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MAN ABOUT TOWN.

Items and Suggestions by Our Man of Leisure. A Little Fun and Nonsense.

If everybody was as perfect as everybody thinks he is, especially after the New Year's resolutions are formulated, what a delightful world this would be..... What a pity it is we can't carry out every resolution we rationally make. If every resolution could be transformed into a concrete fact, how few old maids we would have. There is not an old maid in the universe who does not each year of her life resolve to sacrifice her single blessedness for the sake of making some man happy. But before the year passes away the old maid either changes her mind or else she fails in her effort to convince some man of her unselfish willingness to sacrifice her independence. It is right funny, in this land of the free, to see how many old maids there are who are ready to surrender their independence. With them independence is somewhat at a discount. The old maids resentfully reply, however, "that there are others." Are you hit?..... In our issue of several weeks ago we gave the census of the old maids in our town. Since that time we have been greatly distressed. Repeatedly we have met some of this antiquated species of humanity who have turned to us with tears in their eyes, and in their voices too as for that, who have earnestly inquired of us if they had been classified as old maids. Now what were we to do? Everybody knows it would have been foolhardy rashness to have said, "yes." And yet to have said "no" would have been to tarnish our reputation for unvarying veracity. We were left to but one escape. We simply replied, "an old maid is not made so by reason of advanced years. She is one so completely wanting in the charms of womanly loveliness that her prospects of marriage may be described as desperate." This generally satisfied. It matters not how old the inquirer may have been, she always feels thoroughly convinced in her soul that she is the very incarnation of loveliness. By that little strategy we generally escaped danger. If, however, you want to learn who are the old maids just use this test. Talk about new to those whom you suspect. If you see the tip curl, the expression harden, the manner grow unpleasant, and her criticisms become somewhat harsh and sarcastic, mark it down such a person is an old maid. We say this, because all these symptoms indicate the fact that the woman so tested is attempting to conceal her lack of knowledge concerning men. She reminds us of one who does not like poetry. Why? Because she has never read poetry. So an old maid hates men because she knows nothing about them. She sees them often, but they are generally with other girls. She wouldn't have one, oh, no. Sour grapes..... This is the period of the year when everybody is disposed to theorize about how good it is to be good. This is also the period of the year when everybody resolves to put the said theory into practice. Oh, yes, everybody so resolves, but precious few ever remember the resolutions. Resolutions are made, and, so soon as made, the person feels better. But this consciousness of being better is of but short duration. Old passions often resume their sway, habitual weaknesses return to plague, temptations endured in the past reappear to harass as much as ever, in fact it seems just as hard to be good after resolutions have been made as before they were even contemplated. What's the use making resolutions, it's just as difficult to do right after resolving as it was before? Such is the exclamation we often hear. Now we never did preach the doctrine that there was any intrinsic salvation in a resolution. The virtue lies not so much in the resolution as the number, as in the actions which follow. In fact there is but one resolution after all which is needed. That should read about as follows: "Resolved, that from this date I will try to do my duty as a man, even to the extent of paying my debts." We admit that such a resolution is somewhat perplexing. Not because it can't be understood, oh, no, but because the latter clause is so very clear and perspicuous that there are many who are indisposed to thus resolve. The perplexing part comes in when one begins to study as to how all debts are to be paid. Well, first resolve never to contract a debt unless you have the visible means of liquidating it within a reasonable time. If this be done, then one's temper won't be lost when an attempt is made to collect the debt. For a debtor to lose his temper at the same time that a creditor loses his claim is to inflict a double calamity that hurts two ways. During the coming year let's all be happy, let's all be good, let's all be paragons of ideal perfection. For mercy sake don't let this goodness limit itself to finely worded resolutions, but let us act the spirit of those resolutions. Never mind the difficulties that may confront us. Do not, for one repulse, forego the purposes you have resolved to effect. If your purpose is fixed, then act that purpose. Only cowards turn their backs on good intentions..... The use of the words "good intentions," recalls