STRAY TOPICS FROM OLD NEW YORK

New York, Sept. 26.—Eureka, the "one" thing lacking to make bachelorhood an ideal state, has been supplied at last and bachelors, at least in greater New York, will never again yield to the pressure of missing buttons, ripped seams in their underwear and holes in their socks, to sacrifice their single-blessedness and become married, simply to have their wives look after the annoying little details of their wardrobe. It took a Chicago woman to solve the problem and to remove the last obstacle to successful bachelorhood. Miss Gertrude Barnum, president of the Women's league of Chicago, and a well-known settlement worker, conceived the idea and carried it into practical execution in this city. She first established the "Ship Shape Shop," in an experimental way in connection with the Hartley Settlement house on West Forty-sixth street and so great was its success that a larger house had to be found for the establishment on West Forty-seventh street.

"Wardrobe repairs for bachelors and maids, business and professional women, husbands of absentee wives, tired mothers, hotel guests, etc., is the legend on the sign displayed on the door of the establishment, which is conducted under the direction of Miss Barnum. It is an excellent institution, which gives employment to a number of young women and will undoubtedly furnish work and a fair income to many more, as the enterprise prospers. The "Ship Shape Shop" makes contracts at $1 a month with bachelors, old maids, professional men and women, etc., to keep their shirts, underwear, socks, stockings, etc., in good repair. More important repairs and other work is paid for extra according to estimate. Miss Barnum's idea is undoubtedly clever and a blessing to all bachelor men and women, but it will scarcely meet with the approval of President Roosevelt. It is really antagonistic to his views on matrimony and race suicide, as it makes bachelorhood easier and more free from cares than ever.

It is probably premature to speak of the days of the horse being counted, as the price of automobiles and other horseless contrivances is still a great deal higher than that of horseflesh; but it seems quite likely that the days of horse racing are on the wane. There are many indications to that effect. What killed horse racing? Several causes contributed to the decline of that sport, which has been in favor for many centuries. Crookedness among the professional horsemen, trainers, jockeys, etc., had a great deal to do with the decline of horse-racing. The abuses of the betting ring also brought discredit upon the sport and finally led to an attempt to suppress the gambling feature of racing. But, with the gambling feature eliminated, horse racing ceased to be of interest to so large a percentage of the race-track patrons, that the attendance at the races has dwindled to the point of making racing unprofitable to the track owners as well as to the horse owners. This year's "Futurity" was witnessed by only 10,000 people, while in former years, before the betting ring was abolished, it used to draw from 30,000 to 40,000. But, as in the days of Caesar the great masses insist upon having "panem et Circenses"; and, if horse racing has lost its interest owing to the elimination of the gambling feature, they take to something else. Baseball has largely profited by the suppression of the betting rings on New York's race courses and fully 100,000 witnessed the last four games with Chicago at the Polo grounds on August 7, 8, 10 and 11. Just recently the Giants played the Brooklyn team five games before a crowd of 60,000 "fans."

It has become quite common in recent years to use race tracks, ordinarily intended for horse racing, for speed tests and races of automobiles. Now another use has been found for such courses. The old Morris Park race course, the historic scene of many a famous race, is the first to capitulate to ultra-modernism. It has been leased by the Aeronautical society and will be used as the club site and testing grounds of the society. Where once the thoroughbreds struggled for victory, monoplanes and hellcopters will spin and soar and, occasionally tumble in the future. Some of the old quarters have already been turned into machine and carpenter shops, where air craft of all sorts of design may be put together. Out on the field are two structures from which single rails are laid across the turf. This apparatus is to give a flying start to ambitious experimenters. The clubhouse has been converted into the home of the Aeronautical society and its walls are covered with photographs of airships and dirigible balloons.

The schools of greater New York are now in full running order and daily about 640,000 children—just think, about 25,000 more than the entire population of Boston—will go to their respective schools to imbibe knowledge of things necessary and superfluous. It is a disgraceful fact, that fully 52,000 children will be unable to find proper accommodation and will be compelled to attend school but part of the day. Some old fashioned critics say that it would be much better to use the money supplied by the taxpayers for the building of additional school houses than to waste it on fads which benefit only a few special teachers and are of no earthly use to the children. But the fads have many friends in the board of education and their ambition to keep New York at the head of the procession must be gratified.

