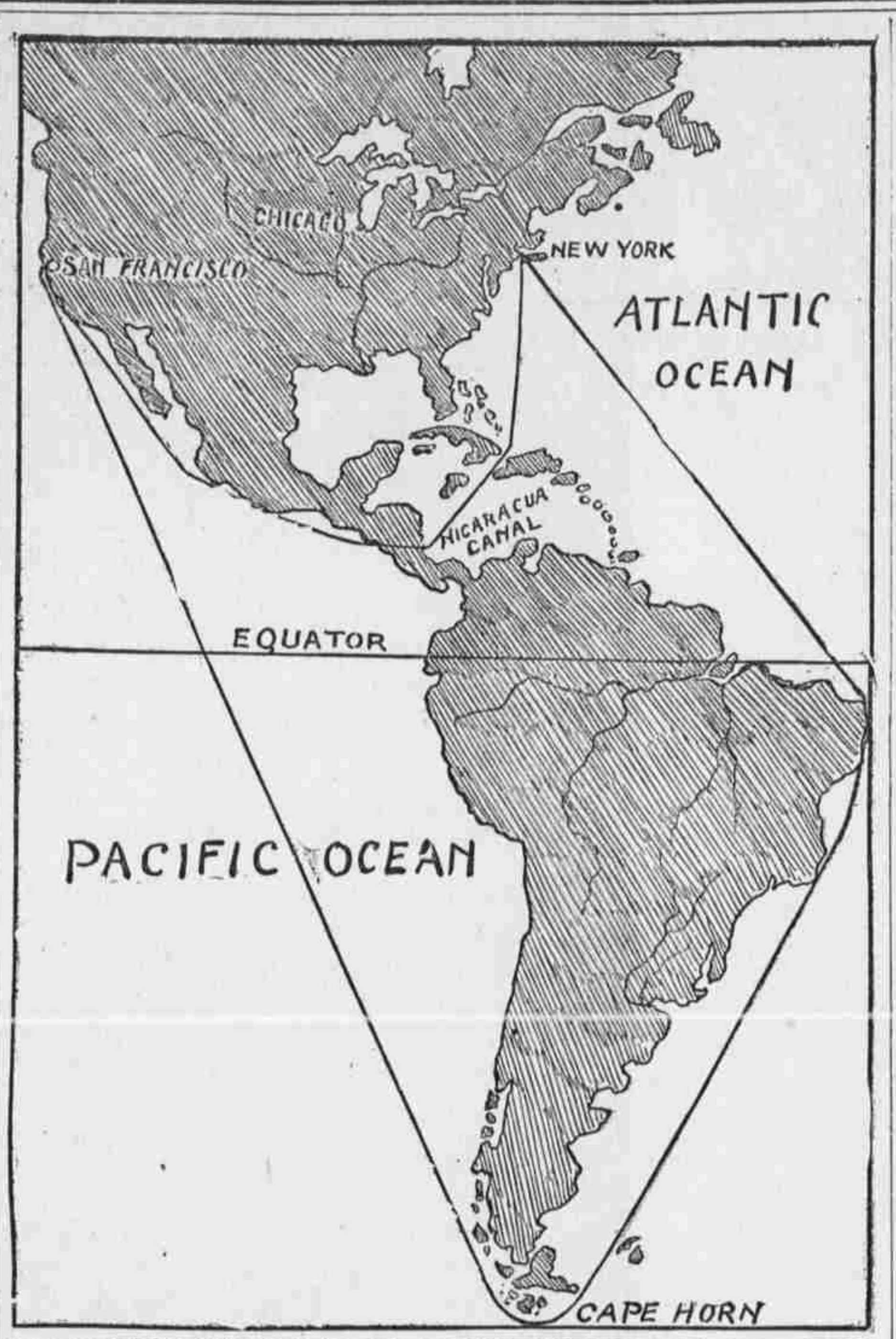
NEED OF THE CANAL.

NICARAGUA DITCH WOULD SAVE TIME AND MONEY.