to our minds the fact that such virtuous sentiments have found lodgment in the breasts of our town commissioners. Now we know they certainly must be possessed of good intentions otherwise they would be a little more energetic in the active promotion of some needed work. Everybody who accomplishes very little is loaded with good intentions; that is so, for the simple reason that their good intentions are never consummated by concrete performance. They remain as they originated, that is, as good intentions. We feel no hesitancy in saying that our town commissioners have the very best intentions in the way of protecting our comfort and health. Some of these more important intentions, however, never advance any further than the taking up of their abode in the commissioners' minds. Among many other samples of their good intent we feel morally certain that the commissioners intend to provide us with proper street crossings at requisite places. We know also that at such places where good crossings were once laid, the commissioners intend to keep them in the very best of order. Or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say, that they ought to do so. The difficulty is, there are some of these crossings which have sunk so low beneath the earth's surface that the commissioners have lost all knowledge of the fact that they ever existed. We are sure, however, that they are there, because, during the late muddy spell, we took the trouble to dig in search of them. We were anxious to recover one stone as a relic of past glory as well as of past pedestrian usefulness. We feel confident that the commissioners also would succeed in thus finding these crossings if they would give orders to their subordinates to dig deep enough. The excavation of these monuments of lost glory would forever redound to the honor of the present board. The commissioners should remember that there are some people in this town so skeptical as not to believe that such crossings were ever laid. As a matter of local historical pride therefore, the present board should recover at least enough of the buried bricks and stones to demonstrate that at one time we did have crossings. Such enterprise would be a great archæological triumph. It would preserve to future ages the evidence of a delightful convenience which Centreville once enjoyed. To be sure it would be a ruthless sacrilege to ruin the historical grandeur of those buried crossings by laying a visible crossing over such relics of the past. And yet it is very disagreeable this ploughing over the streets in mud..... As we are just now suffering from the experience of anticipated coldness, everything should be made to accord. The presence of street crossings such as our forefathers enjoyed would be very timely at present since we have had introduced once more the old-fashioned railroad schedule. On Monday last the mail schedule was changed to suit somebody whom nobody else knows. It certainly does not please anybody who ever patronizes the road. From the recent schedule which provided us with separate passenger and freight trains and also brought and carried our mails at convenient hours, there has been a change to the "mixed train system. Now the use of the word "mixed" must have been suggested by its meaning as applied to drug store mixtures. In drug stores there is often mixed a combination of substances which the most healthy stomach can never retain. And that is so, because every element in the combination is of itself a creator of disagreeable causes. Now this mixed train business is none the less repulsive to the public mind. It is a compound of weariness, discomfort, inconvenience and annoyance. In fact it is one of those unpalatable pills called a "nuisance," which pill our people will never swallow except under protest. It was compounded by some Pennsylvania schedule-maker with the deliberate design of seeing to what length he could stretch the public patience. This change stretches it a little too far. In every sense of the word it is abominable and objectionable. It interferes in various ways with the business convenience of our people. It makes travel so very distasteful that it becomes an affliction instead of a pleasure. It has completely destroyed the acceptable schedule which has been in operation during the past year. The mail now reaches here an hour later than formerly, that is, if it reaches here at all. The unfortunate part of it is, the train is seldom if ever on time. The arrival of the mail is uncertain as to time. A business man under the present schedule is unable to open his mail, answer it, and forward the answers on the afternoon mail. He is not allowed time for this. And the trip to Townsend! If it was only summer time so one could alight from the train and play a game of baseball at each stop, then it would not be so disagreeable and tedious. But to be forced at this season of fickle weather to sit patiently in a passenger car and watch the engine at each successive station play fox and goose with a number of freight cars, is just too fatiguing for anything. Our people should file a vigorous complaint.

