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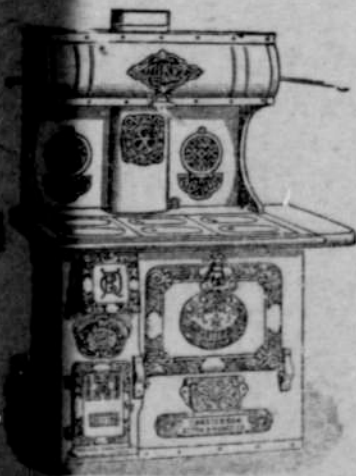
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CURIOUS CUSTOMS

Norman French Still Used in Lawmaking in England.

RUSSIAN OFFICIAL FARCES.

Amusing History of a Royal Daily Ration of Rum and the Astonishing Story of a Stolid Sentry and an Innocent Grass Plot.

In Europe there is perhaps nothing more astonishing to the American mind than the persistency with which certain old customs are maintained. The Romans, for instance, keep up the saturnalia of their ancient pagan ancestors in a harmless way, and the Florentines go on one morning of the year to catch crickets in the grass simply because the Etruscans did the same thing 2,000 years ago.

John Bull has always had an affection for the old ways. So persistent is he in keeping to the forms and traditions of the past that his French neighbor over the way has dubbed the United Kingdom a "museum of antiquities" among modern nations.

It is somewhat odd that the Norman French of Edward the Confessor should still be the language, the legal voice, of parliament, but so it is in a way. Whenever a bill has passed the commons the clerk before he forwards it to the house of lords writes upon it, according to the ancient usage, "Soit baillie aux seigneurs" (Let it be sent to the lords). If it is sent from the peers to the commons it bears the like indorsement, "Soit baillie aux communs" (Let it be sent to the commons).

Should a bill pass both houses it needs only the royal assent to become a law. Here the Norman French appears again. The commons, summoned by the usher of the black rod, are admitted to the bar of the house of lords to hear the statement of his majesty's commissioners. When all are assembled the lord chancellor makes a sign to his assistant, who reads the title of the bill and then says in a loud voice, "Le roi le veult" (The king wills it). In the case of financial bills the form is this: "Le roi remercie ses bons sujets, accepte leur benevolence, et ainsi le veult" (The king thanks his good subjects, accepts their faith and so wills it). For private bills the form is, "Soit fait comme il est desire" (Let it be done as is desired). Sometimes, if the bill is of special importance, the sanction of his majesty is given in person. In such a case the king, seated on the throne at one end of the chamber, bows his assent as the clerk reads the title.

The inflexibility of Russian official orders has resulted in some queer and needless fixtures in the official system. Quite a ludicrous discovery of this sort was made by the Empress Catherine, who was the mother of that Emperor Paul who was assassinated in 1801. Catherine at one time was inspired by some passing whim of economy to scrutinize the imperial house-keeping accounts. To her amazement, she found among other queer items that "one bottle of rum daily" was charged to the heir apparent. Inasmuch as her son, Nasednik, then a young man, had never evinced any signs of intemperate habits, his mother was greatly astonished. Going over the accounts to ascertain how long this sort of thing had been enduring, she found to her still greater astonishment that the said expenditure went back to the day of his birth, and, indeed, far beyond it.

So, it appeared, the heir to the throne had not only been charged with drinking over thirty dozen bottles of fine Jamaica rum ever since he was born, but for a long time before that. It is hardly necessary to add that the empress made a thorough investigation of this queer entry. Finally, by the aid of an antiquarian, she at last reached the original entry.

A century or so before the imperial physician had prescribed for the Nasednik of the period, "on account of a violent toothache, a teaspoonful of rum, to be taken with sugar." This dose was given for several days in succession, and the nurse in charge had deemed it more fitting to the imperial dignity, as well as more profitable to herself, to purchase a new bottle of rum each day. No one had ever given the order to discontinue the purchase, and it had gone on for a century, the rum having constituted one of the perquisites of the court nurse.

When Bismarck during the term of his mission as ambassador at St. Petersburg was walking one afternoon in the summer garden he met the emperor, who invited the diplomatist to continue his stroll with him. Soon Bismarck noticed a sentry stationed in the middle of a large grass plot. He asked what the soldier was doing there. The czar did not know. The aide-de-camp did not know. So inquiry was made of the sentry himself.

"It is ordered," was his reply.

