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OUT OF THE CLOUDS.

Mud, Brown Snow, and Colored Hail.

New York's recent shower of muddy rain is one of those phenomena which, though not common, occur at long intervals in all parts of the world. Not long ago at Flume, in Austria, there was a heavy fall of half-frozen, brownish snow, and in Italy, and some parts of Germany, there was a down-pour of red rain. It was found, upon investigation that the brown snow of Flume was caused by the admixture of sand which had been blown from the desert of Sahara hundreds of miles away across the Mediterranean, and the red rain was not a deluge of blood, as the peasants thought, but was due to the presence of quantities of minute infusora, which somehow had been drawn up into the heavens and let down again when the clouds fell as rain.

A singular phenomenon of this sort occurred in Venezuela some time ago when colored hailstones fell in the State of Zamora. There was first a heavy thunder storm, with much rain and then, after a while, the hail came down in such abundance that hundreds of bushels of hailstones might have been gathered. Some of the hailstones weighed as much as two ounces. It is well known that in the tropics hailstorms are exceedingly rare in places situated in the low lands. But this hailstorm was particularly remarkable on account of the color of the hailstones, some of which were whitish, while others were blue, green, rose color or red.

Schwedoff, who, in his memoir on the origin of hailstorms, describes a fall of similarly colored hailstones which fell at Minsk, in Prussia, in the month of June, thinks that the colors are due to the presence of nickel and salts of cobalt, and that the phenomenon confirms his hypothesis of the cosmic origin of hail. There have been many well-authenticated cases where, after a heavy rain, the ground has been found strewn with small fish which have dropped from the clouds, and even young frogs, scarcely out of their tadpole state, have been known to descend upon the wings of the storm. One theory is that all these foreign substances are carried up into the clouds by whirlwinds, and another that the least bulky of them, such as minute infusora, are caught up in the process of evaporation.

ELECTRICAL WATCH.

A time and labor-saving device is the latest improvement in the horology, which has been perfected by a Swiss watchmaker named David Perret, of Marin, near Neuchatel. He has invented a watch which goes by electricity. Its special feature is its accuracy. It was severely tested by experts, and it was found that it gained only seven-tenths of a second in five weeks. The watch resembles an ordinary gentleman's lever, costs £12, and goes for fifteen years without being re-wound.

Tramp—"Yes, madam, I've been a solicitor for nigh twenty years." Mrs. Farmyard—"A solicitor?" Tramp—"Yes'm. I solicits bread an' meat."

FIRST SHOTS IN WARS.

Circumstances Under Which They Were Fired.

It is always difficult to find out who fired the first shot in a war. Either a war begins in a scrimmage, in which several persons are engaged at the same time, or, if the honor or the calamity belong to one man, several claimants are always found for the place, says the London M. A. P.

THE CRIMEAN WAR.

The war between Russia and the allies began with the invasion of Moldavia and Wallachia by a Russian army, many months before the diplomatic rupture occurred between Russia, France and England; and many shots were fired before the Russians faced their real antagonists. But the first shot fired between English and Russians was in June, 1854, when a Capt. Butler, of the English army, who was temporarily attached to the Turkish army, was reconnoitering on the defences of Silistria, which was besieged by the Russians. His voice was heard outside the works by a Russian sharpshooter, who fired into an embrasure, killing Butler.

On the 7th of July, 1854, took place the battle of Guirgevo, on the banks of the Danube, and although the British army had not arrived, here for the first time the Russians faced Englishmen, for the Turks were commanded by Gen. Cannon — a general officer of the Sepoy army (serving temporarily as a pasha). A Capt. Bent, leading 300 riflemen, charged the Russians, driving them from their tents and across the Danube. And so Capt. Bent would probably have as much claim as anyone to have fired the first shot in the Crimean war proper—that is, exclusive of the earlier Moldavian fights.

THE INDIAN MUTINY.

