

PLEASANT HOURS

PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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A FRENCH PEASANT'S SPECTACLES.

"If it weren't for the bad water our fellows would do well enough here," said Captain Adolphe Lachand, as we sat together under the friendly shade of a cluster of palm-trees just outside the little white fort of Biskra, with the gray unending level of the Sahara Desert stretching dim and lifeless all around us. "But as it is there's hardly a man in the garrison who hasn't got the 'Biskra sores' round his eyes, and some are so bad as to be invalided outright."

"It's a pity," observed I, "that you can't provide them with spectacles like those in the advertisement, 'warranted to prevent all diseases of the eyes, and cure any which may have been already contracted.'"

"Well," said the captain, "I remember a man, not far from my native town, who credited ordinary spectacles with much more wonderful powers than those."

"How was that?" asked I, guessing by the twinkle in Lachand's keen black eyes that something good was coming.

"Well, you see, there was a fair one day at Guingamp—you remember the old three-cornered market-place there, with the queer fountain in the middle? Old Pierre Roquard, the optician (who told me the story himself), was standing in the doorway of his shop at the corner, watching the carts and people crowding in, when up came a big fellow of the regular country type, with the usual blue blouse and wooden sabots, and a short pipe in his mouth.

"Show me some pairs of spectacles," said he.

"Pierre brought him out several. The man put one on, and asked for a newspaper, to try how the glasses worked. No good! He tried three or four more pairs, but it was just the same story with them.

"Roquard began to think him rather hard to please, but he brought him out a fresh lot, until this fastidious customer had tried all the best glasses in the shop; but still, as sure as he bent down over his newspaper, he shook his head as if he could make nothing of it, and Pierre began to get quite out of patience.

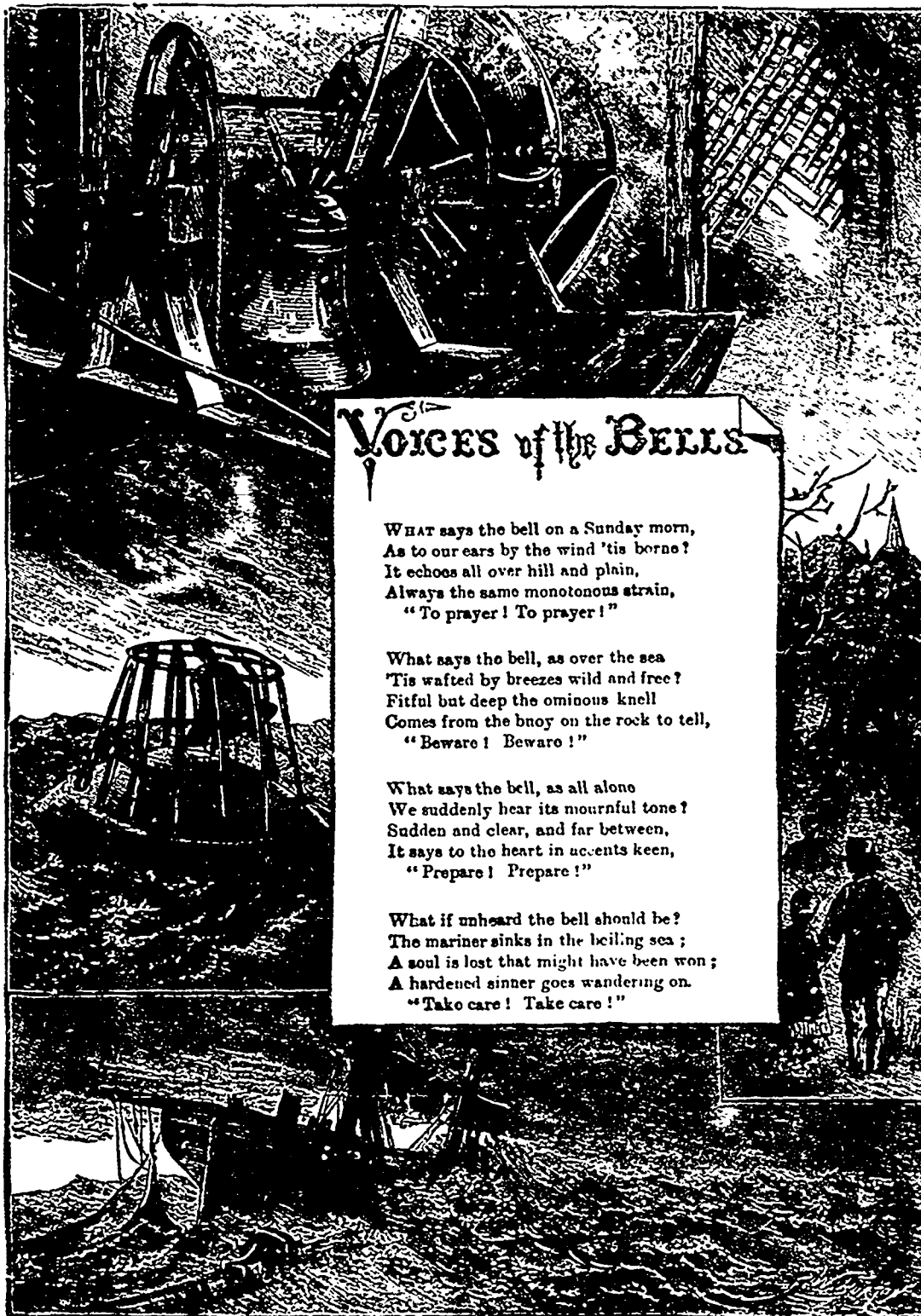
"All at once a fearful thought struck the optician, and he turned upon the man with a face like a thousand thunders.