With a few exceptions the opium dens in the Chinese quarter of the city have been suppressed by the police. Now it has been discovered that the strict laws against the sale and use of cocaine have been skillfully evaded by the fraternity of "dope-fiends" and that they had a number of places scattered throughout the city, where they could obtain their favorite drug and give themselves up to the delightful effects of the "dope" without fear of police interference. One of these cocaine dens was pulled the other day and a number of cocaine users and the keepers of the place were arrested. The arrests were made on a Saturday and the prisoners were kept in the lockup over Sunday. By Monday morning their nerves were in such a condition from the unaccustomed abstinence from the drug, that small doses of cocaine had to be administered to the drug victims to enable them to appear in court.

Parents will be interested in the fact that a new use has been found for babies. The baby boy of a family living in one of the suburban villages on the Jersey side has demonstrated the fact that babies make excellent burglar alarms. The other night a naughty burglar entered the house where the aforesaid masculine infant eats and sleeps and yells while father works. It was in the middle of the night, when the boy was awakened by the noise made by the amateur burglar. Upon awakening the boy began at once to set up such a howl for his midnight lunch, that the burglar fled in consternation, before he had finished his job. In addition to that he ran right into the arms of a policeman and was "pinched." And all that because the youngster made such a fine burglar alarm.

Evelyn Thaw, of unsavory history, seems to have reached the end of her string. Her portrait, painted by Harrington Mann in Paris some years ago at the order of Stanford White, has been seized by the sheriff for non-payment of a millinery bill of $263 contracted by the gay ex-chorus girl and those, who have not yet been cured of their hysterical admiration for that woman will soon have an opportunity to bid in the beautifully framed and exquisitely painted likeness of Evelyn at the sheriff's sale.

LONG ISLAND PRAIRIES.

Fifty Square Miles of Genuine Prairies at New York's Door.

In a region so densely populated and so easily accessible to travelers as the western third of Long Island, it would seem almost impossible at this late day to make a geographical discovery worth mentioning, and yet probably not one person in a thousand (or even one scientist in a thousand) in the United States knows that there are something like 50 square miles of genuine prairies on this island.

The prairies are situated mostly in the central portion of Nassau county, in all the three townships of the county—Hempstead, North Hempstead and Oyster Bay—and have long been known to people living near by as the Hempstead Plains, says Forest and Stream. These thousands of treeless acres, covered with grasses and herb and dotted with a few bushes of course attracted the attention of the early settlers of Hempstead in the seventeenth century, and have been used more or less for grazing and other purposes ever since. But by the time geographies came to be written in this country these prairies were an old story to the inhabitants, few of whom ever realized that there was no other prairie within several hundred miles, so not many accounts of this remarkable area have ever found their way into print.

Almost by accident I "stumbled across" the Hempstead Plains one day last summer and was surprised to find that on thousands of acres the flora is still practically all of native species, which is pretty good evidence to the botanist that such land has ever been cleared or plowed up. This state of affairs is rather remarkable, considering that Nassau county now has about 300 inhabitants to the square mile and is all within the radius in which it is profitable to haul farm products to New York by wagon. The parts of the prairie which are under cultivation seem to produce well, but the native sod is so tough and the subsoil so dry and porous that it is not a very easy matter to put the land in shape for tillage. Besides, considerable areas are owned or leased by wealthy persons and kept open for the sake of fox hunting and other equestrian sports and thus protected from the encroachments of real estate developments.

The prairie originally extended about as far west as Floral park, but farms and villages have encroached on it so that now only about one fifth of it remains in an approximately natural condition, and even that bids fair to be obliterated before the end of the present century by the expansion of New York City. The undisturbed prairies now center about Hicksville (25 miles from New York), from which village one can walk about 10 miles in almost any direction and find essentially the same vegetation that the earliest white settlers saw.

Like the western prairies the Hempstead plains are very nearly level. They are crossed from north to south by a few broad shallow valleys, all of which are dry except the one in which East Meadow Brook has its source, about three miles east of Garden City. The soil is a very fine grained dark brown loam, underlaid at a depth of a foot or two by a great thickness of coarse sand and gravel.

The natural vegetation averages about two feet tall, covers the ground pretty closely and consists of over 50 species of plants, some of which are rarely found elsewhere, as a favored few among botanists know. Likewise several birds which frequent this area are seldom seen in other parts of the island.

The cause of the treelessness of this large area is as much of a mystery as it always has been in the case of the better known western prairies, which have puzzled scientists for nearly a century. It is of course difficult for trees to invade an area already thickly clothed with grass vegetation on account of fire, grazing, rapid evaporation, scarcity of humus, etc., but this does not explain how the grasses got ahead of the trees in the beginning.

The Old Farm.

