

Abroad.

BY P. W. GEER.

I am afraid the readers of the Torch will think by the tone of my letters that I am out on a pleasure trip. So far, I have only given accounts of the good times I have had; in fact, that is the only kind of times I have had. My whole journey of three thousand miles in five weeks' time has been one continual round of pleasure. But I want those who are interested in the Liberal University, and the cause of Secularism in general, to know that I am doing some splendid work, which is also a pleasure. For reasons best known to myself and a few others, I will not report what help the University is receiving until I am ready to report all. I came on this trip with great expectations, but my success has even now been far beyond what I expected, and I have only just begun. I had no idea that the wealthy and influential Liberals were so anxious to see the cause in Oregon succeed. Our enterprise is an assured success and the new building will be completed beyond a doubt. I know this is welcome news to all true Liberals, and it gives me great pleasure to report such progress.

I have spent a very pleasant time at Homer Davenport's fine home in East Orange, N. J., and go to New York city, fifteen miles away, nearly every day. It is a pleasant ride of forty minutes on the train and ferry, and many of the principal business men of New York have their residences in New Jersey. One Sunday, my cousin, Frank Bowers, and I decided to take a trip to Coney Island. Of course I had heard of this place all my life, but I had no idea what it really was. (It has changed since our visit.) I supposed that it was a fashionable summer resort, where one could go and enjoy a stroll on the beach and listen to what the "wild waves say." I had no idea that it was one vast "Midway Plaisance," filled with fake shows, beer gardens and variety theaters, where one had to elbow through the mobs on the narrow, little streets and hear nothing but the "spielers" cry "Frankfurters!"

We arrived at Coney Island at rather an early hour, and the early Sunday crowd had just begun to arrive. Frank had been there many times before and was going to have a little fun showing me a "touch of high life." He was disappointed when he saw the small crowd on the Bowery, but by the time we had taken in the grounds and paid a visit to the beach the crowd had arrived and the "high life" was beginning to get high. The beach I saw does not amount to much; there is but little of it and the sand is soft. I am anx-

ious to see Atlantic City and some other resorts and compare them with the great Pacific and its many attractions.

Our first experience of any importance was "shooting the chutes." We followed some clowns and a bass drum until we came to a gate, where five cents was required, and Frank bought two tickets, which admitted us to the enclosure. Once inside, we went along a street, either side lined with fakers of all descriptions. One man wanted to take our pictures and an old woman wanted to read our future. Frank would have had his fortune told, he said, if the fortune-teller had been a pretty girl. The next man wanted us to throw rings at some canes; another wanted us to fish for wooden fish and get a prize, and the last man wanted us to "get lost in the maze." He had a high fence of wire netting enclosing a place about 30 feet square, with a lot of cross fences making many compartments, connected with each other by gates. People would pay five cents to get into this "maze" and then try to find the way out. Well, Frank and I didn't bite at any of these things, but marched bravely past them all until we reached the edge of a small, artificial lake, which was filled with water and numerous boats floating about. At the farther end was a high structure, with an inclined plane extending from the lake to it. People ascend this plane by means of cable cars, get into boats and away they go as fast as gravitation will take them down the chute into the water below, where they arrive with a splash (and, of course, a scream) and go bounding and rocking across the little lake. Of course Frank and I had to try shooting the chutes, and we reached the bottom all right. Frank said it wouldn't be considered a success unless we screamed, so we both gave unearthly yells, which made the tight-rope walker fairly tremble, the fortune-teller to lose her fortune, and the people in the maze were greatly amazed.