Every official gave the same answer. "It is ordered," but nobody knew by whom. A sentry had always stood guard in the middle of that innocent grass plot. The archives were searched, but in vain. Finally an aged official was found who gave the explanation. He had had it from his father that the Empress Catherine had once seen a snowdrop ready to bloom in that plot and had ordered a sentry to stand guard and allow no one to pluck it. For more than a century the watch had been maintained because "it was ordered" and because no one had ever dreamed of disobeying the order or questioning any one as to the reason therefor.—New York Press.

CHANGING A QUARTER.

What You May Do With a Twenty-five Cent Piece in Tangier.

The traveler who goes ashore at Tangier is likely, if he wanders about alone, to meet himself coming back to the same starting place. His souvenir postal cards may be mailed at four separate postoffices, with different stamps on each. Or, writes Mr. E. A. Forbes in "The Land of the White Helmet," at a British hotel he may exchange French money for Spanish postage and mail his letter in a German postoffice. But he may not put British, French, German and Spanish stamps on the same letter, for that might lead to international complications.

He may also do coin tricks equal to those of the prestidigitators. Let him take an American quarter dollar and exchange it for English money. He now has a shilling and a ha'penny over.

He may exchange the shilling for a French franc and receive 30 or 40 centimes in change. The franc may be traded for a Spanish peseta, plus 20 centimos in copper. The Spanish peseta may now be converted into a Moorish peseta, "hassani," with a handful of copper to boot.

He now has his pockets weighted down with English, French, Spanish and Moorish copper, yet he can buy just as much from a Moor with his hassani peseta as he could have bought with his original quarter.

In a thoughtless moment one day I held out a hassani peseta to the American vice consul general at Tangier and asked him how much it was worth.

"A hassani peseta," he replied glibly, "is worth ten dhirems or twenty half dhirems."

"And twenty half dhirems equal?"

"Two or three cents less than a Spanish peseta," he answered. "But you must remember that the valuation of Moorish silver fluctuates from day to day; at times it is officially worth only a third of its face value."

"Today is Thursday," I said in desperation. "The hour is 1:45 p. m. Would you mind telling me how much this hassani is worth in American cents at this moment?"

"I'll figure it all out for you," he answered.

At 2:30 he was still figuring, so I crept softly out and wandered into a Moorish ten house. There I spent the hassani in riotous living.

GRANT WAS JESTING.

But the Plucky Southern Woman Was in Deadly Earnest.

During his Virginia campaign General Grant found it necessary one day to encamp some of his troops on the beautiful property of a Mrs. Stouton and also to take a room in the house for his own accommodation. He did so, however, with great tact and gentleness, quite winning the heart of the estimable lady. As he prepared to depart he turned to her.

"Now, Mrs. Stouton, we've enjoyed your hospitality very much, and I'm prepared to pay the bill," said Grant.

She protested, but the general assured her that it was a business transaction and she was entitled to fair compensation for the supplies they had consumed and the comfort they had enjoyed. She named the amount, and then the general said, with a roguish twinkle in the eye:

"Now, Mrs. Stouton, would you like it in United States banknotes or in Confederate money?"

She pressed her lips together, her eyes flashed fire, and without a moment's hesitation she said:

"In Confederate money."

Grant looked at her with admiration.

"I was only jesting," he began softly.

"I was not," she quickly interrupted. "I am in earnest—deadly earnest. I've made my choice, and I'll abide by the consequences."

And Grant, with his eyes full of admiration for the pluck of the southern woman, paid her in Confederate money.—Ladies' Home Journal.

A General's Last Order.

It is over a hundred years since General Mallet was shot for a conspiracy against Napoleon. The circumstances of his death (told by Mr. G. Duval in "Shadows of Old Paris") were curious. He had asked that in consideration of his past services to the nation he might give the command to fire to the soldiers who were to execute him. "As they lifted their muskets to take aim the general's practiced eye discovered a want of union in their movements, which he reproved, ordering them to repeat it properly, and with the word 'Fire' on his lips he fell, pierced by the bullets of twenty muskets."

Precise.

"I jump up and down when I'm happy," declared the small girl from New York, and, according to the Louisville Courier-Journal, the Boston child looked at her gravely and replied:

"I can imagine your jumping up, but I think the law of gravitation must be responsible for the alternating descent."

Important Distinction.

"What do you think of our patient?" asked one alienist.