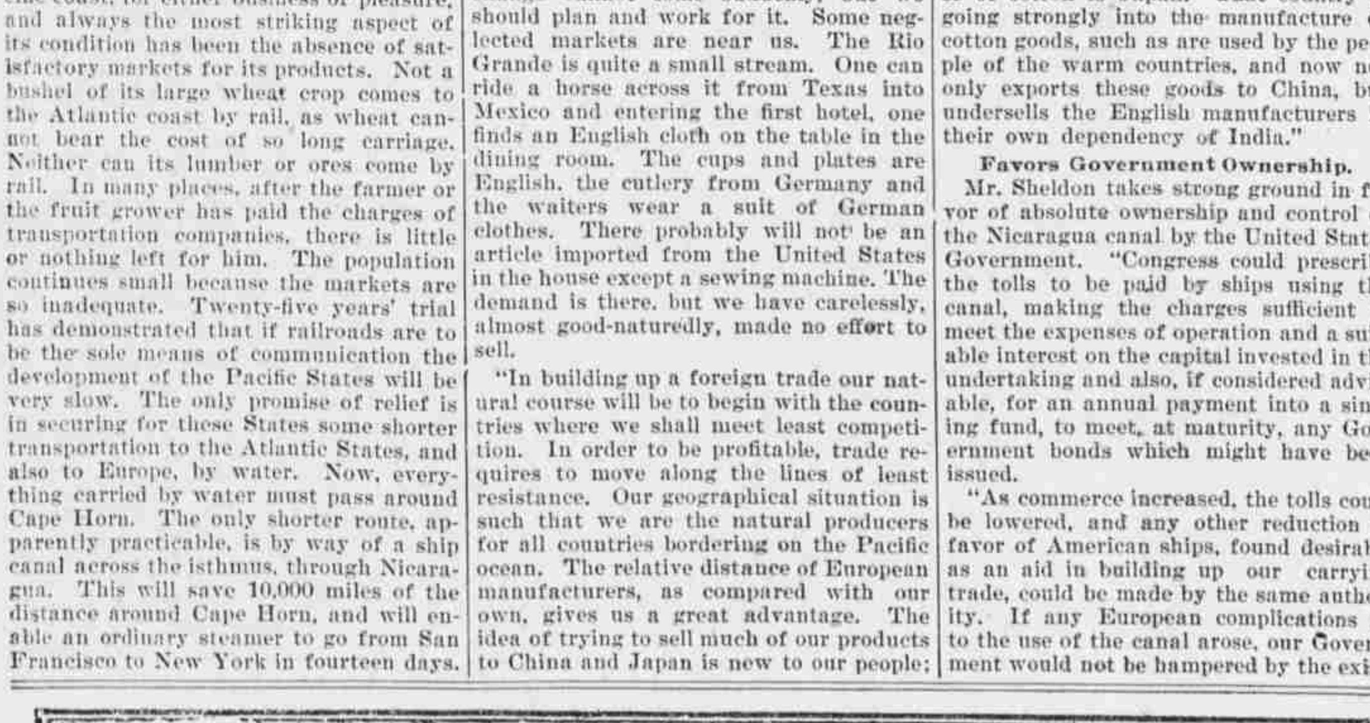
As a Business Venture Alone the Proposed Artery, It Is Claimed, Would Be a Big Bonanza in the Way of Tolls and Lock Charges.

That the proposed Nicaraguan canal is vital to the interests of the United States was emphatically demonstrated during the recent war with Spain when our battleship Oregon was compelled to make her long voyage down around the Horn to reach the scene of naval operations. The apprehension of the American people during the long detour was painfully and justly excited, while the Government was deprived of several weeks' service of its finest man-of-war during the time it required to sail down the west coast of South America and up on the eastern side. Then, again, the commercial benefits to be derived by the completion of the proposed short-cut waterway are inestimable. A most comprehensive article on the subject of the Nicaraguan canal has been written by Henry I. Sheldon, a Chicagoan. This is said by experts to be the most complete study of the canal question yet undertaken. Mr. Sheldon visited Nicaragua three years ago and traversed the entire route of the projected waterway, examined the work done, and secured reliable data as to cost and methods of construction. Mr. Sheldon went not as the agent of any company or of the Government, but merely as an individual having no interest, pecuniary or friendly, with the present company constructing the canal, and was careful to incur no obligations which would prevent his taking an unbiased view.

