

Notches on The Stick

In a recent letter to the writer, descriptive of Mexican life and scenery, Hon. Chas. H. Collins has something in verse and in prose concerning the herdsmen of that country, and their faith in the Virgin Mother. He says, 'The Virgin of Guadalupe is to Mexico what Notre Dame is to France and Canada. She guards the slumbers by night and the footsteps by day of her faithful devotees. It is a simple faith, and, thus trusting in Her, the most isolated life is made endurable. Without such faith, and raked by doubts or pursued by phantoms of grief and a desire to mingle with the human throng, no man could lead the solitary monotonous existence of a Mexican herder of sheep without losing his reason. Some do so lose their reason, but very few. These people make a striking and picturesque addition to the landscape of the Table-lands in Mexico. There is a touch of pathos about them—a something which appeals to the artistic element—in their "make-up." Beside one of these figures, under the blue skies and framed in a circle of the Cordilleras, it seemed to me that even that noted picture, "The Angelus," was common place. Prometheus on the rock, Selkirk on his island, Napoleon at St. Helena, or lonely Eremita in Arabian desert, are all suggested, but none had such surroundings. This is because no picture has such magnificence in its setting. The atmospheric effects in Mexico cannot be duplicated. The wonderful blending of colors—of light and shade—cannot be described, but must be seen. In Europe there is nothing that approaches it, and perhaps nothing in America except the Salt Lake valley of Utah, which has much of the same transparent beauty. Coming from Jalapa to the city of Mexico on the Inter Oceanic Railway, we had for many hours in full view some of the world's great mountains,—the great Cordillera-Perote protecting Jalapa,—snowy Orizaba lifting its summit far above the clouds,—the twin volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccuahuatl, and Malintzi, about which hangs the glamor of romance, as it was named after the favorite of Cortez. Her name was Marina, and Malintzi (pronounced Malinch) was her pet name. We passed through a varied and constantly shifting panorama, cities, churches, missions, ranches, haciendas and stations, with crowds of blanketed men and hooded women—a very wildness of color. Now a train of burros—then pack pedlars—peons—great pulque fields—guaca palms—mesquite cactus—and far away, the motionless herders and their flocks." The verses are as follows:

THE MEXICAN HERDER.

Have you not seen upon some seaward slope
The lonely lighthouse, in the glare of day,
Loom up in weird, uncanny form and shape
Until the night reflects its lantern's ray?

So does the Herder on his sandy main
A vigil keep in desert wastes alone,
The only thing to sentinel the plain,
As beacon tower upon its sea ward throne!

A silence carven, 'mid the lava beds,
And like these worn volcanic fires, still;
The lord o'er fleecy flocks, whose trusting heads
Around him safely lie and tear no ill.

A silhouette framed by the mountain range,
There statuesque and blanketed he stands,
Where cactus blooms, with forms uncouth and
strange,
And nought beside in all the desert lands.

Do voices whisper to his soul, beguiled
By visions gleaming in his fervent sight?
Do thoughts of Her—the virgin and her child,
Reward and cheer his slumbers in the night?

Who knows? To us he seems a type of Fate,
Fixed in a groove from which escape is vain,
And ever thus to grimly pose in state
And share eternal Desolation's reign!

"A poet cannot strive for despotism,"
exclaims one modern poet against the perversity of another. He cannot without scattering the brightest leaves from his wreath of "laurel."

"His harp falls shattered; for it still must be
The instincts of great spirits to be free."

Nor does it become an honorable senator to plead for a barbaric despotism, that, under the guise of civilization, rivals the atrocities of Benin or Dahomey in war. How can Senator Hale lift up an honest hand or a voice to defend the military crimes of Spain in Cuba? Is he to make himself the mouth-piece of that sordid and pusillanimous spirit which falls as a blight on every human and generous impulse, and, without rebuke? A ide from any supposed or real insult to the flags of the United States or violation of the rights guaranteed to her citizens; when war degenerates into massacre—the mangling of babes and women—murder of the senile and feeble, the devastation of hospitals, the immolation of prisoners,—if nothing can be interposed by the Nation at whose door these deeds are done, then let her statesmen keep silence,

till they can speak right words and speak them burningly. Surely a senator of the United States cannot strive for despotism without blame.

The poem following is from "Matias," a book of verse by a Canadian author of whom we hope to say more in a future issue of PROGRESS.

The King's Hostel.

Let us make it fit for him!
He will come ere many hours
Are passed over. Strew these flowers
Where the floor is hard and bare!
Ever was his royal whim
That his place of rest were fair.

Such a narrow little room!
Think you he will deign to use it?
Yes, we knew he would not choose it
Were there any other near;
Here there is such damp and gloom,
And such quietness is here.

That he loved the light, we know;
And we know he was the gladdest
Always when the mirth was maddest
And the laughter drowned the song;
When the fire's shade and glow
Fell upon the loveliest throng.