Early in May, 1857, the episode of "the greased cartridges" led up to some insubordination among the troopers of the Third Regiment of native cavalry, stationed at Meerut, and commanded by Col. Carmichael Smyth, who was a severe and unpopular officer. Smyth ordered a parade for the purpose of reprimand, and for troops to receive the hated new ammunition. Eighty-five troopers failed to appear. A court-martial was held, and all the eighty-five, with the exception of eleven youngsters (let off on account of their youth) were sentenced to ten years' hard-labor imprisonment.

On May 9 the sentence was executed on the parade ground, the regimental armorers and smiths shackling leg-irons on the men, while their comrades had to stand by and see them degraded.

May 10 was Sunday, and a blazing hot day. Rumors were about that mischief was brewing, but the Europeans took no precautions. The chaplain's children's ayah besought her mistress to fly, but her warnings were disregarded. At evening church time trouble was reported in the Sepoy lines and Col. Finnis, commanding the Eleventh Regiment, rode down to the Sepoy camp. He was a popular, "fearna-hearted man, and much liked by Sepoys. Strong in his belief in them, he rode fearlessly straight in among them. He was actually remonstrating with them when a young soldier of the Twentieth Regiment discharged his musket at the colonel, but only wounded his horse. Again he fired, the bullet hitting the colonel in the back, killing him instantly. In a moment the dead body was riddled with bullets. The young trooper of the Twentieth had commenced the great mutiny!

THE CIVIL WAR IN AMERICA.

I know not the man who fired the first shot in the civil war in America, but who might have been that man and very nearly was. Roger Pryor in recent years has been a dweller in New York, and for a time occupied a position on the judicial bench. In his hot youth, however, he was one of the young bloods of Virginia whose fervor helped to fan the flames that burst into the awful conflagration. By a curious coincidence he was one of the party that demanded the surrender of Fort Sumter. With breathless interest I listened to him one night as he told the story of the eventful day when he and his friends paid a visit to Fort Sumter with the demand that the northern troops should give the place up.

And so it was that this interview, fateful with some awful consequences—to end in the destruction of a million lives—took place with pleasantness on both sides. The garrison received the deputation in a hospitable spirit; drinks even were exchanged. But both sides took up their position with that inflexible and iron determination which is another American quality.

FORT SUMTER.

And then the confederates went away; and soon after the order was given that the fortress was to be attacked, and that the first shot in the fight was to be fired. Lightly, I dare say, these wild young fellows thought of what they were about to do; for if the men of the south had not been reckless dare-devils they would never have provoked this struggle—the end of which was as certain as anything could have been in history. Somebody suggested to Roger Pryor that his hand should have the honor—as it was supposed—of firing the first shot. Though he was so young and so hot-headed, some good angel whispered into his ear that this might turn out to be one of those acts of heavy and calamitous responsibility that would haunt a man's conscience, and perhaps blight his life forever afterward, and he waived away the proffered honor. The man who fired the first shot was bound to become known to the whole American world, and was thereby a target of attention, attack, pity. It weighed upon and overwhelmed him, and I believe he felt for a long time like a marked and doomed man: an outcast and an accursed one. How it ended with him I do not recall, but I believe his death was tragic.

FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

The first shot in the Franco-Prussian war was fired by a French soldier who was on guard at Strasburg bridge, and blazed away across the bridge at a party of Germans. The incident occurred early in August, 1870, a day or two before the Emperor Napoleon III. formally took the field.

TURCO-RUSSIAN WAR.

The bombardment of Poti, in Trans-Caucasia, on April 22, 1877, was the occasion of the first shots fired in this war. At the same time Hobart Pasha, in his yacht the Rethymo, ran the gauntlet from Rustchuk on the Danube, past the Russian guns at Galatz, under the cover of night. The Russian gunners detected the yacht, but the Pasha kept well in under the shore so that the gunners were unable to depress the gun muzzles sufficiently to take accurate aim, and, after the Rethymo had passed, the pasha sent a shell into the Russian camp. At the same time there were "affairs of outposts" in one or two spots where the Russians and Turks faced each other on the Roumanian frontier. Thus was war beginning in several localities at the same time, and nothing is recorded which would help to identify the first shot.

