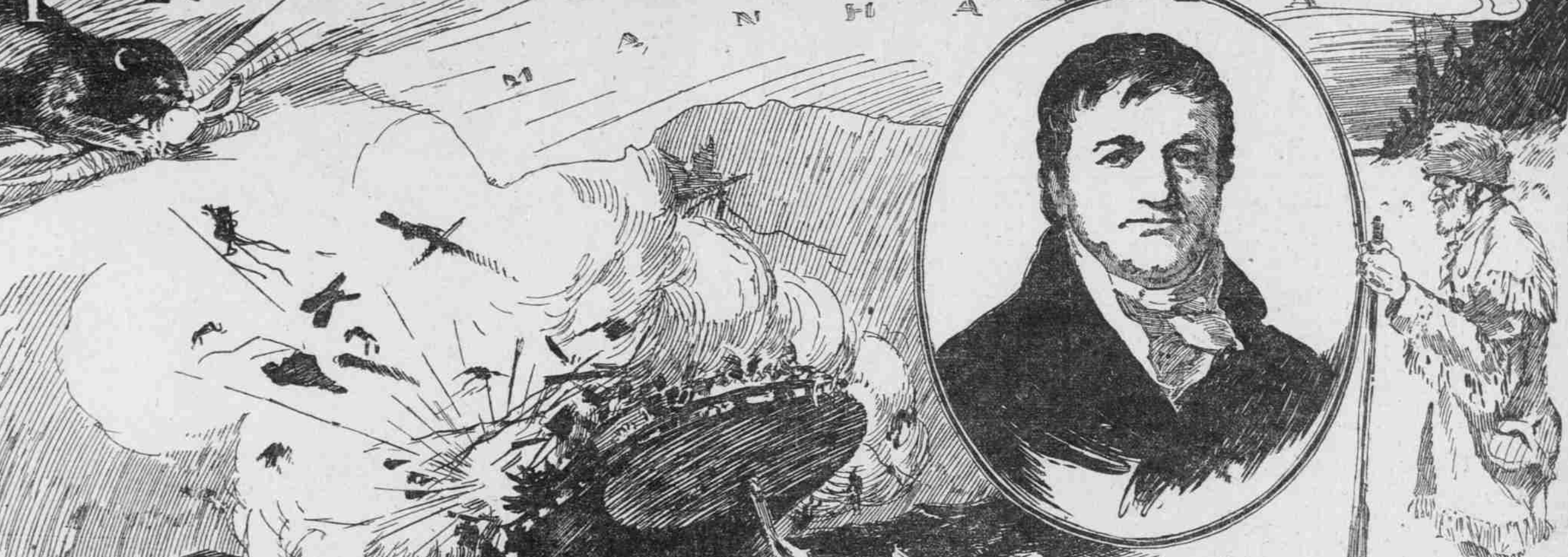


THE ROMANCE AND TRAGEDY OF THE ASTOR FORTUNE



JOHN JACOB ASTOR.

W. RICHARD SPILLMAN.

When Napoleon sold to the United States that vast territory then known as Louisiana and embracing most of the trans-Mississippi country, there blossomed in the brain of John Jacob Astor a plan of development so magnificent in scope that it fired the imagination of Thomas Jefferson until he got to think of it as his own idea. Time has not dimmed but rather mellowed its splendor, for it gave to the world one of the tragedies that never will be forgotten and that marks a rugged chapter in American history. By the camp fires in the Far Northwest and the Canadian wilds the story of the Tonquin has been told and retold until it is a part of the folk lore for the people of the forest and the plain.

Too bad that such a brilliant undertaking did not have a successful termination, but even if it did not fulfill the expectations of its originator it brought to the name of Astor a fame that is enduring. Measured by the conditions of a century ago and those of today, the project of Astor far surpasses those of any latter-day captain of trade, transportation or finance. He planned a real winning of the West, a peaceful conquest of a great region to which the Nation's title was doubtful, the establishment of a long chain of trading stations that would blaze the way for civilized man and open the door of opportunity for countless millions, and beyond the West itself he reached out to give to America the trade of China and practically the control of the Pacific. To do it all he asked no aid. Out of his purse he drew the money to pay the cost.

The Immigrant From Waldorf.

