

Mystery Stories From The West Indies

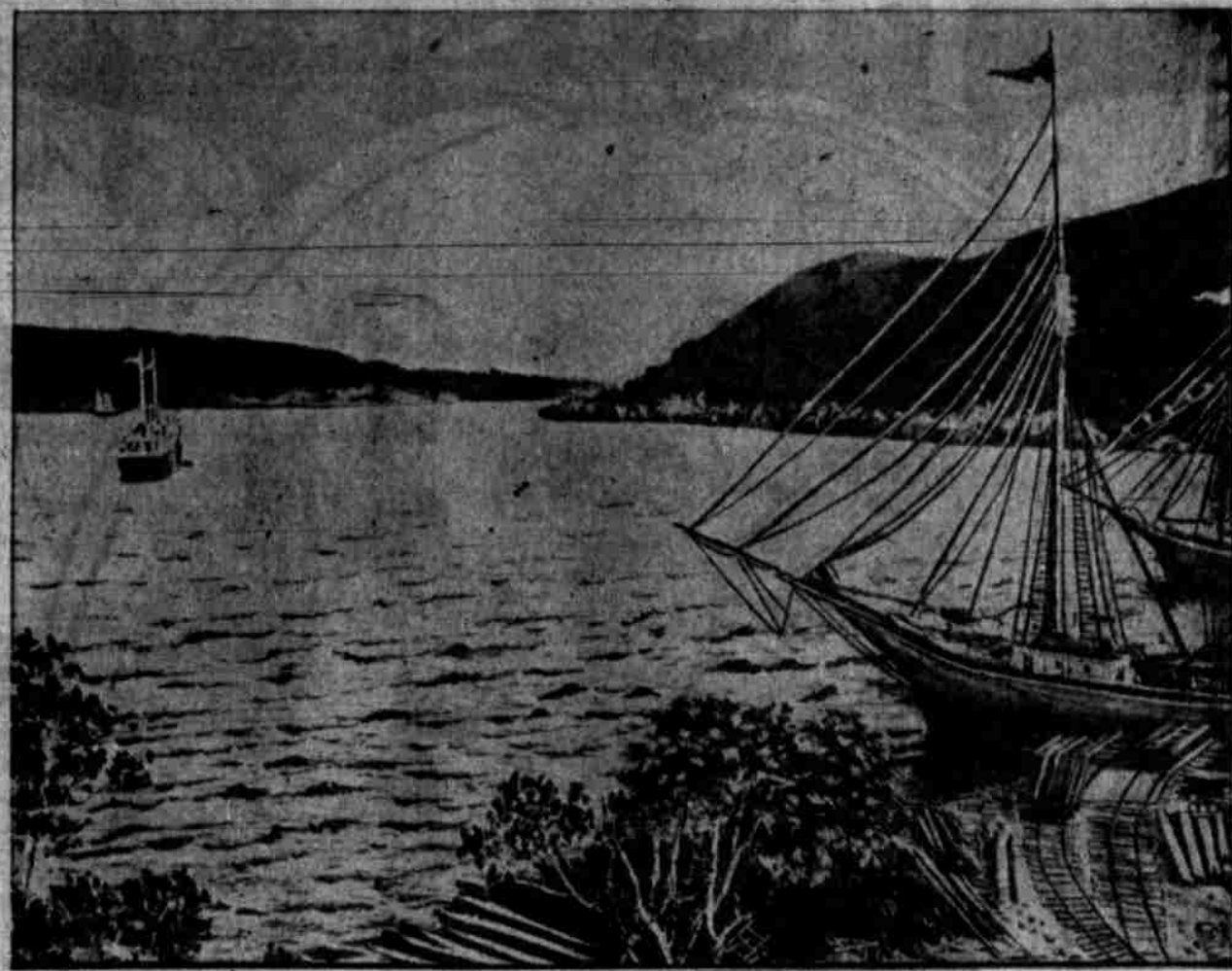
(By Frederic J. Maslin.)

