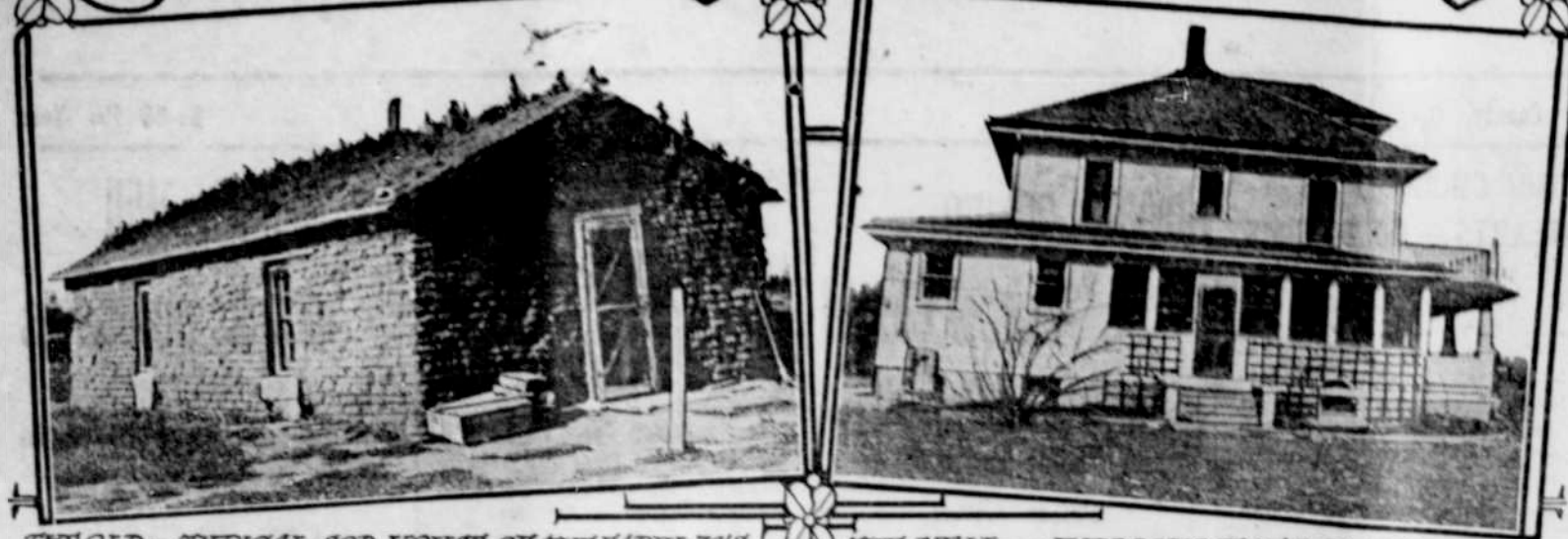


The Passing of the "Soddy"



THE OLD—TYPICAL SOD HOUSE OF THE EARLY '70'S THE NEW—FARM HOME OF MR. AND MRS. JOHN E. JOHNSON, MASON CITY, IOWA.

By KARL L. SPENCE
Editor, Franklin (Neb.) News.

FIFTY-SIX years ago this spring the first settlers commenced arriving in central Nebraska, bent upon permanent settlement, with the expectation of making homes for themselves and their families. Passing up the opportunity of securing the rich bottom lands along the Republican river, the first settlers went back from the river a few miles and settled along the different creeks, which were heavily timbered, and had an abundance of fine spring water. The fuel bill was also solved here, as the new settler had plenty of timber for wood, and posts for his fencing. These first settlers were able to build log houses or dugouts, which were log houses built in the banks of the draws or along the streams, the lower story being dug out of the bank and the house built over it.

During the years of 1871, '72 and '73 nearly all of these desirable homesteads were taken up, the settlements running up the streams north from the Republican river for a distance of several miles, with the intervening lands left vacant for a few years. As these lands were well grassed, the settlers along the creeks were able to use them for pasture as all unoccupied lands were owned by the government and were free range.