John Jacob Astor had come to the United States in 1781, an immigrant from Waldorf, a village on the Rhine. He expected to become a piano salesman, but while the ship that brought him over was icebound in the Chesapeake he heard enough from one of his fellow passengers to convince him that in this country there were far more possibilities for him as a dealer in furs than as a dealer in musical instruments. When he got to New York he started in at once as a buyer of pelts. At that time the business was in sad disorder. In earlier days the French had controlled the trade, through the company, the Ohio Valley, the Great Lakes and Mississippi the French trappers ranged, and their product found its way to Montreal. When the British came, the French from Canada and a new system of trade came with a new order of men, the trappers found it difficult to resist the new masters. The Revolution came on, and as its close the business was in the same state of disorder as after the French war. In the northern part of Canada the Hudson Bay Company was in control, but it was not aggressive at that time. Far more business was done by the independent merchants, who, a little later, merged their interests, formed the powerful Northwest Company, and controlled the whole lake region and the territory west. The men in the Northwest Company were Scotchmen, and they were the real lords and rulers of the Canadas. There was a smaller company, known as the Mackinac Company, that operated in the Upper Mississippi Valley. New York, in the days of British control, had a fair trade, but the Revolutionary War had driven away the British merchants.

Patently and carefully Astor went about building up a trade on his own account. He sought no alliances and looked for no favors. He traded with the Indians, the French and the English. Occasionally he traveled to Canada and purchased pelts from the Northwest Company, the Mackinac Company or the Hudson Bay Company. In good years and in bad years he prospered, for he was a genius as a merchant. He was a trade economist. Most of the goods he exchanged for pelts he manufactured himself.

Bought Land and Bought Land.

By the close of the 18th century he was the richest man in the United States. Then, as his wealth continued to grow, he did a thing that many persons thought was foolish. He bought land. Most of the land that he bought was on Manhattan Island, far beyond the developed section, and did not seem likely to be encroached upon by the little city for generations to come. Occasionally he spent a bit in his land investments. Once he purchased an estate of 10,000 acres in the Hudson. The wisest man in New York could be inviting ruin, tying up vast sums in unproductive land that meant nothing for him but taxes. But he kept on buying land.

Then, in the first decade of the 19th century, Louisiana was purchased from France, and John Jacob Astor, sitting in his office in Pearl street, studied the new map of the United States and marveled over the possibilities the newly acquired empire opened to the Nation. The region beyond the Mississippi was less known than in the interior of Africa today. A few years before the Columbia, that mighty river of the north, had been discovered. The Rocky Mountains were a barrier hard to cross. A great domain in the far Northwest would become the territory of the Nation whose people first established themselves there and raised

the flag. To establish a chain of trading stations along the Mississippi to its headwaters and then from the headwaters of the Columbia on the other side of the Rockies down to the mouth of the big river on the Pacific shore would open a highway to trade and settlement. The station at the mouth of the Columbia River would be a depot from which a fleet might trade along the Northwest coast to the Russian possessions in Alaska, and also with the rich markets of China and the whole Pacific.

It must be understood that thus far the whole Columbia River country was open territory. If the British got there first it would be theirs. The northern limits of the Louisiana country that Jefferson purchased were vague. And what made the situation acute was the fact that the Northwest Company had pushed across the Canadian Rockies and established some trading posts in a section of the Pacific and approaching the Columbia Valley.

The Charter.

To Washington went Mr. Astor to get from the President the sanction of the Government for the magnificent plan he had in mind. He got the enthusiastic support of Mr. Jefferson and the Cabinet. No doubt Mr. Astor saw great profit for himself in the enterprise, but far more than profit, he sought the fame the project would bring to him.

There was a lot of work preparing properly for the expedition. First of all, Mr. Astor organized the American Fur Company. That company got its charter July 10, 1807. Under the charter, which was to be under the laws of the United States, he recruited a force from among the attaches of the Northwest Company. For his lieutenants in the undertaking he drew mainly on the men of the Northwest Company. These men he made partners. He gave to them 10 per cent of the interest, retaining the other 90 per cent himself. He put up \$100,000. In his selection of men he exhibited exceptionally bad judgment. The plan was to send two forces, one by land and the other by water, to the mouth of the Columbia. The land force was to go by the Horn, the other through Canada and down the Mississippi and then up the Missouri, over the Rockies and down the Columbia. The land force was to establish posts along the route and meet the other force at the mouth of the Columbia.