AUSTRO-PRUSSIAN WAR.

Most biographies of Bismarck make the attempt on his life, on May 7, 1866, the starting of this war. Bismarck knew if he forced on the struggle his whole career depended on the issue, and it was while he was still undecided, and was walking down the Unter den Linden, that Karl Blind's son fired a revolver at him. Bismarck used the attempt and the wave of public enthusiasm for him at Berlin to break down such governmental opposition as was being offered to his policy, and, from a dramatic point of view, that revolver shot in the Unter den Linden might be called the "first shot" in the seven days' campaign which ended in Sadowa.

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR.

Capt. Sigsbee, United States Navy, of the Maine, in his history of the blowing up of that vessel, on February 15, 1898, at 9:40 p. m., says: "Although the war which followed was not founded on the destruction of the Maine as a political cause, that disaster was the pivotal event of the conflict which led to it, and ended Spanish possession in the New World." The explosion of the torpedo, or whatever the destructive agent was, could scarcely be called a "first shot," but probably most Americans consider the incident the first blow struck in the war.

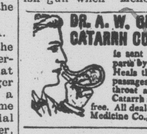
GRECO-TURKISH WAR.

Stevens in "With the Conquering Turk" describes the "first shot" at the battle of Meluna of the big Turkish gun when "Mehemet Ali Effendi, the tall, black-browed officer in command of the battery," sights and fires the first shell on to the Greek blockhouse two and a half miles away, while "Edhem Pasha sat squatting crosslegged on the ground watching the practice." But two days before this there had been almost continual skirmishing in the woods of Karya, even before the official notification of declaration of war had reached the Turkish Generalissimo.

IN OUR OWN DAYS.

The last story on my list is of our own time. Everybody knows that the gallant old Joubert, who was the commander-in-chief of the Boer forces, was always an opponent of Mr. Krueger and of the war. Nevertheless, he went in with his countrymen when the hour of danger came; but he went with no doubt as to the disastrous final result. He and his troops were before Dundee; and then it was that what was practically the first shot in the war was fired. The scouts brought the information that the English troops were in possession of the town, and it was resolved that they should, if possible, be dislodged.

"All right," said Joubert, "bring up the Staats Artillerie." The Staats Artillerie came up. "Fire," said Joubert. The shot was fired; and then, as the smoke died away, amid a thrill Joubert turned to his officers and said: "There goes the independence of the Transvaal." Some months later the gallant veteran was dead. Probably the calamities which he foresaw, but could not prevent, had much to do with hastening his end.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The Geniuses

I.

Metaphorically speaking, the world stood still when the news went forth of the projected alliance between young Frank Varley and Mary Markham. I confess, even to me, philosophic though I am by nature, the announcement came as somewhat of a shock.

Frank was such a tremendous favorite with everybody, who had welcomed him as their pet and darling ever since, a mere sunny-faced stripling, he made his bow to society.

From the first they decided he was to be a second Paderewski, and every musical composition he sent forth was as extravagantly admired and extolled as if he had in very truth borne that magic name.

Frank himself—handsome, gay, debonair—cordially appreciated his easily-gained laurels; and if it all slightly turned his youthful head, yet his conceit was so frank and so outspoken that to his women friends at least it was rather a naive attraction than failing; while the men accepted it tolerantly, as a pardonable attribute of his genius.

Somehow no one had ever entertained the idea of his marrying suddenly, more especially an unknown wife of his own choosing.

That was where the sting lay.

Frank, the elegant, the fastidious and refined, with his artistic temperament and passion for the beautiful, to choose as wife such a hopeless woman as Mary Markham!