THE moon was riding splendidly in the clear southern sky as our ship swung at anchor in a West Indian port. Across the shining water there came confused land noises, which, mingling with the clatter of the hoisting machinery as it strained and groaned at the task of lifting cargo aboard, made sleep out of the question. The passengers gathered around a group of story-tellers on the upper deck and listened to many marvelous yarns of experience on land and sea.

"The most remarkable thing that ever happened to me," said the scientist, stretching himself and lighting a fresh cigar, "was when I swallowed a loco loco bean in Hayti. The voodoo priests of this island are the most clever and mysterious poisoners in the world. They are able to administer various vegetable compounds that will temporarily paralyze or permanently destroy any or all of the five senses. Consider the predicament of the victim to whom strawberries are no more delectable than putty, or another who cannot tell the difference between the sweetest perfume and ammonia. It must be a fearful shock for a person to suddenly find himself incapable of speech or deprived of the faculty of hearing. Imagine the state of mind you would be in if you found you could not distinguish between the touch of a fish and a cat's back, or a hot plate and a piece of ice. When told of the astonishing results of their skill I expressed myself in terms of unmistakable skepticism. I was too outspoken in my opinion, as I soon found to my sorrow.

"Instead of taking away my sight or smell, or disturbing my other senses, a loco loco bean was put in my food, and for a few days I was the most perplexed mortal on the globe. I am naturally a close observer, and the way I began 'swell' things was alarming. If I pinched myself once I did a hundred times to determine whether I was awake or dreaming. When I went to bed one night the window-shades were white, but as I awoke the next morning I noticed that they were blood-red. My servant had a mole about the size of a hazelnut on his chin, and I was puzzled when I saw that it commenced to shift its position on his face. In the morning it would be on the right side, only to appear on the left during the afternoon.

"After a pitcher of ice-water had turned into a bottle of cheap wine, and that while I was in the room, I became thoroughly alarmed for my sanity. One day I worked myself into a dripping perspiration stopping my razor because it would not cut, when, lo and behold! I discovered that it had been converted into a paper-cutter. Things went from bad to worse. I wore my dress-suit to breakfast one morning, and that same evening at the dinner hour started for the dining-room in my bathrobe. I actually became afraid to look in my mirror for fear the cold evenings I had would turn into pennies even while I looked at them. Don't you think it would make you feel foolish if you were certain that you had put on patent leathers before leaving home to find yourself sitting in the public square in lousy slippers?



A WEST INDIAN HARBOR

"The climax of my trouble occurred one evening when I was summoned by the doorbell to find some men carrying my prostrate form up the stairs on a stretcher. Imagine the situation! I was standing in the door, yet there I was on the stretcher. The injured man had my voice and my clothes. He was my exact double, even to the size of the hand spot and the scar on my wrist. As I talked with him I found that he knew things no mortal other than myself was aware of. It was too much. I became frantic and shrieked for help as if I were pursued by a snake. An old witch of a doctor was called in, who gave me a little pellet to swallow. My mind cleared as quickly as it had clouded. She had given me an antidote for the loco loco bean.

"That reminds me," said the diplomat, glancing at the listeners surrounding the group, "of a strange thing that happened in the interior of South America several years ago, while I was on duty in an out-of-the-way station in the heart of the jungle. I have heard of the astonishing things the fakirs of India do with snakes, but I never knew of anything quite so wonderful as what I am about to relate. There was a homely native girl called Nama, who was remarkable for two things. She was a marvelous musician, and she had a pet snake that trailed around after her wherever she went.