One or two portable sawmills were brought into the country and for a time native lumber, sawed from cottonwood and elm trees, was available, but at its best this lumber was not very satisfactory, as it was liable to buckle, warp and twist into many fantastic shapes while curing in the sun. Many of the first houses were built from this lumber and one can still find a few of these pioneer dwellings in this section of Nebraska.

Beatrice, for a time, was the closest railroad point and this was a matter of several days' journey coming and going with the slow ox teams of the pioneer period. Most of these journeys were made to secure flour, coffee, sugar, tobacco and other necessities needed by the pioneers. Usually the load taken by the pioneer to Beatrice was buffalo hides which he bartered for the things needed in the home. Later the railroad was extended to Lowell and the trip was made to that place in much less time and the pioneer was then able to take a load of grain to exchange for his groceries and clothing.

The Rush Into the West

And so we come to the time when the rich prairie lands, which contained no timber, were all that was left for the homesteader. And they came in swarms, as this was the period in our history immediately following the Civil war, when thousands and hundreds of thousands of young men, virile and full of hope for the future, were striking out to make homes for themselves. It was a new country, money was scarce, and many of the settlers did not see enough money to buy a sack of corn meal from one year's end to another. Trade, such as it was, was carried on by barter. A man traded what he had a surplus of to his neighbor or the small pioneer storekeeper, for what he absolutely had to have. He raised his own corn for corn meal, his wheat for flour, and these he took to the mill, often on horseback, the grain being tied behind the saddle in a bag. Here he waited until it was ground into meal or flour and paid the miller the balance being taken home in the same sack the grain was brought to the mill in. The prairie homesteader had no timber to build himself a log cabin, and no money to buy the lumber or logs, so that it was up to him to provide a substitute. He did this by building a "soddy."

First selecting a likely site for his new home, he took a team of oxen and hitched them to a breaking plow that is peculiar to the prairie regions. Instead of a solid plowshare this plow has a share of heavy rods, which does the same work as a solid share without causing the friction that it does. Setting his plow to a depth of about three inches, he plowed a long straight furrow as near to the location of his soddy as he could, so that he would not have the labor of moving the sod any great distance. This sod was impregnated with fibrous roots of the grasses and prairie plants so that it held together remarkably well. Strips of sod a foot wide and three feet long are then brought to the site of the new house and the building begins. After the dimensions of the house have been decided upon, the ground is smoothed off so that a space is left for the walls, which will be two feet or more in thickness. The growing grass is left on the sod and this forms the chinks between the layers, so that it is not necessary to chink up the spaces between the layers of sod. The walls are built up to a height of seven or eight feet, openings being left for the windows and doors which are recessed into the walls for a distance of a foot or more. Many of the first soddies did not have glass for the windows, but instead used oiled paper or muslin for lights.

Setting the Ridgepole

After the walls were completed a ridgepole was secured, usually being a native tree, with other smaller trees or branches to be used for rafters or supports. Over this brush was thrown and then a layer of prairie hay or straw, after which the roof of sod was put on, the layers being leveled off and chinked up so that not a drop of water enters and the structure drains perfectly.

fectly. Doors and windows are then made by the homesteader from native lumber or perhaps from the boxes he brought with him in his overland journey to his new home.

The soddy is now ready for the homesteader and his family to live in, though in many instances to make it more attractive, a coat of whitewash is given the inside walls, which has been made from native lime, which he secures from the hills along the river and burns himself. Most of the pioneer soddies had no wood floors, the floors being made of clay which was dampened and tamped down until it was smooth and even. The furniture of the pioneer soddy was very primitive and except for a few pieces brought by the homesteader when he first came to the new country, had been made by himself. The beds, tables, chairs and what few other pieces of furniture he possesses show his handiwork. The roof of the soddy, being made of dirt as it is, usually presents a drab appearance, as does the whole building, but in many cases the homesteader or his wife has gone to a great deal of trouble to beautify the humble home which they have builded, and often you see a gorgeous flaming cactus, or perhaps a number of wild sunflowers bravely blooming on top of the soddy, where they have been carefully planted and nurtured by the family. Occasionally the whole top of the soddy will be a mass of bloom from a bed of portulaca or rose moss, which requires little attention and will bloom in the hottest and driest weather. In fact it seems to do its best under the most adverse conditions. Morning glories shade the windows, while beds of petunias, bachelor's buttons, zinnias and other gay-colored flowers make a bright spot about the soddy. Nearly the first thing that the new owner did after completing his sod house was to plant a small grove of trees which he cared for tenderly during the many dry spells and which have made a noble monument to him in his after-years.