"Hark ye, fellow," cried he sternly; "have you ever learned to read?"

"No, of course not!" answered the peasant indignantly. "If I had, what think you would be the good of buying spectacles to teach me?"

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS?

Once lay a smart young fellow, with shiny shoes, a new hat, and checkered trousers, boarded a street car in a Western city, and stepped to the front platform.



Voices of the Bells

WHAT says the bell on a Sunday morn,
As to our ears by the wind 'tis borne?
It echoes all over hill and plain,
Always the same monotonous strain,
"To prayer! To prayer!"

What says the bell, as over the sea
'Tis wafted by breezes wild and free?
Fitful but deep the ominous knell
Comes from the buoy on the rock to tell,
"Beware! Beware!"

What says the bell, as all alone
We suddenly hear its mournful tone?
Sudden and clear, and far between,
It says to the heart in accents keen,
"Prepare! Prepare!"

What if unheard the bell should be?
The mariner sinks in the heaving sea;
A soul is lost that might have been won;
A hardened sinner goes wandering on,
"Take care! Take care!"

He pulled out a twist of paper and lighted it, and began puffing a concentrated essence of vile odours in the faces of those who were obliged to ride upon the platform, if they rode at all. One, a plain old farmer, couldn't stand it, and stepped off to wait for the next car.

When he reached the station the young fellow was there before him, and it happened that the two met at the restaurant counter.

"Got any sandwiches?" called the young man to the waiter. "Here, gimme one," and he tossed out a nickel, and then proceeded to pick up and pull apart every one of the half-dozen sandwiches on the plate before he found one to suit him.

The farmer, who had been waiting for his turn, drew back in disgust. Finally, he found something which the fingers of an

other had not fouled, and presently followed the loud young man to the car. He found every seat occupied, including the half of one on which were piled the young man's gripsack and overcoat.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked.

"Seat's engaged," was the curt answer, with a look meant to squelch the old farmer, who went into the smoking car.

That afternoon the same young man walked into the office of the governor of the State, armed with recommendations and indorsements, an applicant for a position under the State government. He was confronted by the same plain old farmer, who recognized his travelling companion of the morning without any trouble.

Glancing over his papers, the governor said: "Hu-m, yes; you want me to appoint you to so-and-so! If I should, I guess

I might as well write my own resignation at the same time."

"Wh-why so?" stammered the young fellow.

"Because I saw you pay for a street car ride this morning, and you took the whole platform. You bought a sandwich, and spoiled the plateful. You paid for a seat in the train and took mine, too, and if I should give you this place, how do I know that you would not take the whole administration?"

WALKING WITHOUT LEGS.

Lots of boys and girls kill snakes in the country who never stop to think what a very curious way a snake has of getting about. They see him so often sliding through the grass that it never occurs to them to wonder how he can do it, just as many other wonderful things in this world are so common that we never stop to think how wonderful they really are.

You would tell me that Mr. Snake got along by crawling. His body holds one long back bone, the ribs coming from it numbering as many as three hundred in some snakes. Besides these ribs, in his long slender body he has very powerful muscles, which bring his ribs forward as he walks along upon them, just as if they were feet. So that he may be said to walk upon his ribs. His muscles draw his ribs forward, so that he rests upon them, and then his muscles give another step. So on he runs as fast as lightning, particularly when he sees a small boy coming after him with a sharp stick!

The snake, large or small, swallows his food whole, and often has to open his mouth very wide to do it. But Mother Nature has made special arrangements about a snake's mouth, by which he can separate the bones of it, so that he can swallow animals by gradually drawing them in until the bones are at some distance apart. When once the dinner is down, the muscles of the mouth contract, and the bones draw back into place, and the snake's head looks as small as it did before he took in his

huge mouthful. Poisonous snakes kill or crush their prey to death before they swallow it. The smaller snake, have teeth turning backward, so that the prey, getting inside once, cannot escape.

You know something, perhaps, of how the snake sheds his skin. Perhaps you have found such a treasure as an old snakeskin for yourself. When the snake is about to shed his coat, it grows dull in colour, and some day it splits open all the way down the back. Then Mr. Snake wriggles out of his old clothes and finds himself in a brand new suit.

Snakes, of course, can climb trees, or swim, as well as they can get over the ground. In fact, they do all these things as well that it would seem as if it were rather easier to get along without feet than with them.—New York World.