"Nama was a mystery. Her parents were unknown, and she made no friends. She seldom spoke to any one, and always moved off if an effort was made to engage her in conversation. She would be absent for days, and sometimes for weeks, without any one knowing her whereabouts. An air of stealth was about the silent creature that caused dread without taking into consideration the snake, for the sight of that big, ugly reptile and the very evident control she had over it was enough to give one the shivers. But, man alive, the way that black girl could play the flute and charm the devil! She could imitate the songs of angels as easy as

I can light my pipe. It was just like glory to hear that instrument of hers talking to the night. No matter what the topic of conversation was, all talk ceased when Nama came a-serenading. You could not hire her and you could not coax her. When she got good and ready to play she did it, and then only.

"The strange part of it was that Nama always had a white sweetheart. The girl must have been possessed, because it was said of her that she could win any man she wanted, and furthermore, that every one who had anything to do with her soon met his death. I never shall forget the last chap to whom she took a notion. He was a big, blonde fellow, and Nama spotted him the day he arrived. The boys saw her looking at him over her shoulder as she passed, and we all knew that there soon would be some more music in the air. They told him her history and warned him not to have anything to do with her. He laughed good-naturedly and said he was on the way home to be married. Nevertheless Nama got him. She played as sweetly as if she were picking her own heartstrings to make the melody. He sat on the club veranda, listened like one entranced, and then went out to the thicket where she and the snake were waiting for him.

"It was pitiful to see him trying to break away from her. Day after day he vowed to leave, but as many times she came to chain him with her plaintive airs which struck into his very soul. We who knew her music well, had never heard the like before. A thousand prayers sobbed in unison could not have been more appealing. Once he failed to go to her, and she sent the snake to kill him. He was doing in a hammock at the club, and awoke just as the vicious reptile raised its head to strike. He pulled his revolver and by a lucky chance sent a bullet through the snake's head. Simultaneously with the pistol shot, there was a scream from the thicket, and we found Nama stone dead. There was not a mark nor scratch upon her. When the priest

came, he crossed himself, then said: 'The affinity between the woman and the serpent is explained—they had but one soul.'

"It does beat the deuce," said the captain, "the mysterious way some of these monstrosities can shut off the mortal coil, whenever the notion strikes them. I had a Chinese cook on this ship who did the nastiest job in the way of a fancy death that ever happened. Wing Lee was a good cook, but he couldn't take a joke. The boys used to be awake nights trying to think up schemes to get the laugh on that celestial. They put a tick-tack over his porthole one night, and Wing thought the devil had made his case a personal injury. He burned so many Jones sticks in his effort to root the evil spirit that the ship smelled almost like a fumigating plant. When he found that it was only a joke he was mad enough to fight.

"I tried to make the crew leave him alone, because I was afraid Wing would quit, or hunt some one while in a temper, and in either case I would be short a cook. The boys were a little hard on him. It was downright mean when they put chewing-gum in his pig-tail. It couldn't hurt him, Wing, worse if they had broken one of his legs. If he had not taken their pranks so seriously in the beginning, they would doubtless have left him alone, but the simple-minded Chinik just went all to pieces, and the jokers had him dancing about two-thirds of the time."

"But every lane has its turn, and Wing Lee gave those jokers a parting shock that none of them will forget to his dying day. At a small port in Brazil, a circus agent came aboard with a box of snakes, and the reptiles were left on deck so they could get the air. During the night one of the big ones squeezed his way out through the slats, and the first thing I knew those blasted snakes were running all over the ship. We thought we had caught them all, but the agent said he wasn't sure; that there

might still be two or three little ones at liberty. The jokers put a rubber snake in Wing's bunk, and I never heard such a racket on board ship as when that Chinaman ran amuck.

"Of course, the fools couldn't keep still and Wing caught on that it was another joke. He discovered the gully parties, and such a scene I never expect to see again. He simply jumped up and down, he was so wrought up. He covered three of them and the way he berated them in Chinese could not have been worse had he been reading their death warrants. His face fairly shone with wrath. Making a dramatic gesture to the heavens, he cast a last look at the sea, then hid right down there on the deck and died with no more effort than if he were going to sleep. He never strained a muscle nor uttered a groan. The doctor went over him, or bruise or rupture about him. It cost him his life, but Wing gave his persecutors something to remember for the remainder of their days."