A fine ship, the Tonquin, was equipped for the sea trip. She carried in her hold the frame of a schooner, which was to be employed in the Pacific coasting trade. The Tonquin was commanded by Jonathan Thorn, a Lieutenant in the Navy, on leave of absence. Nearly all of the Northwest Company men Mr. Astor had taken into partnership were British subjects, and before the Tonquin sailed two of them went to the British Minister to the United States and advised him of what Mr. Astor was doing. Hardly had the Tonquin left port than trouble began. Captain Thorn was a martinet, honest and punctilious, but with an abiding contempt for landmen. Duncan McDougall, the partner to whom Mr. Astor gave a proxy to act in any disagreement, was a peppy, fastidious creature. Thorn and McDougall clashed at once, and there was a condition approaching mutiny on the Tonquin from start to finish.

The Tonquin.

On September 8, 1810, the Tonquin left New York. The frigate Constitution conveyed her to sea, there being a British warship outside which, it was understood, intended to stop and search her and take her to England as a prize. The ship was aboard. The Tonquin got away without molestation, but there was turmoil aboard every day. Many times the captain threatened to put the partners, the clerks and all the voyageurs in irons. The ship stopped at the Falkland Islands and two of the partners had a narrow escape from being marooned there, the captain sailing away without them. But the ship became becalmed and the men were able to get to her in a boat. On Christmas day the Tonquin doubled Cape Horn and on February 12 reached the Sandwich Islands. There some Hawaiians were recruited for service in the Columbia River country, and the Tonquin resumed her journey. On March 22, 1811, the Tonquin arrived at the mouth of the Columbia. The weather was tempestuous and the sea was high. For several days vain efforts were made to find the channel. Eight men were lost in the capsizing of small boats that the captain sent out to find a way into the river. At last, after much delay and trouble, the Tonquin got inside, and on April 12 a site was selected on a small bay for the establishment of the station which was to be the company's headquarters on the Pacific. A fortified post was built, the Stars and Stripes were raised, and the settlement was named Astoria. From Astoria parties were sent up the river to explore the stream, establish stations at advantageous points and open up trade with the Indians.

After all the cargo destined for Astoria had been taken out of the ship, the Tonquin departed to proceed up the coast to trade for pelts at the various harbors, visit Alaska and begin business with the

Russians. Mr. Astor having sent a representative to St. Petersburg and made arrangements by which the American Fur Company was to supply the Russian posts with goods and handle the bulk of the seal skins the Russian hunters gathered in Bering's Sea.

Hardly had the Tonquin left than the people in Astoria learned from the Indians that a party of 50 white men had arrived several hundred miles up the Columbia River. It was a party of North-west Company men who had established a trading post on the Spokane River, which empties into the north branch of the Columbia. The Americans had arrived none too soon.

The Insult.

It was on June 5 that the Tonquin left Astoria. A few days later the ship arrived at Vancouver Island and anchored, much against the advice of the Indian interpreter, who told Captain Thorn the natives were the most treacherous of Indians. But the captain, obstinate and intolerant of opposition, would not heed advice. In the morning a great fleet of canoes put off from the shore and swarmed about the ship. The Indians had sea otter skins to sell. The Indians were headed by two sons of Vancouver, the Indian chief, and by an old sub-chief named Nookamis. Captain Thorn expected a profitable deal and had the deck spread with blankets, cloths, knives, beads and fishhooks. The Indians had some experience with Russian traders and Nookamis was especially shrewd. He scoffed at the offers. Captain Thorn made and exasperated that choleric gentleman, he gave orders to weigh anchor and sent some men aloft to set the sails. The Indians thereupon were prepared to trade on any terms. But they took knives and hatchets always in exchange for their otter skins. Then, as the captain gave orders for them to get into their boats there was a yell. Knives, clubs and hatchets were drawn and the Indians hurled themselves upon the whites. The first man to fall was Mr. Lewis, the ship's clerk. He was a calm, determined man, unobtrusive and quiet. He was leaning over some blankets which he had been bargaining with an Indian about when he was stabbed in the back and mortally wounded, down the companionway.

The captain made a glorious fight. He had nothing but a clasp knife. He drew this and cut and slashed until he had killed one Indian and crippled various others before he could free himself from the lot of savages who made the first rush at him. Then he tried to reach the quarter-deck and he strewed his path with dead and wounded. But now and then a knife, a club or an ax struck him and at last he fell. In an instant he was backed to death and then he was tossed overboard onto the knives of the savages in the canoes. All over the ship the battle raged furiously, but

The Tragedy.