"It may be well to say at the outset," writes Mr. Sheldon, "that I reached the conclusion that the canal in Nicaragua is practicable, and can be constructed at a cost on which fair returns can be earned. It also seems clear that, for many reasons, it is not a suitable work for private capital to undertake, and that it will be better that our Government should assist the undertaking. There are strong equities on the side of national aid, inasmuch as the chief benefits will never be the tolls collected from passing vessels. The canal may so develop our trade with Eastern Asia that a single year of that trade will exceed in volume the total cost of its construction. Its opening will double in value almost every acre of agricultural land in California, Oregon and Washington, and the population of those States will be more than doubled. For many years I have occasionally visited the Pacific coast, for either business or pleasure, and always the most striking aspect of its condition has been the absence of satisfactory markets for its products. Not a bushel of its large wheat crop comes to the Atlantic coast by rail, as wheat cannot bear the cost of so long carriage. Neither can its lumber or ores come by rail. In many places, after the farmer or the fruit grower has paid the charges of transportation companies, there is little or nothing left for him. The population continues small because the markets are so inadequate. Twenty-five years' trial has demonstrated that if railroads are to be the sole means of communication the development of the Pacific States will be very slow. The only promise of relief is in securing for these States some shorter transportation to the Atlantic States, and also to Europe, by water. Now, everything carried by water must pass around Cape Horn. The only shorter route, apparently practicable, is by way of a ship canal across the isthmus, through Nicaragua. This will save 10,000 miles of the distance around Cape Horn, and will enable an ordinary steamer to go from San Francisco to New York in fourteen days.



MAP SHOWING PRESENT ROUTE AROUND THE HORN AND THE SHORT-CUT MADE BY THE PROPOSED CANAL.



MAP SHOWING ROUTE OF THE PROPOSED NICARAGUAN CANAL.

The exact distance, by such canal, will be 4,760 miles. The ordinary railroad freight service consumes from seventeen to twenty-one days. The canal line will be only about 60 per cent longer than the rail line.

Needed in the Time of War.

"Our country is so widely extended, 3,000 miles from east to west, that cheap and speedy water transportation like this is almost absolutely needed to bind and hold it more closely together. At present, in time of war, such parts of our growing navy as might be on either the Atlantic or the Pacific side would be for a considerable time of no use on the other ocean. The canal, when built, will promote the development of better markets for our manufactures in foreign countries bordering on the Pacific. These are less exposed than those on the Atlantic to European competition. This nation cannot be considered a first-class power when our people are only buyers from the rest of the world. Exporting agricultural products does not make a great nation. The French and the Germans do not engage in such exportation, finding other activities to be more profitable. A glance at the principal food-exporting countries shows the truth. They are such countries as Southern Russia, India and, latterly, the Argentine Republic, and they are poor, and they stay poor. We need to keep our wheat, feed our operatives with it, and send abroad the products they manufacture. The change cannot come suddenly, but we should plan and work for it. Some neglected markets are near us. The Rio Grande is quite a small stream. One can ride a horse across it from Texas into Mexico and entering the first hotel, one finds an English cloth on the table in the dining room. The cups and plates are English, the cutlery from Germany and the waiters wear a suit of German clothes. There probably will not be an article imported from the United States in the house except a sewing machine. The demand is there, but we have carelessly, almost good-naturedly, made no effort to sell.

"In building up a foreign trade our natural course will be to begin with the countries where we shall meet least competition. In order to be profitable, trade requires to move along the lines of least resistance. Our geographical situation is such that we are the natural producers for all countries bordering on the Pacific ocean. The relative distance of European manufacturers, as compared with our own, gives us a great advantage. The idea of trying to sell much of our products to China and Japan is new to our people; but those countries are entering on a career of great development, and why should not the American people have a share in supplying their wants? The trade reports tell the story of their awakening. The purchases of their silver were:

In 1885	$28,000,000
In 1894	113,000,000

China bought from foreign countries:

In 1885	$132,000,000
In 1894	243,000,000

"We have not been alive to this demand. Of Japan's purchases abroad of $113,000,000 in 1894, we sold her only $11,000,000. We excelled in paying money to her, however, for in that year we bought of her goods amounting to $143,000,000. Of China's purchases from other nations of $243,000,000 in 1894, we supplied only $10,000,000. We were good buyers, however, taking $25,000,000 of her products. Our diplomatic agents report that with more alertness and enterprise we could have furnished to Japan, and at a reasonable profit, 60 per cent of all her foreign purchases in 1894. One reason why the people of our gulf States are so unanimous for a canal in Nicaragua, is that it will open an additional market for their cotton. The United States is the chief producer of the world's cotton, and prices for this product have been deplorably low of late years, entailing great privations in many Southern homes. It is the old story. We have been producing more cotton than we could find markets for. The new buyer of cotton is Japan. That country is going strongly into the manufacture of cotton goods, such as are used by the people of the warm countries, and now not only exports these goods to China, but undersells the English manufacturers in their own dependency of India."

Favors Government Ownership.

Mr. Sheldon takes strong ground in favor of absolute ownership and control of the Nicaragua canal by the United States Government. "Congress could prescribe the tolls to be paid by ships using the canal, making the charges sufficient to meet the expenses of operation and a suitable interest on the capital invested in the undertaking and also, if considered advisable, for an annual payment into a sinking fund, to meet, at maturity, any Government bonds which might have been issued.

"As commerce increased, the tolls could be lowered, and any other reduction in favor of American ships, found desirable as an aid in building up our carrying trade, could be made by the same authority. If any European complications as to the use of the canal arose, our Government would not be hampered by the existence of a canal company, nor by being obliged to obtain the current action of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, but would be in a position to decide for itself what course to take. The possible claims of England to joint control of the canal under the Clayton-Bulwer treaty should be ignored. Those claims could never be allowed, and we probably would hear little of them after we had constructed the canal with our own money and were in full possession. The Suez canal has been neutralized by an aggeement between the great powers, but that waterway is closely connected with the Eastern question, the balance of power, and other large subjects involving the nations of Europe. There is no analogy as to neutralization between the situation at Suez and that at Nicaragua."

Estimates of Probable Revenue.

Mr. Sheldon's estimates of the probable revenue to be derived from the canal are encouraging. "As the conditions are so similar, it is necessary, in taking a broad view of probable earnings, to consider the business transacted by the Suez canal. The results there shown are more helpful than mere estimates; they are ascertained facts. That company deals with the world's commerce, just as will be done in Nicaragua. In 1895 its business amounted to 8,440,000 tons. It had then been in operation twenty-five years. The first year, 1870, its business was only 436,000 tons; in 1871, 760,000 tons; in 1872, 1,100,000 tons, and there has been a fairly steady increase ever since, up to the amount in 1895. During all this time the volume of the world's commerce has steadily increased. Not only has trade more and more adjusted itself to the Suez route, but also the aggregate amount of trade has become much larger. Some allowance should be made for the advantages possessed by the Suez canal as a now well-established route. Taking its business eight years ago may be a fair offset for this item. The amount for 1888 exceeded 6,000,000 tons. The earlier Suez tolls were $2.77 per ton, which have been gradually reduced the past twenty years, and traffic is not prepared now to stand heavy charges in any direction. A moderate tariff will be in every way desirable. A favorable, but approximate, estimate of the possible revenues in Nicaragua would be as follows: With tolls at $1.50 per ton at the outset, and a business of at least 6,000,000 tons after the canal is fairly in operation, a gross income of $9,000,000 would be obtained. Administration, maintenance and operation for 1895 cost the Suez canal about $1,800,000. Taking into account all the dam and embankment work at Nicaragua, as well as the heavy rainfall, an allowance of $3,000,000 as an annual average for expenses may be fair, leaving a net income of $6,000,000. An undertaking of this character is to be gone into only as a long-term investment, and the earnings for the first few years after it is completed are not to be considered as sufficient for a final judgment. The greatest earnings will come later on.

"The canal route, as at present projected, is to be 174 miles long from Brito on the Pacific to Greytown on the Átlantic. The first half mile from Brito is at sea level. Then in two miles the canal rises 110 feet, through three locks to the summit level, 151 miles long, then in 4½ miles it descends, through three locks, to sea level again, and then continues at sea level 9¼ miles to Greytown. The estimated time required for an ordinary steamer to cross from one ocean to the other is twenty-eight hours. Electric lighting is to make passage by night quite feasible. The allowance for passing through locks is forty-five minutes for each lock. Only twenty-six miles of the 168 miles of canal is to be through excavations. Some twenty-one miles is through basins, and 121 miles through the lake and the river. Provision should be made from the first for increasing the accommodation when it shall become necessary. Widening can be carried on at the same time that vessels are passing. So can deepening. To increase the size of the locks, however, will cause all traffic to be suspended. The locks in the present plans appear to be too small for permanent use. They are each to be 650 feet long, 70 feet wide, and 28 feet deep."

