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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1901.

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One copy per week, in advance, 10c

One copy per month, in advance, 30c

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ANOTHER RAILROAD GRANT.

With the history of past grants to railroads starting him in the race, Representative Sibley, of Pennsylvania, has the effrontery to offer to congress another bill for a repetition of the abuse. He proposes to grant a charter to a company that desires to construct a road across Alaska from Cook's Inlet to Bering Sea, and to give to the company "each alternate section for a distance of ten miles back from each side of the track."

Like similar propositions that have come to the federal government in former years, this is deceptive, and bears not upon its face its real meaning. Apparently, it is to give to a syndicate a worthless tract of land that will never be of value to the nation. The people, reading stories of the barren region on the Alaska peninsula, are accustomed to think of it as worth nothing, and they will probably rest content for this company to take this splendid empire, without protest.

Let one study the map intelligently, learn the mineral deposits of the country to be traversed, and then remember that railroads are not built upon sentiment, but because the projectors expect high returns upon their investments, and but one conclusion will be reached—This proposed land grant should be denied.

The mineral wealth of that peninsula is beyond comprehension. Gold is there in so great quantities to lead persons posted on that country's resources to believe that, when methods have been perfected, the yellow metal will be as cheap as silver.

Think of a tract of land ten miles wide and two thousand miles long, and one will have in mind the territory it is proposed to turn over to the prospective railroad.

The people of the United States have had enough of giving away the public domain to railroads. It is amazing that anyone will have the face to lay down another such proposition.

ACCEPTING TRUST BONDS.

It was no foolish thing that moved President Roosevelt to refuse or, at least, hesitate, to accept from Andrew Carnegie the ten million dollars worth of bonds of the United States Steel Corporation, for the endowment of the proposed national university. Appreciating the munificence of Mr. Carnegie's offer, the president saw good reason for asking that the securities be converted into cash, before he could receive the donation for the pub-

lic. It would have been embarrassing, indeed. In the event of legal difficulties, and the necessity for the administration to proceed against the steel trust, under the federal law, were the holding of the bonds to be turned over to the trustees that will be appointed. The holding of these bonds, too, would have its inevitable effect upon the action of the government toward the steel trust, and all around, it was wise to ask for cash in their stead.

It would have been delicate for Mr. Carnegie to think of this before his tender. It would have saved the president from a quandary.

BOOKS AS CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

Two weeks remain before Christmas, and in those weeks the majority of the season's holiday gifts remain to be bought. There is no better gift than a good book. The American people have been growing more and more thoroughly convinced of this fact in the last few years, and the book sellers are now in the midst of the greatest season of activity they have ever known. The outpouring of books during the recent autumn has been unprecedented, both in the number of titles and in the size of the editions of the popular favorites. In no department of trade has the prosperity of the nation been so marked as that of the publishers.

The people have the money to buy books and they have the desire to read. Best of all, they are reading good books. Though there is an enormous mass of mediocrity and worse than mediocrity, there are few trashy books among the record breakers. Popular favorites are generally not of a kind to become classical literature, but the moral and literary quality of the novels that reach sales of 100,000 in the United States are sufficiently high to be a subject for patriotic congratulation.

The great difficulty that confronts the buyer of literary Christmas gifts is that of choosing the right books. The greater the total mass of books on the market the harder becomes the task of finding just what one wants. There is no time to read a tithe of the new volumes, or even to look at the covers of all. It is at this point that the reviewer steps forward with a bow and proffers his services to the puzzled book-buyer.

In the meantime it is no small task to find the right gift books, even after the chaff has been winnowed from the wheat. Half of the value of the present lies in giving the right thing to each person. This requires much thought. It requires an appreciation of the tastes and character of the person as well as of the nature of the book. To give an uncongenial book to a friend is as ill a service as to introduce an uncongenial acquaintance. But to give a book that will fit into the heart of the possessor is a service worthy of more than ordinary gratitude. It is like giving a counselor, companion or comforter for life.

"Oh, but books are such safe company!" wrote one who was a genuine good book lover. "They keep your secrets well; they never boast that they have made your eyes glisten, or your cheeks flush or your heart throb." It is in the power of everybody to give such silent friends and "safe company" to those they love, and there never was a time when the assortment of worthy and beautiful books was greater than at the present moment in the book stores. The publishers have now practically completed the output of the season. Everything is before the public, from dainty calendars to ponderous encyclopedias. There is something for every taste and every age, and it should be a labor of love to find the right thing for each friend.

