

ABOUT A NEW OIL CRAZE.

SUDDEN FORTUNE TO MANY POOR VIRGINIA FARMERS.

The Greater Part of the Development Has Been on Land That was Almost Worthless - Streaks of Great Luck - Recent Discoveries of Oil and Gas.

West Virginia is passing through an oil craze, writes a New York Sun correspondent from Parkersburg. A stranger at one of the hotels anywhere hereabouts will hear nine men out of ten talking about the clinal and anti-clinal, salt sand and Berea grit, pressure and leases, 45-degree line and royalties and a thousand and one other things which are more or less meaningless to him. What he does understand all relates to oil. Some men and women are growing rich, while others are losing everything in the rush for oil.

Nature, in this instance, has been most charitable, as the greater part of the developments thus far has been on land so poor that the owners were put to it to make a living. Rough and rocky hills and soilless creek bottoms, almost worthless for farms, produce nine-tenths of the oil in West Virginia, and hundreds of poor farmers who a few months ago found it difficult to raise the commonest kind of food and pay for the cheapest of clothing are today monthly depositors in the banks of this city. Royalties and rentals are being paid in sums ranging from a few dollars up to thousands every month to farmers clad in rusty butternut and ragged clothing. Drake farm was rented six months ago for \$2.50. The man who leased the place lost confidence in the territory before any development was made, and offered it to an oil land speculator for \$40. His offer was refused by the speculator but was taken by another. A few days ago the lease sold for \$20,000. A year ago a farmer living near this city was head over heels in debt and was at last compelled to move to a farm owned by his mother, fourteen miles north in order to make a livelihood. He leased the land for oil purposes a few months ago and in less than sixty days three paying wells were struck on the place. They were all good wells and the royalties amounted to almost an independent fortune.

The farmer paid his debts and put some money into a bank and was about to start back when he received the intelligence that another well—a gusher this time—had been struck on his farm. The last well is considered the best shallow, salt sand well in West Virginia and is reported to be flowing 100 barrels an hour. In a law office here there is a notary public who seldom had a dollar to spare. The lawyer received several months ago, in return for legal advice, a twenty acre lease of a farm, twelve miles away. As a reward to the notary for little acts of kindness the attorney gave him a fourth interest. Last Tuesday a well was struck on the lease, and it is now quoted as a twenty-barrel-an-hour well.

Oil scouts are travelling all over this region hunting for desirable properties. The scout keeps tab on all the wells, producing or dry, for miles around. He thereby secures a knowledge through which his employers, some wealthy firm or corporation are enabled to get the best paying territory or to buy out good producing wells. Nearly every large oil company has in its employ a number of scouts. Following the scout comes the leasing of lands. His business is to select what is considered valuable territory for prospecting and to secure leases, binding himself to sink or begin a certain number of wells in a certain number of days and to pay a certain monthly rental. These leases are all plotted and offered for sale to the speculator or prospectory. Sometimes it occurs that a lease is refused as valueless and is given up when, perhaps within sixty days' development in its vicinity brings it within the production boundary, and there is a rush for its possession. One prospector may offer a \$100 for it, and in less than twenty-four hours another may increase the bid to \$1,000 or even 5,000, with a royalty of one-eighth or one fourth of the oil.

All these things add to the excitement of the pursuit, which is not, however, confined to the search for oil. Natural gas, which some years ago was allowed to go to waste as useless, is now as eagerly sought. Good gas wells are in many localities much more valuable even than good oil wells. One gas well may produce enough gas to run a whole pool or section of oil wells, while others are sold to the big gas companies, and the product is piped to different towns. The city of Parkersburg is at instance. Natural gas is used in nearly every house and factory in the town, and it is much cleaner and cheaper than coal.

Oil men often say there is no telling what a well may do. It may go on from day to day, year to year, producing oil

or gas with as much regularity as the swinging of a pendulum or it may break loose in a minute and make trouble for everything in its vicinity. When the Big Moses well was struck it flowed as all self-respecting wells should, filling the tanks with oil day after day, until one unfortunate afternoon something broke loose. Then gas, sand, salt water and other things lying 2,000 feet below began to come to the surface. The owner tried to plug the orifice, but Big Moses wouldn't have it. Every plug inserted was blown out, and a great column of gas shot up into the air. The owner finally had an immense casting made which weighed several tons. This casting was placed over the mouth of Big Moses after a great deal of trouble, and the proprietors turned away with a sigh of relief, satisfied that at last they had secured control of the terror. A few days later they found that the pressure had opened a new outlet, and the well was again pouring out gravel, sand and all sorts of rubbish. Not only was this the case, but the forces which had been confined had cracked the earth for long distances around and gas in great jets was bursting through. Before a stop could be put to its capers the gas caught fire, and the fire spread through the woods. The well was ruined. For a wonder no one was injured in this case. There are many instances, however, in which lives have been destroyed by igniting gas, notably that of a well on Whiskey Run. This well, situated in a natural amphitheatre, surrounded by hills, filled the little valley full of gas one morning. The gas caught fire from a pumping well and did great damage. Among other things, a boarding house was burned and four lives were lost.