"What did you do about it?" asked the scientist.

"I simply made an entry in my log book," answered the captain, "that Wing Lee, a Chinese cook, had died of spite. 'If heard a queer story in Buenos Ayres not long ago," began the drummer, "which was vouched for by men whose truthfulness could not be questioned. The church authorities had planned to erect a new chapel in a remote province of Argentina, and a dispute arose over the location of the proposed house of worship. Finally one faction gained control of the arrangements and determined upon the site. It was unfortunate that ill-feeling should arise over a religious matter, yet it seemed certain that there would be strained relations on account of the divided opinion of the congregation. The question was finally decided, and the threatened breach prevented, in the most unexpected, as well as unaccountable manner."

"The material for the structure was upon the ground, and the building had begun. While some teamsters were conveying a statue of the virgin to be placed in the new church, the oxen suddenly balked. There was evidently no reason for the stubbornness of the animals. They had never been known to balk before; they were not hungry, nor thirsty, nor tired. The drivers whipped them, twisted their tails, put mud in their nostrils, but all the usual tricks failed to make the patient beasts budge an inch. Another yoke of oxen was brought up, but they refused to pull. After the failure of a third attempt to move the statue, it dawned upon those interested that this was the appointed place for their sanctuary. While no one had discovered the fact, investigation proved that it was really a much more suitable location than either of those for which the two factions had been contending. The spot upon which the oxen balked was unanimously chosen as the proper place."



"AN OLD WITCH OF A DOCTOR."



WING LEE COULDN'T TAKE A JOKE.

Skansen's Varfest, When Stockholm Makes a Holiday

(By Olof E. Carvin.)
(Special Correspondent of The Journal.)

STOCKHOLM, June 5.—This city is quite proud of what is here called "Skansen," or translated, "The Fortifications." It is now a park, but it is also much more—it is an epitome of the Swedish people, how they build and how they spin and weave, an exhibition of how they work and play, and sing and dance. In fact, an illustration in most minute detail of how they live and how they think. Or rather, should it be said, how they did this in the past. For things change rapidly.

As an institution it is unique and deserves much more than the few lines there is room for. As it is said, however, that other countries are copying the idea and gathering the fragments that can still be found of what has been. But this does not deal gently with the souvenirs of the past. Sweden was fortunate in possessing Axelius, who saw the value of these records and started in early and kept forever at it, gathering the priceless collection to be seen on the hills of this park and in its buildings.

Here there has just been celebrated the yearly festival called "Skansen's Varfest," one more expression of the Northman's love for spring. It lasted five days with virtually the same program each day. For all that I could not keep away. Having attended the first day I must needs go once more, and found time to go the last day also. But the program varies from year to year. Several novelties were introduced, and judging from the large attendance, highly appreciated.

At 4 o'clock, p. m. the firing of a Swedish salute indicates the beginning. Not until 11 o'clock, when the last tired dancers are willing to desist is the interested foreigner aware how tired he, too, really is.

Immediately after the firing of cannon the great market is officially declared opened by a drummer and a "lanaman," who march around accompanied by another man, who reads the announcement in accordance with the customs of olden times. The many stands are opened and coffee, ale, wine, punch, sandwiches and pasties can be had, for no doubt you have traveled a long way to attend this celebrated market and need some refreshment.

Perhaps you wish to gamble. It is very easy. Right across the way is the wheel of fortune, and even if you lose 10- or 20-crowns there is one comfort—All the profit goes to the state. For thus they think here, that as long as people will insist on losing money in lotteries, why should private persons profit? It is, too, so much easier to regulate it.

