

THE ORIGIN OF STRAW HATS.

Few out of the countless thousands of persons who thankfully don their light straw hats when the sun streams down so powerfully as to make the ordinary felt or silk headgear too heavy for comfort, have ever thought of the origin of the cool, sheltering, wide-brimmed straw hat. Yet it has, says the *Western Morning News*, an interesting history, dating back at least to the sixteenth Century, and the well-known Italian historian, Cesar Cantu, says it can be traced to the beginning of the fourteenth century, though no reliable evidence can be procured to corroborate this statement. The actual date of the origin of the manufacture of hats from wheat straw is wrapped in obscurity; but it is certain that by 1574 the industry was of considerable importance. Florence, of course, was the centre of the manufacture, the straw being imported from abroad at that date, as the peculiar quality required for the industry was not then cultivated in Italy. Experiments, however, were made with the view of establishing the production of the straw required for hat-making, and the efforts in this direction were crowned with great success. Experience enabled improvements to be effected in the plaiting, which became the principal occupation of the people. The straw for the manufacture must have a good length between the knots, a clear, golden colour, and not be brittle. A certain Domenico Michelacci was the initiator of the scheme for cultivating the straw, and he started the work at Signa, a village near Florence. The industry flourished and spread all over the district, continuing with unabated success until 1771. An important trade had been by this time established with England and other countries. At the end of the last century, however, a rude check was given to foreign exportation by political troubles, and the trade was for some time confined to local consumption. The tide turned again in 1810, when a certain Guiseppe Carbonori, a native of Leghorn, introduced an improved broad brimmed hat, called "fioretto," which became popular in France and Germany, and afterwards in England and America. It has been estimated that no fewer than 60,000 hands were then engaged in the manufacture of the hats, and the average daily earnings of the workers was about two shillings each. In 1822, owing to the impetus given to the trade by the opening up of the American markets and the large export to that country, it was calculated that about 80,000 persons found employment, the

most expert earning about 6s. 5d. per day. Naturally, the success of the Florentine article induced other countries to take up the manufacture, and by 1826 England was turning out a description of hat which satisfied the English public, and easily ousted the Italian rival from the English markets, causing a corresponding depression in the Florentine industry.

A WHEEL SONG.... Evaline Stein.... *Women's Sentinel*

Oh, the ships have sails for the swelling
gales,
The falcon flies in the wake of the wind.
In the speed of the steed of the Bedouin
breed
The blood leaps high to the hoof-beats,
lead,
As the leagues are left behind.
But what care I
For the birds that fly,
Or all the vessels that sail the sea;
The blasts that blow,
Till the trees bend low,
Or the barbs of Araby
Nor wish I more for the wings he wore,
The fleet-foot one, of the fables old!
For the feathered robe of the messenger god,
Or the winged sandals wherein he trod,
In the happy age of gold.
Let poets mourn
For the days outworn,
But these glad mornings are still divine!
Those flying feet
Were they half so fleet
As the steed that springs from mine?
Then ho! for the wheel with its strength
of steel,
Yet blessed buoyance of sky-born things!
And the rush of the near and crystalline
clear
Sweet breath of the summer that sings in
the ear
Like harps of a thousand strings!
Oh wild and free
Is the joy to me
To breast the breezes and whirl along!
To skim the ground
Till the pulses bound,
And the heart bursts into song!

Johnny Chaffie's Sunday-school teacher is a lady. The other day she asked him: "Johnny, do you know what a miracle is?" "Yes. Ma says if you don't marry our new parson it will be a miracle."