The mellow smell of hollyhocks
And marigolds and pinks and phlox
  Blends with the homely garden scents
Of onions shivering into rods,
Of peppers scarlet with their pods,
  And (rose of all the esculents)
Of broad plebeian cabages,
Breathing content and corpulent ease.

The buzz of wasp and fly makes hot
The spaces of the garden plot;
  And from the orchard, where the fruit
Ripens and rounds, or, loosed with heat,
Rolls, hornet-clung, before the feet,
  Sounds warm the veery's golden flute,
That mixes with the sleepy hum
Of bees that drowsily go and come.

The podded musk of gourd and vine
Embowers a gate of roughest pine,
  That leads into a wood where day
Sits leaning o'er a forest pool,
Watching the lilies opening cool,
  And dragon flies at airy play,
While, dim and near, the quietness
Rustles and stirs her leafy dress.

Far off a cowbell clangs awake
The noon who slumbers in the brake;
  And now a pewee plaintively
Whistles the day to sleep again;
A rain-crow croaks a rune for rain,
  And from the ripest apple tree
A great gold apple thuds, where, slow,
The red cock curves his neck to crow.

Hens cluck their broods from place to place,
While, clinking home, with chain and trace,
  The cart-horse plods along the road
Where afternoon sits with his dreams;
Hot fragrance of hay-making streams
  Above him, and a high-heaped load
Goes creaking by, and with it, sweet,
The aromatic soul of heat.

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" the evenfall
Cries, and the hills repeat the call:
  "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" and by the log
Labor unharnesses his plow,
While to the barn comes cow on cow;
  "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" and, with his dog,
Barefooted boyhood down the lane
"Coo-ee's" the cattle home again.
—Madison Cawein, in the Outlook.

Dorothy Davis of the Blunkall Company at Lyric.

DEATH BY THE GARROTE

Capital Punishment in Cuba, Where the Executioner Loves His Art.

Cuba retains from the long Spanish occupation the garrote as the instrument of capital punishment. A very neat and quick acting affair is the garrote in the Carcel in Havana, that prison building which occupies the choicest site in the whole city. The Carcel looks out to the ocean at the harbor mouth, and after the Morro and Cabanas is the most prominent old structure of the city.

They keep the garrote in a dark room not more than a dozen feet square, it appears, on the ground floor of the Carcel. Alongside the execution room is a cell where the executioner lives.

He is a red haired Cuban, a political prisoner who is there for life. It isn't a popular job, that of being executioner, and because of the lively passions of the Cubans perhaps it's just as well that the executioner is permanently detained within four solid stone walls.

The incumbent of the job takes a workman's pride in a smoothly operating piece of mechanism. Apparently it never occurs to him that there is anything tragic or melodramatic in an execution.

Without qualms he sees a stumbling, unwilling, cringing human being dragged rather than conducted into that dismal room. Seemingly he never is touched with the thought that what is a man when he enters the room never will step alive out of it. Far from any feeling of emotion, he slides the mechanism back and forth to show how beautifully it works, and then with a malicious grin invites who will to sit down in the chair and try it.

The garrote is a thing that no man of nervous temperament should look at. Once seen it never can be forgotten. Just to think of it months afterward brings up a choking sensation which makes one long to tear away his collar and breathe the free air as deeply as he can.

It rests upon a raised platform, an ordinary straight backed chair, with thin iron clasps on the elbows and legs of the chair. These are for the arms and ankles of the condemned criminal.

At the top of the back of the chair is a band of iron, one end of which swings out so as to admit of a neck being inserted. This band snaps around in place and all is ready. A twirl of a crank in back and as the band crushes the neck back a pin pierces the medulla oblongata.

The executioner explains all this with a bright smile. It is nothing new to him.

He tells as a great joke how one time one of those vaudeville performers who free themselves from handcuffs and chains came to the Carcel to look over the garrote with an idea of making a wager that he could free himself of it. The executioner worked the pin a couple of times and the wizard declined to try the machine.

The garrote man laughs uproariously as he tells this. That's his idea of a joke.

The executioner's fee is $17. The executioner expends this generally for tobacco and other creature comforts.

One time he stood out for money in advance. What earthly hurry there might be for a man who has all his time to spend in jail to get his money in advance the average person cannot well see, but he said if he didn't get his money he'd refuse to do the job. Eventually he got it.

This executioner too has ideas on the subject of comparative capital punishment. He thinks that the garrote is the best of all—more effective and more humane than the electric chair and hanging and infinitely better than the guillotine and the axe.

"See for yourself," he says, twirling the crank, "could anything be better?"

And as expert opinion perhaps it deserves respect.

Miss K. Carter, soloist with Venetian band at the Orpheum.

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