The roof of the soddy, being built as it was from brush, straw and mud, made a fine home for many different kinds of rodents and snakes and often the pioneer looked up during the warmth of the evening to see a rattler or a giant ballsnake coiled around the rafters of his dwelling and stories are told of the packrats that came during the absence of the family and carried off the food stores as well as other bright objects which attracted their attention, which they stored away in some convenient cache. One pioneer tells the story of how he spent the night once with a neighbor. When night came on, the homesteader's wife placed the jars of milk on the floor in the room, where he was expected to sleep, in order to keep the milk cool. Just as daybreak came a mother skunk with seven or eight babies came through a hole in the wall of the soddy and they all had a nice breakfast of fresh milk. The visitor, fearing that the mother skunk would resent his presence, wisely kept still and allowed the early morning visitors to depart in peace.

A Refuge in Time of Storm

With walls two feet thick and a roof from eight inches to a foot thick the soddy made a fine home for the pioneer family, being warm in winter and cool in summer. Fuel was scarce and the pioneer had to depend upon cow "chips" for fuel. Ice in summer was unknown, and this finally led to the building of caves or outside cellars, where the perishable vegetables, milk and canned goods were kept. This cave was also used by the pioneer family, who took refuge in it when tornadoes threatened.

Water on the prairie was hard to secure and wells were put down, being dug by hand, sometimes to a depth of 250 feet. The pioneer well-digger had a dangerous job and many a well has cost the life of a man before being completed. Later wells bored by machinery and tubular wells were put down and most of these were equipped with windmills, so that the back-breaking labor of pumping water for household use and for live stock has been done away with and large tanks are provided for storage during the occasional spells when the wind does not blow.

The average soddy contained one or two rooms, though occasionally some well-to-do homesteader had a soddy containing four or five rooms, but usually when the homesteader was able to build such a house he would build from lumber which he freighted in by ox-team from a long distance. Many of these larger soddies had wooden floors and these houses were the meeting places for first parties and dances among the pioneers. The first school houses and first churches were built of sod and many of the native sons and daughters secured their first rudiments in the three R's while attending school in a sod school house.

A Menu of Wild Fruit

The pioneer family lacked variety in their menu, but this was overcome to a certain extent by the homesteader's wife, who canned and dried the wild fruits which grew along the numerous streams in abundance in nearly every section of the country, as well as choke-cherries, and in different localities there were black and red raspberries, gooseberries, sand cherries and black currants, which grew wild. The family usually took a day off each year when these fruits were ripe to pick a supply for canning. The plant known as the buffalo bean also furnished the makings for pies, and while rather insipid in taste, was used by the homesteader when nothing better could be secured, and make a dish quite nourishing.

the district, who wrote to me: India is now beginning to wake up, and now is the time when clean, self-sacrificing, unselfish work like that of your mission can be of infinite value in setting a standard for the people."

Growth of Coral Varies

Little is known regarding the rapidity of growth in corals. A specimen of *Mocandrina labyrinthica* measuring a foot in diameter and four inches thick in the most convex part was

The outbuildings on the new home of the homesteader who lived in a soddy, were nothing more substantial than a lean-to shed against some bank or a shed made of poles and covered with straw or hay. Usually by spring this had great holes eaten into it by the stock and during the summer months was little else save a roof and the framework of poles.

In the early days of settlement fierce storms raged during the winter. Blizzards, driven by high winds, swept over the prairies, and while the homesteader and his family, living within the two-foot thick walls of his soddy, was immune from their blasts, as long as the food and fuel lasted, his live stock, which was housed in flimsy structures, often suffered from the cold and snow. One pioneer tells us of a snow and windstorm which kept up continually for three days. He had a team of mules tied to the manger in a shed barn which was built of boards running up and down, with a good-sized crack between each board. When the storm ended it was found that the mules were still tied up, but all that could be seen of them were their ears and the tips of their noses. They were in a solid cake of snow and had to be dug out before they could move. At that time there were thousands upon thousands of acres of lands that had no trees on them, but these storms have greatly diminished since windbreaks of trees and groups of buildings dot every quarter section of land.