Yet it may be, if he come,
Now, tonight, he will be sired;
And no more will be desired
All the music once he knew;
He will joy the lutes are dumb
And be glad the lights are few.

Heard you how the fight has gone;
Surely it will soon be ended!
Was their stronghold well defended
Ere it fell before his might?
Did it yield soon after dawn,
Or when noon was at its height?

Hark! his trumpet! It is done.
Smooth the bed. And for a cover
Drape these scarlet colors over;
And upon those dingy walls
Hang what banner he has won.
Hasten ere the twilight falls!

They are here!—We knew the best
When we set us to prepare him
Such a place; for they that bear him
—They as he—seem weary too;
Peace! and let him have his rest;
There is nothing more to do.

The critical papers of David Christie Murray on contemporary writers of fiction have proved to be interesting, written as they are with acumen, and with that precision and economy of statement which reveals the practised writer. But in his dealings with S. R. Crockett and Ian Maclaren he outbeggars in contemptuous severity Macaulay when slaying the late Robert Montgomery. That Crockett is the victim of egregious puffery and an exaggerated critical estimate, we have no doubt,—for it is absurd to rate Crockett with Sir Walter Scott, that variously and mightily-gifted man, or to put Robert Louis Stevenson above him. At the same time we do not believe Crockett's work entitled to such contempt, nor do we believe that any degree of puffery can account for his present reputation. He has not the higher qualities of intellect and style that distinguish a Thackeray or a Stevenson, nor is his pathos or humor, of the delicate order of Barrie; yet, that he has appealed to the popular heart and won a genuine appreciation we have no doubt. Mr. Crockett cannot be annihilated by such slung shot, even from the gun of Mr. David Christie Murray.

In an unpretentious little paper-clad volume labelled "Poems"—a title not so unpretentious—we have found some fairly good things. These verses are by the rural poet of Giffstown, New Hampshire; and while there is much technical incompleteness, they show how he has tried to beat out a genuine music that is in him. Some of the brevities are best, such as—

And Such is Life.

"Oh, give me love!" the longing maid prayed;
I am athirst! Oh, give me love, she plead.
Her prayer was granted; she became a slave
Of passion, and one morning she lay dead.

"Oh, give me sympathy!" the poet prayed;
My life's short! He ate of sorrow's bread.
The people came when his rare gift they weighed
To pay their tribute, but his soul had fled.

In "Sunrise on Castle Rock" he says:
The sky was blossoming with a wreath
Of early morn,
Across the eaves I saw the gleaming east
More brightly glow,
Until the light of morning had increased
To one vast glow.

Then from the purpling sea uprose
The kingly sun;
And bursting into beauty like a rose
The day began.

In one of the verses, entitled "Granites," he throws out this caution:

If you would woo a Giffstown maid,
Please have it understood,
Before you undertake the job,
That your moral traits are good.

Which is a proper standard, to which
the poet would like to see all the New
Hampshire towns arrive.

PASTOR FELIX.

CLOTH FROM CAT TAIL.

A new Use for the Humble but Pretty
Water Plant.

Very few, probably, are aware that the fur, or vegetable down of the cat-tail is a marketable article, superior to feathers or cotton for many purposes. It is not quite so valuable or useful as eiderdown, but it approaches it very closely, and is cheaper than any of the three. As a matter of fact a great many people are to-day using articles covered with cat-tail products who have no idea where the material comes from.

It is a vast extent of country, comparatively speaking, from which the cat-tail is gathered. It comes from the swamps along the numerous creeks that put in from the Delaware bay, from Morris River to Cape May. The average amount gathered in the season is a ton a day. The work of gathering and transporting it, and then weaving it into the many forms which it must take before becoming salable, constitutes a considerable industry.

One of the most elaborate uses to which this material is put is that of covering sofas. Very many of the supposed plush-covered divan are really covered with a fabric of cat-tail. It wears better than the plush, and is infinitely cheaper.

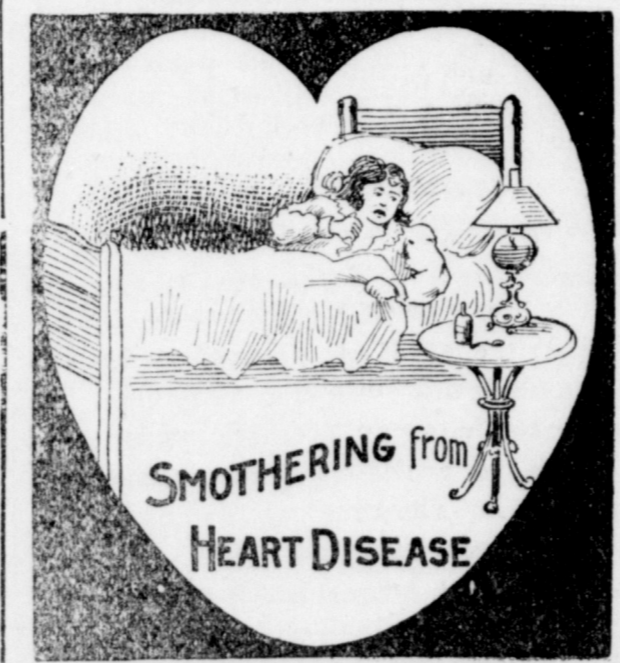
The same argument that applies to the sofa is applicable to the pillow. Very often, however, such pillows go by another name.