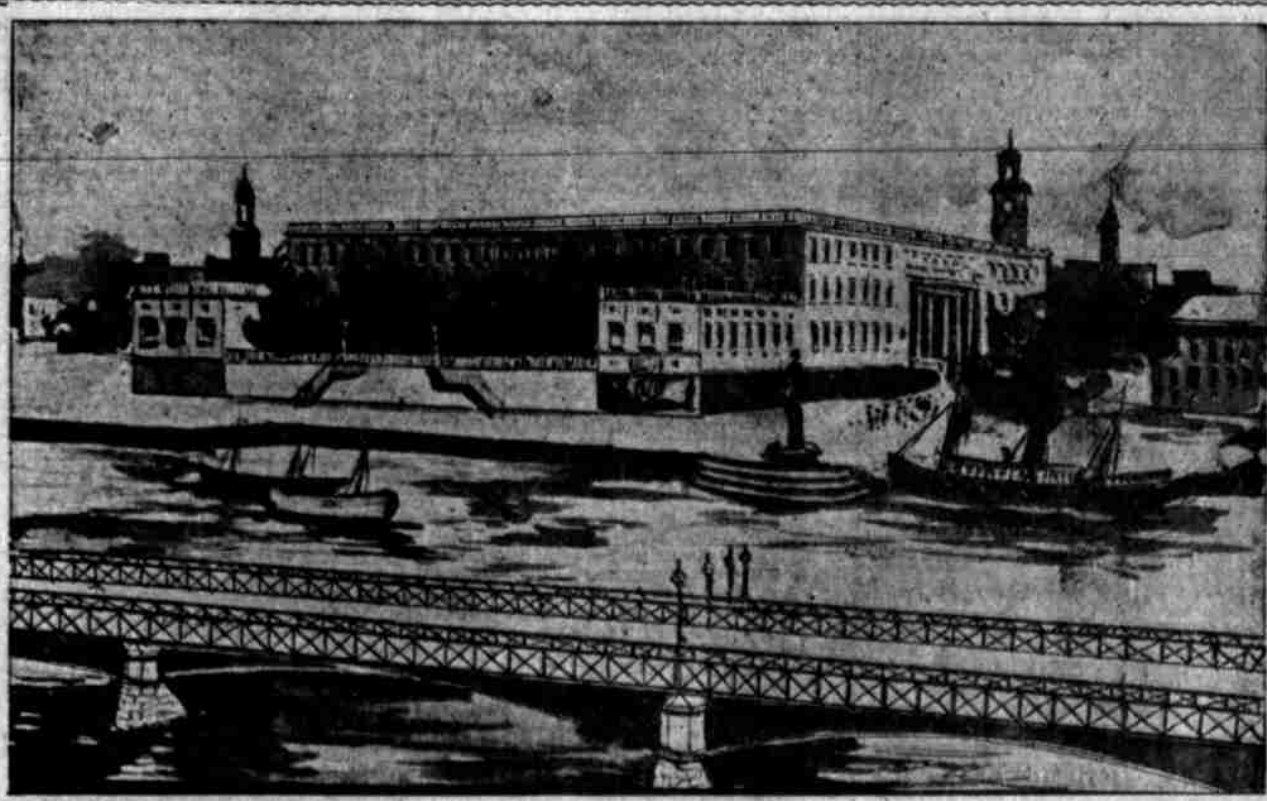
At 8 o'clock the gypsies come and tramp on one of the knolls, a band of 20 people with their leader. It is not easy

for the Swedes to make up as gypsies; their eyes are so blue and then they like to keep clean. The clear complexion is readily seen in spite of efforts to cover it. The gypsies come down in twos and threes to the busy market and practice their time-honored and honorable vocation of singing, dancing, begging, fortune-telling or stealing, as the case may be.

In various corners will be seen young students playing violins, thus trying to gather money to carry them through another term at the academy. In one of the old quaint farm houses from Blackinge, Jon Sæctor sings "The Bird" which is the country troubadour performed for a gaping populace. When I heard him he was singing the fourteenth verse of a ballad which recorded the wars of Napoleon. They think there must have been 25 verses and every one had the same refrain.