Abundance of Wild Game

A milk cow, a pig or two and a small flock of chickens helped to provide the living of the pioneer family, but these chickens had to be jealously watched by the household to keep the prowling coyote and the watchful hawk, who were always on the watch, at a safe distance. Besides this domestic supply of meat, the early settler depended much upon his gun to provide meat for his table, as the prairies teemed with bison, antelope, deer, wild turkey, snipe, hens, prairie chickens and many other varieties of wild game. In spring and autumn the annual migrations of the ducks and geese made a welcome variety to the family larder and the homesteader could secure meat for his table in a very short time.

Many homesteaders became discouraged before proving up on their claims, others stayed long enough to prove up and then left, selling their land for a song or letting it go back for taxes. One homesteader, whose name is unknown, in leaving his homestead, after finally proving up, writes the following dirge:

FAREWELL TO MY HOMESTEAD SHANTY

Farewell to my homestead shanty:
I have
The cattle will hook down the walls,
And some one will steal the roof.
Farewell to my sheetrock stove
That stands in the corner all cold;
The good things I have baked in the oven
In language can never be told.
Farewell to my cracker-box cupboard,
With gummy sack for a door;
Farewell to my store of good things
That I shall never want any more.
Farewell to my little pine bedstead;
Where I slumbered and slept;
Farewell to the dreams that I dreamt,
While the seas all over me crept.
Farewell to my down-holstered chair,
With bottom sagged down to the ground;
Farewell to the socks, shirts and breeches
That fill it again to the ground.
Farewell to my nice little table,
Where under I have oft put my feet,
Then those from the bounty of good things
The substantial of life for to eat.
Farewell to my sour dough pancakes
That none but myself could endure;
If they did not taste good to a stranger
They were sure the dyspepsia to cure.
Farewell to my tea and my crackers;
Farewell to my wash and soap;
Farewell to my sorghum and buckwheat;
Farewell to soddy and hope.

A virgin soil, undaunted courage, youth and a spirit of home-making were sure to win for the pioneer homesteader and his little dirt soddy was soon changed to a modern home with the comforts that his pioneer fathers had never dreamed of, and today we find that while the old soddy has passed into the beyond, back to the dust from which it came, it has left a well-settled country of prosperous farmers who have builded for permanence and the future. His trees, planted and tended with such tender care, have grown into great groves which shade thousands of acres of ground and provide a fitting resting place for himself in his old age and for the generations which are to come. He builded wisely and well. His work has borne fruit beyond the imagination of the men of his time. Where once stood the lowly soddy with the straw covered sheds for the live stock, now stands the modern Nebraska farm home with modern outbuildings surrounding it. Instead of the slow and steady team of oxen, the farmer now has his automobiles, his tractors and labor-saving machinery of various kinds, so that one man working half the time that he used to can now produce twice as much grain by his labor. Where once were trails, are now great gravelled highways that are covered daily by hundreds of automobiles going at the rate of thirty or more miles per hour, where once that distance would have been considered a big day's driving. Through the coming of the pioneer settlers Nebraska has developed into a great commonwealth with a population of more than a million and a half.

Out in the Country

A seventh history class, which had just finished studying colonial life was an examination. One of the questions was, "Discuss city life in colonial times." One boy wrote: "There were not many cities, and what there were were out in the country."

On Job Every Day 48 Years

Train Dispatcher Spends Spare Time as "Silent Evangelist."

Arkansas City, Kan.—Fred T. Horton, in retiring from his job as train dispatcher on the Santa Fe railroad in Arkansas City, is closing nearly half a century's career at railroading with an outstanding record.

He has never missed a day at work. He has never been late a day, except once, when his home was on fire. He has never been responsible for any serious trouble on the line while he was on duty.