History of the Canal Scheme.

In December, 1881, Senator Miller of California introduced a bill in Congress to incorporate "The Marine Canal Company of Nicaragua," with the purpose of constructing the canal. Gen. U. S. Grant, Howard Potter, E. D. Morgan, H. J. Jewett and other prominent capitalists were concerned in the proposed enterprise. The bill met with bitter opposition in Congress, and was utterly defeated by the failure of the Marine Bank of New York, in which the Grants were ruined financially. The Nicaragua Canal Company was incorporated in 1887, with former Senator Warner Miller as president, and for a time made good progress. Its success induced opposition, and in 1889 the Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua, which received the sanction of President Cleveland, was incorporated. Hiram Hitchcock was the first president, but he was subsequently succeeded by Thomas B. Atkins. The work of digging the canal was begun and continued until financial misfortune overtook the enterprise, the construction company failing in the terrible panic of 1893. The contract for the construction was then awarded to Warner Miller Nicaragua Company, which still holds its concession. Many attempts have since been made to secure the aid of the Government, but the bills have failed to pass both houses. Congress, however, authorized the appointment of a technical commission of civil engineers to re-examine the canal line, and it is the report of this commission which will be presented to Congress in December.

The principal authorities on transportation statistics have made estimates that the Nicaragua route should divert from 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 tons of low-rate freight, such as flour, dry goods, machinery, coal, etc., from the overland traffic. Suppose 2,500,000 tons were diverted to steamship lines from the Atlantic and gulf ports, going by the canal route. With the usual ocean tonnage from New York to the Pacific, and other vessels which would go through the canal, a conservative calculation places the annual freight at 7,000,000 tons. At the lowest Suez canal rate this would give an annual revenue of $12,810,000. The route in favor runs from Greytown on the Atlantic coast, via the San Juan river and Lake Nicaragua to Brito, on the Pacific. The total distance is 174 miles, divided as follows:

	Miles.
Brito to lake	17.27
Lake Lajas to San Juan river	56.50
Slack water in the San Juan	68.54
San Francisco Basin Ochoa to Eastern divide	12.01
Cut through the Eastern divide	3.00
Canal to Greytown	16.48

Thunderstorms in Jamaica.

At Port Royal, Jamaica, for six months in the year thunderstorms are of almost daily occurrence, and guests to picnics and garden parties are usually invited to assemble "after the thunderstorm."

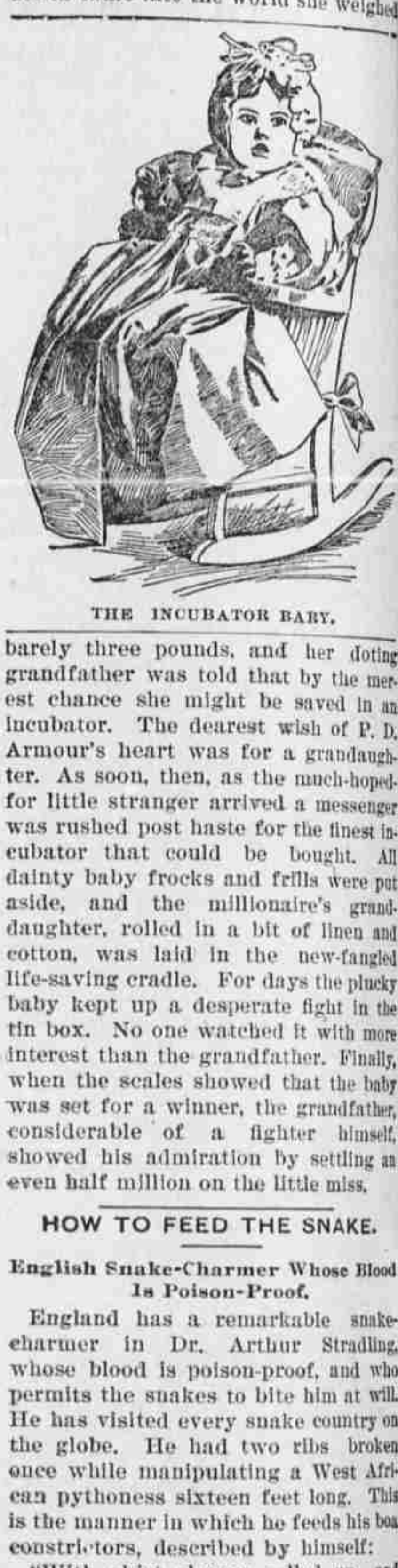
The French may be fickle in everything else, but they are always faithful in their love—of change.