There is another well ten miles above this city which has a remarkable feature. It flows once a day and produces salt water and oil. At 11 45 the well begins to rumble, and a minute or two later a great column of water and oil rushes forth, spreading over the top of the derrick and fall in a shower on the ground. The rush continues for something like half an hour, when it ceases entirely, to reappear twenty four hours later.

A well is sometimes sunk to its required depth, found to be as dry as the proverbial bone, and is plugged, only to burst forth unexpectedly and cover the surrounding land with oil. On the other hand, a good producer will sometimes quit in a second and refuse ever after to respond to either pump or dynamite, all of which goes to show that eccentricities of an oil well are past finding out.

Tax on Hearths and Windows.
Among the most curious of the taxes which have from time to time been imposed are those upon windows. The former tax was first enforced in 1662, and was at the rate of two shillings upon every

hearth or chimney. This was an obnoxious tax, and William III, immediately on his accession to the throne obtained some popularity by sending a message to parliament desiring that the imposition should be taken off, (March 1, 1689.) and his Majesty's illustrious Commons complied with their sovereign's request. The window tax, of which our fathers and grandfathers still talk, was not repealed until 1851.

STORY OF A FALL.

Experience of a Man Who Was Thrown From a Scaffold.
"Many years ago I was at work putting up the large gilded cross which is on top of the spire of the Epiphany episcopal church. We had almost gotten the cross in its position when it careened over and fell to the ground. It was very heavy, and in its fall it brought down part of the scaffold on which we were working, giving me a pitch into the air from a distance of about thirty five feet. Fortunately for me, my fall was broken by a part of the scaffold, and I landed in the grass plot. I don't suppose I was over three seconds in reaching the ground, but during that time I went through a great deal in the way of imagination, much of which was so photographed in my mind that I can never forget it."

"I thought that the fall had killed me and that I went straight to heaven. Arriving there I found that heaven was a very easy place to enter if you were on the right track. As I saw it, those who were destined for heaven were conducted thither on a kind of a railroad track, which worked somewhat like the cash carrying systems in use in the large stores. There was no noise or confusion as on the steam railroads, but everything worked very quietly. A short time before the arrival of the car word reached those who were in charge of admissions, giving the name of the party. Instantly the record of the party was looked up. Though the examination was very rapidly made, there was no undue rush or apparent haste about it. A glance at the record told the story. All the good things were on one side and the bad things were on the other side of the book. If the good things predominated the switches were so arranged that the newcomer was switched into the big gates. If the record showed more bad than good, the car was allowed to go right on without stopping. Where it went to I did not ask, though I imagined having been a church-going man all my life.

"In several cases that came along while I was there the record was about equally divided, and without making any determination, the car was switched off to a kind of purgatory where a more detailed examination was made. I recognized several in

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this purgatory place, one of whom told me he had been there for several months awaiting a decision. He said that for the time those who were in the purgatory were as nicely treated as though they had been allowed to enter heaven, though the suspense was somewhat annoying. I ran across an old friend, a plasterer, who had died about twenty years before. When he was on earth he lived a few doors from me, in the locality known as Swampoodle, in the northeastern section of the city. He said that he had a delightful time in heaven, but that he was somewhat lonely, as so far he had not met many of his intimate earthly acquaintances, though he had been told they were there. I asked him about some old mutual friends, and was pained to hear that they had not reached heaven. "The fact is," my friend told me, "there has not been one admission here from Swampoodle for nineteen years."

A Welcome Announcement.

The public will be interested in knowing that the publishers of the popular weekly paper, the Family Herald and Weekly Star, of Montreal, have arranged for a further supply of their famous premium picture, 'Thin Red Line.' All who become subscribers during January and February can depend on getting a copy, also renewal subscribers. We believe the publishers of the Family Herald and Weekly Star intend the 'Thin Red Line' to be the first of a series of these famous pictures and Canadians who secure a copy this year will be fortunate, as they will be able to get the entire set. In a few weeks the entire edition of 'Thin Red Line' will be disposed of and no more can be had at any figure. This is a hint for those who have not yet secured it. It is given free with a years subscription (one dollar) to that great paper, the Family Herald and Weekly Star Montreal.

Particular Habits of Eels.

"Despite assertions to the contrary," said an old fisherman the other day, "an eel is the cleanest fish that swims. Some persons have an idea that eels feed upon the bodies of persons who have been drowned and upon other refuse."
"Such is not the case, however. I have watched them in all kinds of water. They are more particular about their food than trout. It's only the nicest sort of bait that will bring an eel to a hook unless he happens to be very hungry."

Coming and Going.

"They say Miss Eastly has married a coming man."
"Yes; but it is the general supposition that she'd never have got him if she hadn't gone after him with all her might."

"What is the use of talking?" asked the married man incautiously.
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