He has refused all offers of promotion to official position. His refusal of offers of promotion by no means indicated a lack of interest in his work, however.

"Even when a little boy playing 'choo-choo' I said I was going to be a train dispatcher. I love the work and there never has been a day when I did not go to work in the morning with the eagerness of one who loves what he does," is Mr. Horton's unusual testimony after 48 years at railroading—38 years as train dispatcher at Arkansas City, seven years as dispatcher in St. Joseph, Mo., and three years as telegraph operator in Galesburg, Ill., his home town.

Wanted Time as "Evangelist." Mr. Horton simply wanted all his spare time to carry on his work as the "silent evangelist" of Arkansas City and this requires more time and work than the title indicates.

To do work at the office with all possible skill and care and then to slip out to a hillside near Arkansas City and in full view of the Santa Fe tracks north of the city there to construct his "sermon on the mount"—a rock inscription 475 feet long—these were the chief amusements of Mr. Horton.

Mr. Horton has been preaching his brief "sermon" day after day, year after year, for about thirty years, without ever entering a pulpit. It reads: "Christ Died for the Ungodly." This quotation Mr. Horton has built of rocks in letters 16 feet high and whitewashed so that it can be seen for miles. Some of the letters are 40 feet in circumference. It has taken time, money and work to build the sermon. How many miles he had walked back and forth while collecting stones, it would be impossible to estimate. He has rebuilt the letters four times. He counted up that he walked 700 miles rebuilding the letters once. Frequently he has even worked by moonlight, for all the work has been done after office hours.

It costs from \$50 to \$100 a year to keep up the text, since it takes three barrels of whitewash costing \$15 to \$20 twice a year to keep the giant letters visible, explains Mr. Horton. Thousands of railway passengers, pedestrians and motorists see the verse. Some scoff, Mr. Horton says, but others read it and stop to think or perhaps go home to look it up in the Bible and read for themselves. Horton is absolutely nonsectarian and trusts entirely to his silent sermon and his own methods of living to reach the public.

Links Work and Faith. Horton's religion and his work are closely united.

"Not even the president of the railroad is more interested or more anxious to have things to run smoothly than a train dispatcher," he said. "No one is more anxious to hear 'trains whistle at the same time' than the train dispatcher. They like to live by clockwork. There is no more responsible or strenuous job, either."

Now there are more automatic signals, the quick telephone service to supplement the wire, and even so washouts, long trains, floods, storms and such things are always on hand to make the life of a train dispatcher exciting. Sometimes it has seemed to me like playing checkers with trains across the map. I have worked straight through two shifts for 16 hours to relieve a fellow worker who was sick. I have often worked all day without stopping for a bite to eat.

"Fifty orders in eight hours are considered a good day's work. I have given out as many as 125 orders within eight hours besides the regular schedule orders."

Manipulating trains has become a sort of second nature to Horton. There have been times, he says, when he felt there was nothing left for him to do but pray that things would come out right.

"Once when I had three trains standing east and three west with only a blind siding between them, I did all I could and then prayed for divine help. Another time when someone failed to give an order for a train to wait at a station until a long overdue train arrived, and I knew there was only a blind siding without an operator between those trains, I knelt down by the tracks and prayed. I had a man climb to a telegraph pole and see if he could see what was happening. It was little short of a miracle that the train waited over for some reason, until the freight reached safely."

Woman Saves the Day.

"On another occasion, an operator on the road forgot to flag a train I had ordered to stop at a siding to let another pass. As soon as the train pulled out, the operator remembered the order. He was a quick thinker, however, and telephoned a woman up the line to stop the train. Dropping the phone, the woman rushed out and flagged the train with a red table cover and relayed the order."

"Such things naturally make a train dispatcher do considerable thinking. My thinking led me to the Bible and the Bible taught me to depend upon God both in my own life and my work."