RAISED IN AN INCUBATOR.

This Little One Is Now Healthy, and Worth $500,000.

Miss Lolita Armour, just 2 years old, and the granddaughter of Philip D. Armour, is the sturdiest incubator baby in the world. She is as pretty, weighs as much, and is as full of life to-day as babies which the storks usher into the world more propitiously.

Ever since the sly little minx, tucked away in her incubator cradle, heard the grandfather say that if she lived he would give her a half million for her grit, she has done nothing but thrive industriously. She is the child of Mr. and Mrs. J. Ogden Armour, of Michigan avenue, Chicago. When little Miss Lolita came into the world she weighed



THE INCUBATOR BABY.

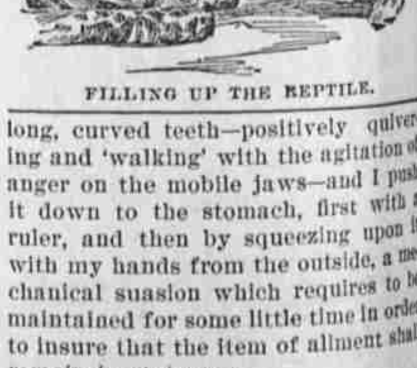
barely three pounds, and her doting grandfather was told that by the merest chance she might be saved in an incubator. The dearest wish of P. D. Armour's heart was for a grandaughter. As soon, then, as the much-hoped-for little stranger arrived a messenger was rushed post haste for the finest incubator that could be bought. All dainty baby frocks and frills were put aside, and the millionaire's granddaughter, rolled in a bit of linen and cotton, was laid in the new-fangled life-saving cradle. For days the plucky baby kept up a desperate fight in the tin box. No one watched it with more interest than the grandfather. Finally, when the scales showed that the baby was set for a winner, the grandfather, considerable of a fighter himself, showed his admiration by settling an even half million on the little miss.

HOW TO FEED THE SNAKE.

English Snake-Charmer Whose Blood Is Poison-Proof.

England has a remarkable snake-charmer in Dr. Arthur Stradling, whose blood is poison-proof, and who permits the snakes to bite him at will. He has visited every snake country on the globe. He had two ribs broken once while manipulating a West African pythoness sixteen feet long. This is the manner in which he feeds his boa constrictors, described by himself:

"With shirt sleeves rolled up and stockinged feet I grasp the creature just behind the head and separate its jaws by gentle pressure with a silver spatula. It's more knack than force, for all snakes are exceedingly sensitive about the mouth; a light tap on the muzzle will turn the fiercest of them. Then the assistant (his little son) pops the lump of meat, dead rat, bird or whatever the morsel may be right in among the quivering triple rows of



FILLING UP THE REPTILE.

long, curved teeth—positively quivering and 'walking' with the agitation of anger on the mobile jaws—and I push it down to the stomach, first with a ruler, and then by squeezing upon it with my hands from the outside, a mechanical suasion which requires to be maintained for some little time in order to insure that the item of aliment shall remain in statu quo.

"In the interval the youngster is not idle and finds plenty of occupation in shifting the reptile's coils and disengaging various parts of me from a too close embrace. And so we fill the beast up until he can hold no more."

Electric Plants on Warships.

A big battle-ship has on board an electric plant capable of lighting a town of 5,000 inhabitants.

An old man stopped in front of a window to look at a display of baby shoes. Another old man came up, and said: "Don't look at baby shoes; look at coffins."