At 7:30 the star number of the festival begins. This was a combination performance of folk songs and folk dances on a platform in the open, with rising ground on one side for the spectators and a background consisting of a cliff covered with the deep, dark verdure of pines and firs. The performers came down a half-concealed path, their bright many colored costumes closely copied from the old national dress once in common use. It certainly is a picture. They gather in a large ring facing the center. Clapping hands they move slowly in the circle following the leader and his partner. Then the leader sings a verse from one of those beautiful, quaint folk songs in a minor key. It was Sven I. Rosenblad. The chorus sings the refrain and then the step is much livelier. Once more the leader sings, it is the second verse, and the dance movement is slow and quiet, so all may hear the words of the ballad. Thus it changes about, solo and chorus, the dancers furnishing their own music with their singing.

For the folkvissas was never intended to be sung in a concert hall or to a piano, the only way in which we now hear it. It and the folk dances were intimately connected. It appears that at one time these were sung all over Europe. At least the songs were very similar. But most of them have long been forgotten and the dances that accompanied them, also. Some of the songs were collected in Sweden by Geijer and others, but the dances nearly all passed into oblivion. There is, however, one corner of Europe where the traditions have been kept up. On the Faeroe islands many of the old songs and the old dances are still in the possession of the common people. Fru Hulda Garborg from Norway has taken great pains to study these dances and has much success in reintroducing them in Norway and this spring here in



THE ROYAL PALACE AT STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN.

ATLANTIC CABLE GUESSES.
When it was first proposed to lay a marine cable many intelligent people said it would not sink to the bottom, but would remain suspended at a certain depth because of the density of the water due to pressure from above. Of course the pressure increases with the depth on all sides of the cable in its descent through the sea, but as practically everything on earth is more compressible than water it is obvious that the iron wire, yarn, gutta-percha and copper conductor forming the cable must be more and more compressed as they descend. Thus the cable constantly increases in density, or specific gravity, in going down, while the equal bulk of water surrounding it continues to have, practically speaking, very nearly the same specific gravity as at the surface. Without this valuable property of water the hydraulic press would not exist.

Some of the most distinguished naval men have made the blunder that is mentioned above. Even at a comparatively recent period Captain Murray of the

British navy, the celebrated nautical author, wrote in one of his novels: "What a mine of wealth must lie buried in the sands! What riches lie entangled among its rocks or remain suspended in the unfathomable gulf, where the compressed fluid is equal in gravity to that which it encloses!"

When the first Atlantic cable was about to be laid, to obviate this supposed difficulty it was gravely proposed to fasten the cable across at a given maximum depth between buoys and floats, or even parachutes, at which ships should call, hook on and send messages to the shore. Others proposed to apply gummed cotton to the cable, set it afloat and leave the gum to dissolve and "let the cable down quietly."

Might Have Been Worse.
From the Detroit Free Press.
Briggs—Castleton was out driving with the Widow Grasper the other day when the horse ran away with him, and he's laid up in the hospital."
Griggs—"Well, it might have been worse—the widow might have run away with him."

A PLAN THAT FAILED.
From the Astoria Budget.
The local cigar makers union won a decisive battle today over the tobacco trust. Yesterday there arrived in the city a number of painters whose object was to paint large signs on the buildings of the city advertising a brand of cigars made by non-union labor for the trust. The local union appointed a committee to prevent this work being done and through only the usual legal methods with the owners of the buildings the painters will leave the city this evening without having been able to place a single sign in the city on any building. The manager of the painters was very much excited over his failure and it was necessary this morning for the police to place him under arrest to keep him from defacing property after the owner had refused him permission.

His Ancestral Pill.
Interviewer—"Tell me something about your family tree, colonel."
Great Man (from Minneapolis)—"Ay tank it has an Axel tree, young feller."

Sweden. Thus a new word has come into the dictionary, the songdance.