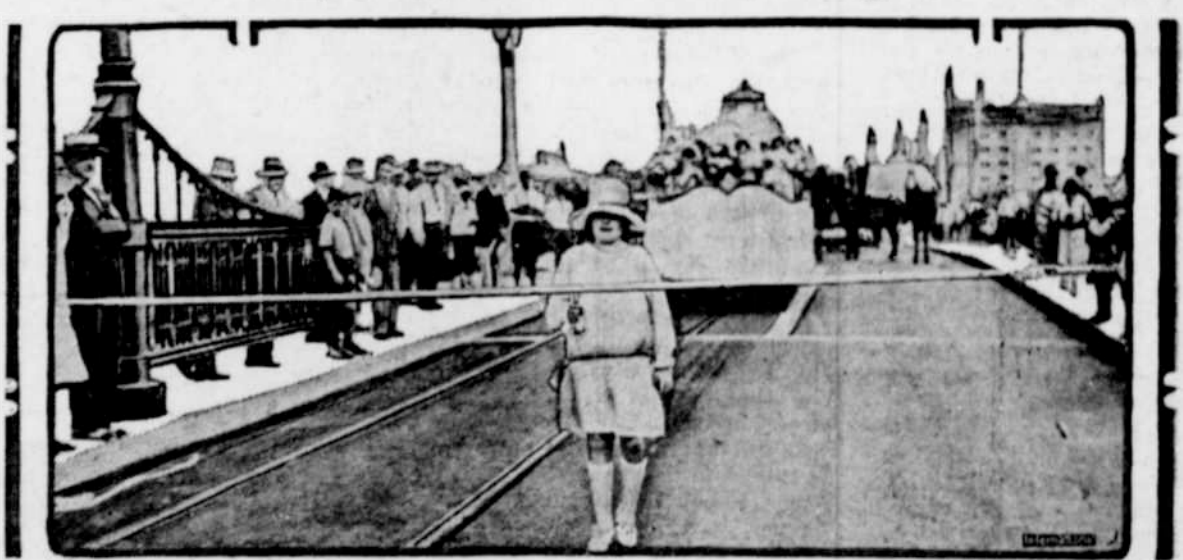
In his daily life Mr. Horton lives simply. Born in Galesburg, Ill., 67 years ago, he attended school there until 1877. His brother taught him telegraphy and he took his first job at nineteen years of age on the C. & Q. railroad in his home town.

German Beauties Shy; Shun Bathing Suits

Berlin.—Germany is soon to have a beauty queen worthy of the title "Frau Deutschland" to participate in international beauty contests. The crowns of all gretchen, including that of Hilde Quandt, who was recently chosen as the prettiest girl from 50 competitors, have been challenged as unrepresentative. So the League of Cultivation of Physical Beauty has organized a contest on the American plan. Forty-four cities already have consented to select their prized beauties.

The rules provide that girls will not have to wear bathing suits unless they desire, but "no artificial aids to shapeliness" are to be permitted beneath whatever single tight-fitting garment the contestants want to wear. The bathing-suit regulation was made optional, the league announced, because many provincial gretchen shy at revealing too much of their figure in public. The winners of the city contests will then enter the finals in Berlin.

Opening a Million-Dollar Bridge



Miss Jean Kodenbaugh cutting the silver cord opening the new million-dollar Matanzas bridge across Matanzas bay, at St. Augustine, Fla. Two other bridges were opened at the same time along the new Marine boulevard, connecting 90 miles of beach speedways on the Florida north coast.

COYOTES, HORSES AND DOGS ARE HIT BY RABIES EPIDEMIC

Infected Animals Are Spreading Terror Among Residents in Certain Sections of Oregon.

Portland, Ore.—Tales of an epidemic which is making coyotes, dogs, horses and cattle attack people are coming into the local office of the United States biological survey from the little town of Isee, in eastern Oregon. A band of infected coyotes is spreading terror through the district. The situation has become so grave that skilled hunters have been dispatched to the region to try to wipe out the coyote population. The stockmen are working with them. The information that set wheels turning in the biological survey office came from the grant county agent, who gathered all the ranchers' complaints together. One farmer told how his two dogs had given their lives in saving him from the attack of a rabid coyote.

He was working in his barn when a large animal entered. The telltale foam was dripping from its jaws. It rushed for the man. He saved himself by climbing to the rafters. One dog leaped at the coyote and by degrees worked it out into the corral. Then another dog rushed in, and together they killed the maddened creature.