The following morning parties of Indians came out in canoes again and made signs that they wanted to trade. The Tonquin was afloat along the floor of the hold until he reached the magazine, where four tons of powder were stored. Then there was a report such as perhaps never was heard in Vancouver Bay before or since. The Tonquin in an instant became a volcano. Its timbers, torn into ten thousand fragments, were thrown high in the air and then scattered over the waters. Of the Indians who were on the deck, the beach for a mile about was strewn for days with their dismembered parts. Lewis, ship's clerk, had avenged the Tonquin's death. As if this gruesome tragedy were not enough, it had a horrible aftermath. The four sailors who sought escape in the boat were cast upon the beach some miles away. They were brought back to the Indian village, tortured and then slain.

Revenge.

Four of the seven men who had gone aloft managed to get to the cabin, where they found Lewis. They barricaded the door and then with muskets and pistols fired through holes in the companionway and cleared the deck. As the Indians started away in their canoes the four sailors went on deck and used the deck guns with deadly effect on the savages. With the Indians went the Indian interpreter. He had not been molested during the massacre and he it was who subsequently reported the tragedy. That night the four sailors, unable to work the ship put off in a boat in hope of making their way to Astoria. They wanted to take Mr. Lewis, but he refused.

Soon after daylight a few canoes put off from shore to reconnoiter. Around and around they circled, but the sails of the Tonquin flapped idly and there was no sign of life on board. The canoes came close and then a man appeared on deck. It was Lewis, the ship's clerk. He made signs of welcome and invited the Indians on board. The Indians were unwilling at first, but as an hour followed hour they became emboldened. Then one crept cautiously aboard. There was no sign of life. The deck was soaked with blood, but Lewis had disappeared. Another Indian climbed aboard and then another. Then the canoes came out from shore in good number. There were many beads, blankets, knives and trinkets about the deck for any one to have who chose to take them. Back to the shore went word of the plunder that was so plentiful. Then the Indians came in hordes. When the deck was crowded once more, crowded almost as it had been the day before, a man wounded unto

death crept along the floor of the hold until he reached the magazine, where four tons of powder were stored. Then there was a report such as perhaps never was heard in Vancouver Bay before or since. The Tonquin in an instant became a volcano. Its timbers, torn into ten thousand fragments, were thrown high in the air and then scattered over the waters. Of the Indians who were on the deck, the beach for a mile about was strewn for days with their dismembered parts. Lewis, ship's clerk, had avenged the Tonquin's death. As if this gruesome tragedy were not enough, it had a horrible aftermath. The four sailors who sought escape in the boat were cast upon the beach some miles away. They were brought back to the Indian village, tortured and then slain.

McDougall's Treachery.

Whatever courage McDougall possessed seems to have departed after he heard the fate of the Tonquin. It did not matter that the overland force, after a series of remarkable and trying adventures, reached the Columbia River country and joined the Astoria contingent. It did not matter that the Beaver, a supply ship sent by Mr. Astor, arrived from New York and that McDougall saw peril and disaster everywhere. War had broken out between the United States and Great Britain and he feared the British would swoop down upon him.

As if Mr. Astor had not suffered enough from the stupidity of his agents, a new chapter now was added to the story of their folly. The Beaver,

after visiting Alaska, went to China with a cargo of skins. Opportunity was offered to sell the cargo at a profit of \$200,000, but the tool in charge dilly-dallied until the season had passed and the cargo had to be sacrificed. Then the Lark, another supply ship sent by Mr. Astor, was wrecked, partly through carelessness. McDougall, worrying because the Beaver had not returned promptly from the Alaska-China trip, turned around when he heard a party of Northwesters were bound for Astoria, and that a ship sent by the Northwest Company and escorted by a British man-of-war was en route for the mouth of the Columbia. When the party of Northwesters paddled down the river McDougall hastened to greet them. Then using the proxy Mr. Astor had given him, he sold the whole Astoria establishment to the Northwest Company for a song. The Stars and Stripes were hauled down and the English flag raised instead. As reward for his conduct McDougall was made a partner in the Northwest Company.

So ended Astoria and the great dream of John Jacob Astor. For years and years the British held sway in the Columbia Valley. Then after disputes and threats of conflict, the boundary trouble was settled and American resumed control. But the winning of the West had been delayed a decade if not a quarter of a century, and the most magnificent project for American trade and American expansion that ever was fostered by one man had failed.