The loud and despaging descriptions of the timorous young woman who had dared to rob society of its favorite, made me quite anxious to meet the original. And I confess that when I did, shortly after the marriage, my first impression was that the accounts had been surprisingly unexaggerated.

She was almost painfully shy and retiring—worst possible accoutrements for society encounters, causing her instantly and scornfully to be stigmatized as awkward, dull, and empty of ideas. Then she was quite plain, possessed rather a squat figure, which she dressed atrociously, and had not the slightest idea of how to make the most of the scant attractions she could boast of.

How she had ever attracted the young musician was a complete puzzle to everyone.

Frank, himself, however, was obviously content with his prize.

II.

I chanced to meet Mrs. Kingston on her way back from her first call on the new Mrs. Varley.

"Well?" I queried, as the landau drew up beside me.

Mrs. Kingston looked at me for some moments with an air of reflection before replying. Then: "I never pronounce sentence after one hearing," she proclaimed judicially. Whereat I knew that Mrs. Kingston was divided in her mind, and halting between two opinions.

Not long afterwards we had arranged some expedition together. On her way Mrs. Kingston intended paying a second call on the musician's wife. The landau was to come on, pick me up, and return to terminate her call at precisely four o'clock.

I was unavoidably delayed, however, and it was nearer the half-hour when, not without great inward trepidation, I drew up outside the Varley establishment. It had been previously arranged that on no account was I to lose time by descending and going in. She was to come out immediately.

On my way thither fancy conjured up lurid visions of that charming and irate lady, furiously indignant, waiting on the topmost step. I breathed supreme relief seeing she was not there.

Then, at length, she appeared, smiling and unapologetic.

"Well?" I observed grimly.

She beamed unabashed.

"Why didn't you come in?" she queried, surprise tinged with reproach.

I leant back and gasped.

"And you told me so particularly not to!"

"Did I?" — innocently. "Oh, well — but I did not know her so well then!"

I forebore to remind her that I was still in that unenviable state of ignorance, and contented myself with my former question.

"Well?"

Mrs. Kingston looked at me with sparkling eyes.

"If I were a man," said she with finality; "I'd marry that woman tomorrow!"

"Shall you make the rest of the world be of the same opinion?" I asked curiously.

She colored faintly.

"No," she decided, a shade defiantly. "I shall keep her as a charming oasis in my arid social desert."

She looked away from my condemning eye.

"Anyway," she maintained self-excusingly, "she was never intended for a society butterfly. Nothing would tempt her from her seclusion, I am convinced, so it would be no good trying."

III.

Certainly Frank was a husband of whom any young wife might justly be proud. And, strange to say, it seemed to be his marriage that evolved his genius. Up to that time his marvellous gifts seemed all to lie in the future; he was brilliantly clever, and would astonish the musical world one day. But I must confess that his reputation had depended chiefly on what people said, and the applauding favor of women.

But with his marriage came a subtle and increasing change. All his declared, incipient genius seemed to expand and blossom forth. As yet he did not seek to fly very high, fearing the strength of his new wings, but the dainty caprices, sonatas, and, above all, songs, that flowed with such amazing swiftness and delicacy from his facile pen, put his name in the mouth of all London.

Of course, his world professed no astonishment. It was only what they had prophesied all along. And more than ever now did they pity him for his unfortunate mesalliance.

I reminded them mildly that he did not seem to consider it in the same light, but invoked an indignant chorus instantly:

"Of course he pretended to be quite content, and in love, and all that, but every one could see plainly that it was only pretence."

"A woman like that!" summed up old Lady Farleigh emphatically; but there, Lady Farleigh is a vulgar old woman. Moreover, she possesses six unmarried daughters, "without a soul or idea beyond babies and dinners!"

I happened to know, at first hand, that Mrs. Varley, though certainly no pianist herself, was yet wrapped heart and soul in music, and revelled in Frank's genius.