"Wholly irresponsible," replied the other.

"Mentally or in money matters?"—Washington Star.

A Fiend.

Mrs. Gramercy—It's awful to have a husband with whom you're quarreling all the time. Mrs. Park—Mine is worse. He's got to that stage where he absolutely refuses to quarrel.—New York Times.

THE OLD BATES HOUSE.

A Hotel That Once Startled Indianapolis With Its Innovations.

I remember that when Indianapolis became a great railroad center and a city of enormous proportions—population from 15,000 to 20,000, according to the creative capacity of the imagination making the estimate—a wonderful hotel was built there and called the Bates House.

Its splendors were the subject of wondering comment throughout the west. It had washstands with decorated pottery on them in all its more expensive rooms so that a guest sojourning there need not go down to the common washroom for his morning ablution and dry his hands and face on a jack towel.

There were combs and brushes in the rooms, too, so that if one wanted to smooth his hair he was not obliged to resort to the appliances of that sort that were hung by chains to the wash-room walls.

Moreover, if a man going to the Bates House for a sojourn chose to pay a trifle extra he might have a room all to himself.

But all these subjects of wonderment shrink to nothingness by comparison when the proprietors of the Bates House printed on their breakfast bills of fare an announcement that thereafter each guest's breakfast would be cooked after his order for it was given, together with an appeal for patience on the part of the breakfasters—a patience that the proprietors promised to reward with hot and freshly prepared dishes.

This innovation was so radical that it excited discussion hotter even than the Bates House breakfasts. Opinions differed as to the right of a hotel keeper to make his guests wait for the cooking of their breakfasts. To some minds the thing presented itself as an invasion of personal liberty and therefore of the constitutional rights of the citizen.—Edward Eggleston's "Recollections."

A FRAGRANT TRAIN.

Cut Flower Limited Express a Unique Feature in France.

Every night during the winter months a special train, popularly called the "Rapide des Fleurs"—the cut flower limited express—of ten cars, leaves Toulon for Paris over the line of the Paris, Lyons and Mediterranean railway, carrying cut flowers in baskets and cardboard boxes from all stations on the line from Nice to Toulon to the Paris markets. Certain cars are switched off to Frankfurt, Berlin and Munich; others continue to Brussels and others to Calais, where their perishable freight is rushed to the markets of London and Manchester.

Certain shipments reach St. Petersburg and Vienna, and the facilities thus offered the flower growers of southern France are unique in the transportation world. A special train crew sorts these tens of thousands of parcels en route, the eight or ten sorters handling the baskets as carefully as the mails are handled.

The cut flower industry of southern France began with the Impetus first given by Alphonse Karr, the scrivalain jardiner, as he was known when he settled in St. Raphael in the latter part of the last century.

Today the violets of Hyeres, like the roses and carnations of Antilles and the narcissus and Roman hyacinths of Ollioules, Le Pradet and Carqueiranne, are found in the shops of Paris scarce eighteen hours after they were growing in the open air on the Mediterranean shores.

Cuteness of Madmen.

In Sir William Butler's autobiography there is an amusing story about six insane soldiers who escaped while the corporal who had brought them on board the trooper was leaving at Durban and who mingled with the 1,800 sane men on the decks. The problem of the voyage was to find who were the six madmen. By the time the boat reached Cape Town twenty-six men were officially under observation, and not one of the six was among them. In the end the crazed half dozen were identified as those who had taken an especially eager part in the lunatic hunt.

Not His Language.

Lord Robson, at the dinner of the Glamorgan society, told the story of a Welsh witness in a Glamorganshire case who, having been sworn to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, was asked if he could speak English or would like an interpreter. "No," he replied; "I cannot speak some English, but I cannot speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."—St. James Gazette.

Good Fellowship.

Biggs—You should join our club, old man, if only for the good fellowship of the thing. Miggs—I intend to. Brown, one of your members, took my name only last week. Hasn't he said anything about it? Biggs—No; we don't speak to each other.—Boston Transcript.

Dangers of Carelessness.

Lion Tamer (to assistant)—You've left his cage open again. One of these days some one will come along and steal him.—London Opinion.

More Like a Lover.

Miss Sweet—My brother is wedded to his art. Mrs. Slinnick—Wedded? Nonsense! He's perfectly devoted to it.—Exchange.

One life, a little gleam of time between two eternities.—Carlyle.