Her work is very much appreciated and is very much in line with similar efforts in Sweden, where the society "Folkdansens Vanner" has for some time picked up the shreds of what is left of revived dances that were all but forgotten. The folkdance is now very popular with the young people, but the steps are nearly always to instrumental music, even though it be a single violin or a mere accordion.

All the songdances are not in a minor key. Some are very lively and the dancing more like work. Others are quite humorous, that is, the words and the steps are humorous. Then others are of quite different character, to punish publicly some one who has been unmanly or in some way occasioned ridicule or contempt.

There was, too, some solo dancing by a young Norwegian, some of the movements verging on the acrobatic, though graceful and lithe for all that. The applause showed how thoroughly appreciated all was.

About 8 o'clock there was the most interest in "Nannemans' garden." Here the little children in the district school were being examined in the presence of parents and friends by the antiquated, pedantic and poorly educated type of teacher who is now a rare specimen in real life. The foolish and irrelevant questions which were more often than not elicited absurd and ridiculous answers, kept the crowded audience in the best of humor in spite of suffocation in the low-roofed school room.

In a shed near by a traveling troupe of "barn-stormers" had advertised the performance of two dramas, the music furnished by their own orchestra. Of course, that must be grand. So I entered. Here the little children in the district school were being examined in the presence of parents and friends by the antiquated, pedantic and poorly educated type of teacher who is now a rare specimen in real life. The foolish and irrelevant questions which were more often than not elicited absurd and ridiculous answers, kept the crowded audience in the best of humor in spite of suffocation in the low-roofed school room.

But it was the acting that caught the audience. Of course, it was bloody. The end of the second, the final act saw nearly every one dead or dying. Unhappily the "drop curtain" got stuck about midway, and the moon, which traveled too fast across the scene in front of the trees, came to an abrupt standstill when hardly more than half way. But then one can't expect the perfection of modern stage scenery for a fee of 1 cent. Every one was well pleased and satisfied he had his money's worth.

At 11:30 the gypsies entered on the stage of the open-air theatre, where they

camped around their fire, played their games, laughed, quarreled and sang. Yes, sang those sad plaintive melodies, with third notes and quarter notes, those songs which tell of a longing for home. In their language is no word for home, but five for moving.

During nearly all this time the Marine band has been performing on the top of the hill to a grateful public. At 10 o'clock they surrender the platform. Three or four letters are sent and couple after couple of young people, and some of them very young, step up to join hands in dancing the old folkdances. They are all dressed in the national costumes.

At 11 o'clock it is time to quit, they say, but the light is still good enough to read by. And so I go home convinced that I shall long remember this beautiful sunny day in Skansen, where a happy populace has enjoyed itself, light-hearted and with abandon of all the worries of every-day life.

QUEER PEOPLE.
Thomas Thorp, a wealthy Scotchman, died leaving his fortune to a poor relative on condition that a headstone with the name of the said Thomas Thorp and a verse of poetry be erected beside the grave. Costing so much a word to chide letters in the stone, the poor relative ordered that the poetry should be brief. Upon his refusal to approve, on account of their too great length, the lines—

"Here lies the corp
Of Thomas Thorp,"
the following was finally offered and accepted:

"Thorp's
Corpse."
According to the Rev. C. F. Collyer, an English missionary, the Koran "never cuts his hair or beard. To do so is considered a mark of dishonor to his parents, whom he strongly reverences. Any hairs that may happen to come out, and even the partings of his finger nails, are carefully saved and put into the coffin with him, in order that he may go back to mother earth intact."

Dr. John Kerr, in his new book of "Memoirs," recalls a number of humorous Scotch stories. Among them is a story of the "argumentatively" Gipsy Scot, who, calling on the minister and being told to go home and return the next day when he was sober, replied: "Man, minister, when I'm sober I don't care a d—n for religious conversation."

Whom to Draw Out First.
From the Chicago Tribune.
House Hunter—"Go outside, man. Do you want families with children?"
Agent of apartment house—"Yes, if the children are over 10."