Since that first meeting I had come across her continually at Mrs. Kingston's. Mrs. Kingston had, in the language of the day, taken her up. And it was amazing the transformation she had effected in the too unvain young woman. The pretty, untidy hair was waved loosely back from the low brow, and coiled becomingly at the nape of the neck; the shyness and awkwardness had almost entirely disappeared, and with them the unbecoming nervous stoop of the shoulders; while, as for her dress, it was as tasteful and a la mode as Mrs. Kingston's own. Could mere man say more?"

Frank himself had altered a good deal since his marriage—grown quieter and graver—older, it seemed; his boyish spirits were not quite so indefatigable as they had been, and he sunned himself less often, and with less satisfaction, in the eulogies and flatteries of his admiring circle. Sometimes, too, I caught a look of trouble in his sunny blue eyes, strangely at variance with his brilliant circumstances.

IV.

Young Mrs. Varley fell ill. It was quite sudden; only a cold at first, but it settled on her chest, and turned to pneumonia, and her life was in danger.

With this trouble Franks' genius collapsed like a pricked ubble. He never touched pen or paper from the first moment of her illness. In a week he was a white and haggard ghost.

For three weeks she was desperately ill.

Then the bulletin went out that hope was abandoned, and Mrs. Varley's hours on this earth numbered.

That night, to everyone's amazement, Frank appeared at the club.

"How is—your wife?" someone questioned with an effort.

"Dying!" Frank replied briefly.

He stood up and faced them with his young drawn face.

"There is something — I wanted to say to you," he announced, forcing his words. They stared at him in silence. He drew a great breath, and passed his shaking hand across his eyes. "I—am a liar and a coward! I am a hypocritical cad!" His face went grey. "I have been meaning to confess for a long time. I am not what you think me. All this year I have been living and acting a lie. I will tell you. It was so hard, and so fatally easy." He choked and grit his teeth hard; his eyes were pitiful. "Everyone had always thought me so brilliant, and predicted such a glorious future, and I had always accepted the predictions as a matter of course until a year or two back. Then for the first time I began to doubt, and the doubt was awful.

"As far as technicalities went, I knew all that art could teach me; but it began to dawn upon me that, despite my passion for music, I possessed very little originality. I composed, but my compositions were in no ways brilliant or wonderful, and an awful terror of my own crushing failure began to grow in me. You could never understand what that thought was to me. Then the temptation came. I married." He lifted his steadfast, white face. "Before God I married solely and wholly for love, with not the slightest idea then——" He paused for a moment, then went on rapidly. "One day I heard Molly singing to herself, and the tune was so quaint and so taking that I asked what it was.

"She laughed, and confessed that her favorite amusement was to put her favorite verses to music of her own fancy. That was the beginning of the end. You can guess the rest.

"I meant to own up, but you know how shy she is. I still meant to confess, but each time my courage forsook me. Once I came here, strung up purposely. It was the day Harkness congratulated me. After that I felt it would have killed me to own up. And so I let you all think . . . And now — now she is dying!"

Frank laid his head down on his arms and sobbed.

After all, Mrs. Varley did not die. She recovered to find herself, to her amazement and unfeigned dismay, a celebrity, courted and cajoled by all. She protested bewilderedly, imploring us to tell the world it was a huge mistake, and that all the glory was genuinely Frank's. Indeed, she declared honestly that more than half the compositions were wholly his.

Mrs. Varley was capable now of holding her own anywhere, in face of the whole world.

To Frank's utter astonishment and humiliation he is as great a favorite as ever. He still sends forth his brilliant compositions, and it is rumored that there is a grand opera in serious contemplation now. But upon everything appears the double names of Mrs. and Mr. Frank Varley.—London Answers.

ANIMALS' TOILETS.

Cats make the most careful toilet of any animals, excepting some of the opossums. Lions and tigers wash themselves like the cat, wetting the dark, india-rubber-like ball of the forefoot and the inner toe and passing it over the face and behind the ears. The foot is thus a face sponge and brush and the rough tongue combs the rest of the body.