However, both were bitten in the fray and shortly afterward they turned on their master and had to be killed.

One of the weirdest tales is told of a Bear creek rancher. He was riding along near a fence one day when his mount began to act queerly. Suddenly it turned on its rider and tried to tear him with its teeth.

He escaped over the fence and the horse started after the dog which had been following. The dog got out of the way and then the horse tried to

Each Thinking Other Dead, Brothers Meet

Mason City, Iowa.—Two brothers, each thinking the other the man who was found murdered in a box car, met face to face in a street here and the most promising clue to the man's identity went glimmering. The brothers are James Schell of Runnells, Iowa, and Phil Schell, an itinerant printer with temporary headquarters here.

Hearing of the murder the Runnells man came here and found every mark about the corpse to conform to those on his brother's body. He took charge of funeral arrangements.

The Mason City brother went into a pool hall and was told the name of the dead man had been found to be Schell. Confident it was his brother, he hastened to the undertaking place to confirm his fears. He was on his way when he met his brother in the street.

Big Rattlesnake Joins Ranks of Broadcasters

Auburn, Ala.—In a cage on the second floor of Comer Agricultural hall here an exceptionally long-distance record in fasting is being made. It is not being done by a human being but by a rattlesnake.

The department of zoology and entomology, of which Prof. J. M. Robinson is in charge, is conducting the test, but unintentionally. The snake was caught near Auburn last October and placed in the cage. Since then he has been presented with rats, birds, and steak, none of which appeal to his appetite. He has steadfastly refused to eat a bite since the day he was put into the cage. He drinks a little water occasionally, but takes no other nourishment. He is now rounding out his sixth month of fasting.

While refusing to eat he also refuses to make friends. A little noise or a little disturbance around him puts his rattlers to work, warning the visitor of danger. He spends most of his time in a coil, ready to strike.

Soon after this rattlesnake became a fixture in the department of zoology and entomology officials of this department were lecturing over radio on snakes, and they used the rattles of this one to illustrate their lecture. It was distinct, he being perhaps the only snake ever heard over radio.

Fortune in Gold Found by Poor Family in Japan

Fukyo.—The Ishii family of Toki-wanachi had been having a hard time. Work had been scarce, sickness had piled up doctors' bills, and it was only through digging up old family relics and heirlooms from the family storehouse and selling these to the second-hand dealers that the daily rice could be secured.

Some days ago, in turning over the accumulated rubbish of generations in order to find something more that might be salable, the wife of the house discovered a number of little bars of some very heavy substance. She was quite pleased, because if these bars turned out to be of lead they would find a ready sale.

She lugged one into the house and started to scratch the grime from it. It was yellow gold. Before she had finished feverishly scratching all through the storehouse she had found 350,000 yen worth of gold bar, a family treasure long lost and forgotten.

The news stirred the neighborhood, and the village priest came to give the storehouse the benefit of his search. He dug out what was thought to be an old copper kettle that turned out to be of gold, and a still further going-over brought to light golden utensils of a value of 100,000 yen.

Students Aid Monument Fund for Truant Officer

Yakima, Wash.—Students in the Yakima public schools have contributed \$165 toward a fund for erecting a memorial in honor of Augustus Becker, truant officer, who died suddenly recently. While Becker was the nemesis of many a runaway schoolboy in past years he was beloved by every one attached to the schools. The money will be used in buying a monument bearing an inscription to indicate fittingly the man's popularity with the school children despite his onerously reputed job.

Hospitals in India Spread the Light

The missionary hospital in India has a unique value, says Albert E. Moore, M. D., English Baptist missionary in Patna, North India: "The days of blasphemy, scorn and sneers are largely over, and India is awakening to the supreme beauty of Christ and all He signifies. There is a wonderful growth of the spirit of service which is manifested in the highest degree in a mission hospital. The people

stand around and watch loathsome sores being dressed, pariah and Brahmin receiving equal attention; they watch minor operations being performed, and the consequent relief of pain; they hear no demand for money, and they hear the reason for it all in the evangelist's address. A striking corroboration of this aspect of medical missions is given in a letter from the chief magistrate of