A LIFE OF EUGENE FIELD.

There was an elusive charm about the boyish personality of Eugene Field that made the man even more attractive than the things he wrote. In this respect, as in others, he reminds one of Stevenson. It is this

rare and lightsome quality that has impelled Slason Thompson to write the two unique and delightful volumes which he entitles "Eugene Field: A Study in Heredity and Contradictions."

"Many authors have I known," says Mr. Thompson, "who have put all there was of them into their work, who were personally a disappointment to the intellect and a trial to the flesh."

"With Eugene Field the man was always a bundle of delightful surprises, an ever unconventional personality of which only the unusual suggestion is given in his works."

This is the testimony of a man who worked side by side with Eugene Field through a large part of the dozen years in which the latter wrote his daily column of "Sharps and Flats" for the Chicago Morning News, and who was both boom companion and hindred aprit in his daily and nightly doings. Mr. Thompson possesses in his own makeup a liberal dash of the same perennial youthfulness that constituted Field's greatest charm, and he has written a book that has the breath of life in it.

There was a time when Field thought to become a tragedian, but his interview with Edwin Forrest on the subject was discouraging. Forrest told him to apprentice himself to a woodsawyer, so he became a newspaper man. But this was only after he had received his share of his father's estate—about \$8,000—and promptly made dukes and drakes of it on a European tour, from which he returned only by dint of pawing all his personal belongings. The inability of Field to keep any money is freely and humorously illustrated in these pages. If he ever gave any serious thought to the matter, however, it was only to give point to some new prank, as when he solemnly instructed his little daughter to recite this golden text at Sunday school: "The Lord will provide, my father can't."

The practical jokes in which Eugene Field indulged still remain as a tradition in every town in which he lived, and not the least of the attractions of Mr. Thompson's work lies in the coat with which he has told many of the best of them. Field's lullaby period culminated during his years in Denver, and the chapter of anecdotes on that epoch is delightfully humorous.

Field had his own way of making visitors welcome, whether they came in friendly guise or on hostile messengers bent. Over his desk hung the unobscured sign, "This is my busy day," which he is said to have invented, and on the neighboring wall, "God bless our good reader. He can't call for him too soon." But his cruelest device, "fatal," as his friend, E. D. Cresson, writes, "to the vengeance of every visitor who came with a threat of a libel suit, and temporarily subsided of the good feeling of those friends he lured into his treacherous embrace, was a bottomless black walnut chair." Its swiveling seat was always concealed by a few exchanges carelessly thrown there. As it was the only chair in the room except the one Field occupied himself, his caller, though never asked to do so, would be sure to see in Field's naive smile an invitation to drop into the trap and thence ingloriously onto the floor. Through this famous chair, on his first visit to the Tribune office, "Bill Nye" dropped into a lifelong friendship with Eugene Field.

It appears, by the way, that Field was the man who "discovered" Nye, inviting him first to contribute a weekly letter for the princely stipend of \$5 a week. This was raised to \$10, and when Field informed Nye that he was to receive \$15 per letter the humorist promptly packed his grip and came to Denver. At that time Nye was whiskered like a western farmer. Field celebrated his arrival by a dinner that began after the paper had gone to press and lasted all night. At 5 in the morning the company escorted their guest to his room and departed with elaborate professions of good will. They waited in the hotel lobby long enough for Nye to get to bed, and then sent up cards requesting his presence down stairs on immediate business. But Nye was equal to his tormenters, and the bell-boy returned with a shot gun, and the message that it would speak for him.

The collier Matteawan, now out 10 days from Nanaimo for San Francisco, has been added to the list of overdue vessels, and reinsurance has been quoted at 20 per cent.



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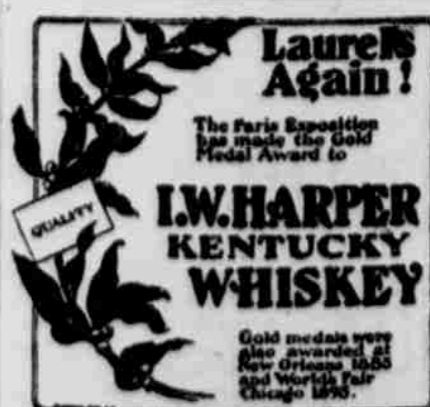
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