Stout Old Lady (to chemist's youthful assistant)—"Boy, d'ye keep a preparation for reducing flesh?" Boy—"Yes'm." Stout Old Lady—"Well, I don't know how much I ought to get." Boy—"Better take all we've got."

Seized With Cramps. Acute Indigestion.

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More people suffer from indigestion and its accompanying ills, such as constipation and deranged kidneys and liver, than from any other class of diseases. The use of digestants, pepsin, bismuth, etc., sometimes gives temporary relief when the trouble is confined to the stomach, but the most serious form of indigestion is that which affects the intestines, and is attended with constipation, kidney pains and cramps.

That Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills is the most effective treatment for this dreadfully common affliction is now generally known, and we here quote a letter from a Peterborough resident, who gives his experience for the benefit of other sufferers.

Mr. R. Beach, 225 Sherbrooke Street, Peterborough, Ont., states:—"About two years ago I became subject to cramps, which were caused, I was told, from acute indigestion. I was so bad that I would be laid up for weeks at a time. These attacks came on periodically, and distressed me greatly.

"I then began using Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, and have found them a wonderful medicine. They have entirely prevented a recurrence of my trouble, corrected the derangement of my digestive organs, and made me feel like a different person."

You need not lose time and money in experimenting with new and untried medicines. You know that Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills are backed by almost a life-long experience of the great physician and receipt book author. They have proven their superiority in scores of cases in every community. Ask your friends about them. One pill a dose; 25 cents a box, At all dealers, or Edmanson, Bates & Co., Toronto.

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QUIET YEAR FOR THE CZAR.

For this year, astrologers have made some interesting predictions with regard to the rulers of Europe. For instance, of King Edward, one of them says the planetary influences are unfavorable for his health, and he adds: "Let great care be taken of his Majesty's health and person." A quiet and uneventful year is said to be foreshadowed for Queen Alexandra, and also for the Prince of Wales; and that he must also take great care of his health. According to star readers, Emperor William will meet with some grave misfortune during the next three years. To the Czar a quiet year is promised; but, on the other hand, a great calamity is said to be impending over the Emperor of Austria. "The sand in the hour glass," says one writer, "has nearly run out, and, unfortunately, with the demise of the Emperor will come a great revolution in Europe. To King Alfonso of Spain and to King George of Greece the coming year, it is claimed, will bring little good or evil fortune. Some disaster, on the other hand, is said to menace the Sultan of Turkey. "In the Sultan's horoscope, the sun is about to meet the malefic rays of Jupiter and Saturn, and hence nothing in the shape of war, revolution, or assassination is unlikely."

"HOLD MY HORSE, GENERAL!"

General French is the sort of commander that Tommy Atkins describes as "a bit of all right." He works his troopers harder than any other general in the field, but he has a happy little way with him which the soldier likes. In camp he lounges about in his shirt-sleeves, and if it was not for his well-known smiling face and bright eyes his own men couldn't tell him from one of themselves.

One afternoon, a correspondent rode up to the horse lines, and, seeing a soldier sitting on a bundle of compressed hay smoking a worn-out-looking briar pipe, asked where the general was.

"The old man is somewhere about" coolly replied the soldier.

"Well, just hold my horse while I go and search for him."

"Certainly, sir!" And the man rose obediently and took the bridle.

"Can you tell me where the general is?" inquired the correspondent of a staff-officer further down the lines.

"General French? Oh, he's somewhere about! Why, there he is, holding that horse's head. What does it mean?"

The correspondent turned on his heel, went to his horse, mounted in silence, and rode off, without waiting to give an explanation. The general resumed his seat on the ground, and laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

A farmer says that a cow can be cured of kicking by catching hold of her leg while in the act. Just so; and a bee can be cured of stinging by catching hold of her sting while in the act. Try them both; it's fun.