We landed all right, climbed out of the boat and sat down to view the crowd and talk over times when we were boys together. Frank's father (Uncle Phil) took us to a circus in Salem once, and after the circus was over I had ten cents left and we both had a great deal of curiosity remaining, so we began to look about for some place to invest our capital and satisfy our curiosity. I had always heard a great deal about mermaids, but associated them with angels, spooks and other imaginary beings. Of course my attention was attracted and curiosity aroused, when, in front of a tent, I saw a man who was yelling himself hoarse, telling the people a wonderful tale about, not only a mermaid, but a mer-

maid's baby! He had them on exhibition right there in his tent. I could go no farther. I told Frank we would have to see that wonderful sight and it was my treat. Frank seemed as anxious as I, so we walked up to the front of the tent and asked the man what he would charge to let us see the human fish. He quit yelling long enough to look at us, then held out his hand and said "ten cents apiece." What were we going to do? I only had ten cents and Frank did not have anything. He was getting excited by this time, and while I was about to drive a bargain and get us both in for ten cents, he had found his father and persuaded him to yield up a dime. The man at the door took the money, smiled and resumed his yelling. I don't know what Frank expected to see, but I supposed we would be entitled to see a real, live mermaid swimming about in a tank, combing out her hair and rocking her baby to sleep on a rock. I had always believed the stories of mermaids to be myths, but when this man offered to show us one, I thought he must have it right there and supposed it would be alive. I suppose it would have been the same if the man had offered (at that time) to show me an angel or a god. I had too much confidence in human nature. Well, we walked in, and what did we see? On an old box was an object not more than two feet long. The body and tail resembled a dried codfish, while the head resembled that of a monkey. The whole thing was probably made in China out of some kind of fibre and was supposed to represent a prehistoric animal. The thing was void of all hair and had a ghastly appearance. The "baby" was built on the same plan of the mother; but on a smaller scale. I was disgusted. I don't know how Frank felt; I didn't look at him. We turned and walked out and found Uncle Phil and Harry waiting for us. To this day it is a great satisfaction for them to joke us about our exploit, but we would never admit that we were sold. I am glad they were not at Coney Island; they might have recalled some traits of character common to us when we were a few years younger. With the exception of this mermaid business, I was always a natural doubter, while Frank has always prided himself in believing things. As a result, he has joined the church, while I am still a heathen.

The rest of our experience on Coney Island was sight-seeing. We went to one of the numerous feed stables where they feed people, and after satisfying our appetites we again went to the Bowery. And what a mob! People were walking, crowding and jamming. There were shooting galleries, art galler-

ies and "gals" of all kinds. There were beer gardens, where negroes sang and danced while people swilled beer and ate frankfurters. There were other beer gardens where a continual vaudeville entertainment was going on all the time, and still another kind where dancing was the principal amusement. The week after we were there this whole conglomerate mass of dives, dance halls and merry-go-rounds went up in flames, and now the city authorities talk of making the whole thing into a park, with flower gardens instead of beer gardens. That is a splendid thing to do. It is a shame to spoil natural scenery and seaside resorts with a "Midway Plaisance." It would be a better plan to put such things in a swamp or on a desert. People don't go to such places to view the scenery. Girls go there to catch fellows and boys go there to see the girls and be "fleeced" by them, while still another class, and an exceedingly large class, go there because it is Coney Island and they have heard of it. You can decide for yourselves to what class Frank and I belonged.

But Coney Island was not the only place Frank and I visited together. I have described a place "wicked but not brutal," but we also saw an exhibition both wicked and brutal. We went to a prize fight. Homer Davenport gave us the tickets. Frank was to act as chaperon, for I had never seen a prize fight, while he had sketched many of them for the newspapers. The first contest was a preliminary fight of ten rounds between two negroes. They were so black that I couldn't see the effect of the blows, and as no blood flowed I considered it a tame affair and nearly went to sleep. But the next contest was more lively. One of these contestants was a white man, and when the negro hit him he always left a mark. Before the fight had progressed very far it was evident that the negro had the best of it, and the white man was knocked down three times and his face looked like a hamburger steak, as Frank expressed it, before he was "counted out" in the fourteenth round. In that round the negro knocked him down, but didn't quite knock him senseless. In nine seconds he got up again, to be hit the final blow. The negro hit him in the jaw about as hard as a mule can kick, and he fell like a dead man. That finished the fight. I was glad it did, for I had seen enough of it to convince me that man is but little above the brute in this respect, as well as some others. I have seen enough fighting; in fact, too much. I never did fight and don't like to see others fight.

We also visited the statue of Liberty. This time we had Homer's half-sister, Mrs. Ada Martin, with