Sofa pillows, also, are made of cat-tail because a pillow avowedly covered with cat-tail would probably be regarded with contempt. Call it Alaskan plush, however, or Sheridan wool that has been treated by a new process, and it will sell readily enough, and give good satisfaction, too.

The family album which graces the centre table in the parlor of so many farm houses is also in many instances adorned with cat tail covers, although the housewife cannot be convinced they are not plush. She has doubtless paid almost as much as if they were what she supposes, and naturally she scoffs at any person who hints that she has been victimized.

It is becoming a prevalent custom to use cat-tail tuft on the back of hand mirrors and brushes, which have heretofore been backed with plush. Some say that the substitute is really proving better than the original. The head rest, too, seen on the easy chair, is often of cat-tail—and it is none the less comfortable for that.

Another article for which the cat-tail is used is the bed quilt. The eider-down quilt is an old time article of luxury. The cat-tail quilt is every whit as comfortable, and costs about one quarter as much. In New Jersey, at least, the housewife fully appreciates the value of the cat-tail quilt, however much her less well informed sisters may scoff at the idea.—St. Louis Globe Democrat.



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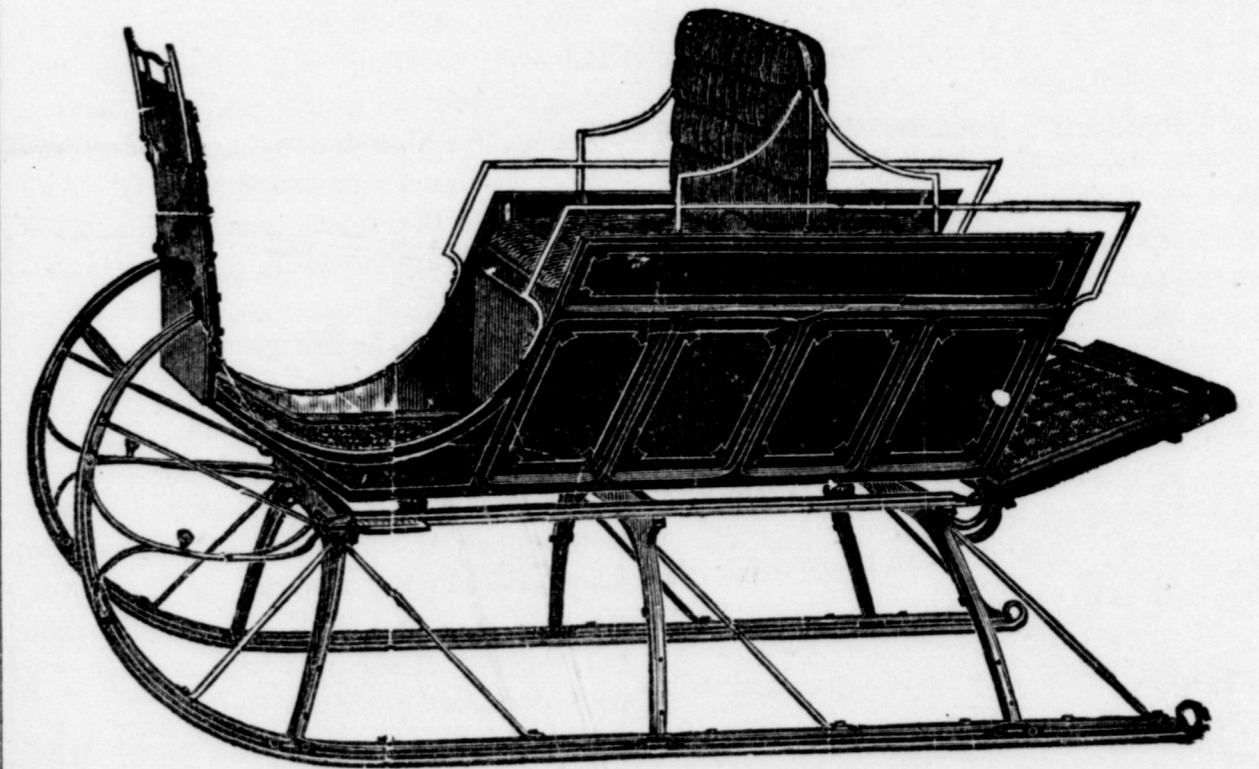
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