleges with the aid of the gramophone, each schoolroom being equipped with one of these wonderful instru-



THE FAMOUS GRAUB MOUNTAIN CHOIR IN NATIVE COSTUME.

ments just as universally as schoolrooms are now equipped with globes and blackboards.

Now coming back to what the gramophone will do for the country, it is plain that a great change will soon be wrought in the farmhouse Sunday—a dreary enough thing in the past. No more wheezy melodeons laboring away in cheerless parlors, no more feeble singing of hymns by untuned voices, but the best anthems as sung in churches on Fifth Avenue, and the beautiful solos of high-