If John Jacob Astor ever regretted the loss of his \$400,000 he did not show it, but he did lament that so many men should die in a mission of peace. When he passed away, full of years and honors, his fortune was colossal, measured as it was by the standards of those days. There have been three generations of Astors since his death, but none of the name to match him in courage, imagination or ability. And the Astor fortune has grown to be the greatest in the world. But what would have been its size if the Astoria enterprise had been as brilliantly successful as its plan warranted?—Copyright, 1909, by Richard Spillman.

His Powerful Editorial

Proprietor of the Geville Trumpet Blast Learns of Its Effects

"A TYPGRAPHICAL craftsman on a professional tour of the country after the manner of this kind," said the ex-editor of the Geville Trumpet Blast, as the riding himself from the day and simultaneously struck the Trumpet Blast office for the price of two beers, not necessarily to be charged on account, but as an evidence of the office's good faith in the promise of the tourist to come back after awhile and maybe set some type. The Geville beer seemed to hit his palate with favor, for he actually came back and said he would stay with me for a day or so, provided the resources of the office warranted it being worth his while, and if too much service wasn't required.

"All the service I required just then from anybody was the setting up of a half column or so of reading matter for the week's issue of the 'Trumpet Blast,' as the riding himself from the day and simultaneously struck the Trumpet Blast office for the price of two beers, not necessarily to be charged on account, but as an evidence of the office's good faith in the promise of the tourist to come back after awhile and maybe set some type. The Geville beer seemed to hit his palate with favor, for he actually came back and said he would stay with me for a day or so, provided the resources of the office warranted it being worth his while, and if too much service wasn't required.

"A couple of hours later I pulled up at the house of my patron. 'Is Hiram home?' I asked his wife. 'Well, no,' said his wife, 'Hiram ain't home just now. He drew to Geville this morning by the hill road. If you're riding up the river, though, you'll more'n likely meet him comin' back.' 'I headed for the river road to waylay Hiram or get back to Geville while he was still there. I met him before he had gone two miles up the road. I pulled up my horse and halted him. He recognized me, and without stopping his team he said to me: 'How do do? Settled that air \$450 with your partner this mornin'?' 'On he went. 'My partner?' 'Huh, huh. And I couldn't help but think that it behooved me to get back to Geville without tarrying along the road to admire the scenery and listen to the war-

ling of the birds, as there was tolerably good reason to believe that he was in a certain rudimentary capacity during my absence, and there was danger that he might be moved to invest under that of that \$450 in Geville beer. So I turned back as fast as the deacon's horse could take me.

"The 'Trumpet Blast' office was vacant when I got there. Feeling that activities had simply been removed from there to the Geville beershop, I was about to hurry over there, when an envelope lying on my table addressed to me caught my eye. I opened it. It contained a note from the Geville beer shop. 'We piece pinned to it was an editorial I had written on 'The Ties of Home,' and which I had left on the copy book for him to put in type.

"Revered Sir: When I send you the word how my poor old father and mother welcomed their long-traveling and prodigal son with tears and hugs of joy and how grateful they were when I told them it was this piece of yours, 'The Ties of Home,' that turned me with irresistible longing back to the old farm, I think I can see you overcome with thankfulness that you let your genius loose in writing it and with regret that the old gem from down the river was only shy \$4.50 on his paper to speed me on my way back to my home. I had left it in charge. It broke me all up and moved me so that I couldn't wait for the stage. And now at last I know who wrote 'Where is My Wandering Boy Tonight?' and 'Geville Beer.' It was you, bless you! If we do not meet again on earth, shall we meet in—but let that pass. It is too sad for this occasion.

"Not au revoir, but fare you well! Thine, JOHN SHAKESPEARE."

"There are people in Geville to this day who do not know why the 'Trumpet Blast of Freedom' got to come out last week. 'Ties of outside work,' I stated in the next issue. And that was no lie, either."

Government Hotel Business.

The Government is going into the hotel business, having agreed, through its insular branch in the Philippines, to take \$300,000 at par of the bonds to provide money for a new hotel at Manila, which, with its working capital, is to represent an investment of \$600,000. When the Philippines got to come out last week, I stated in the next issue. And that was no lie, either."



HOPPECKERS ON THE RANCH NEAR SPRINGFIELD, OR.

SPRINGFIELD, Or., Oct. 23.—(Special.)—The above photograph was taken on the hop ranch of Bruno Vites, two miles from this city. The ranch was leased this year by William Kriesel, of Portland. It will be noted that the women in the party have adopted overalls as the most convenient costume while picking hops.