Mr. Albert Constable, Jr., who defended James H. Truse in the Camp murder trial, has been engaged by William Montgomery to defend him for shooting James Brown, colored, in Elkton, on Wednesday, December 25d.

DOES FARMING PAY?

Some Problems of Considerable Interest to Our Agriculturists Discussed by the Baltimore Sun.

The editorial in the Sun of Friday last upon "Farming in Maryland" touches upon one of the chief causes of hard times among the rural population, especially of our tidewater region. The explanation, briefly stated, of the great depression brought about by low prices and the failure of our farmers to adapt themselves to changed conditions is to be found in wastefulness of methods and the lack of effort to utilize resources which lie ready to their hands. The account books and business correspondence of Maryland planters of fifty or sixty years ago will show that the present low prices are not by any means phenomenal. The pinch was felt then, but it is felt much more keenly now. The reason it may be assured is that the farmers outlay was then proportionately smaller. His income may have been no larger, if as large, but his wants were fewer. A much larger share of what he consumed was produced on the farm.

Fifty years ago many articles which are now purchased "ready-made" were made at home or in the immediate neighborhood. There are probably but few farm houses in our tidewater counties today where soap, candles, linens, baskets and other necessary articles are made as was the universal custom "before the war." Those are now all bought at the nearest store, and though their cost is small, the total outlay in the course of year becomes a heavy tax with all farm produce selling at a very low margin of profit. In former times the farmer's hides were tanned in the neighborhood, his boots and shoes were made by cobblers in the nearest village, the wool from his sheep was worked up at a local factory and returned in part in a supply of strong, serviceable cloth. Clothing was made in the family or by a local tailor or seamstress. The knitting of woolen stockings was a common occupation of a winter's evening at the farmer's fireside. The haberdasher's trade was a profitable one in any considerable village. At almost every cross road there was a wheelwright and blacksmith's shop at which wagons, carts and farm implements, as well as the farmers, the clothing, the boots and shoes, are turned out in vast quantities in great industrial centres and sold to the farmer at prices which defy the competition of local craftsmen and mechanics.

The farmer, attracted by their cheapness argues that it is not worth while to expend time and labor in making things at home which can be bought "for a song." He sees right of the fact that he has to pay for them in hard cash, and that the labor apparently saved to him and his family is not really saved at all when account is taken of the many "odd hours" of bad weather when nearly all farm work is suspended and when some form of home industry would be a pleasant and profitable occupation for the idle members of his household. The truth is that the average farmer has steadily narrowed the range of his production and grown more and more dependent upon outsiders for what he consumes. He feels no ill consequences so long as his crops are good and bring him paying prices, but when there is no longer a liberal profit he finds himself distressed to provide the money for various necessaries which formerly cost him nothing but the labor or were paid for in part, at least, in kind or in supplies from his farm. He looks about him in vain for the neighborhood machables and the small factories that used to take a considerable part of his produce. They have all disappeared. In his own family, perhaps, the art of making candles or soap or even of knitting stockings has been lost. He must depend for everything upon the nearest store and pay for it from the meagre returns obtained from the sale of his wheat or corn or live stock.

Several causes have conspired to bring about a result of which the farmer is, in most cases, the unconscious victim. The marvelous progress during the past thirty years in the invention of labor saving machinery, supplemented in this country by the operation of a high protective tariff, has had the effect of concentrating industrial production into comparatively a few hands. Vast manufacturing plants have been created which produce enormous quantities of the commonest articles of daily use. The small concern which attempts to compete with them inevitably goes to the wall. The temptation to the farmer to buy things thus offered to him on every hand has been almost irresistable. He has indulged himself little by little, not only narrowing his own sphere of production, but depriving the small industries of his neighborhood of the sustenance he formerly gave them and thus trying them up at their source. The local market of which the farmer has thus been deprived, was by no means a insignificant factor in the general prosperity of rural communities.

The only remedy which the average farmer seemed to have tried—at least, in the greater part of the rich and easily cultivated regions lying along the shores of the Chesapeake bay and its tributaries—is in the tillage of a larger acreage of land, hoping thus to swell his resources. The remedy would have been an effectual one in times of good prices, but with the margin of profit growing smaller and smaller as it has done during the past few years, the expected cure has only aggravated the disease. An increase acreage means increased outlay for labor, for commercial fertilizers and for agricultural implements and machines. It may be stated, as a general proposition, that the only safe rule for the farmer with little or no capital is to work only so much land as he can thoroughly till with his own labor or that of his family, and, perhaps, one or two extra hands. Approximately, this may be said to the rule in the more prosperous counties of Pennsylvania, Western Maryland and the Shenandoah Valley. It serves to explain, at least in part, the relatively high price of land in Frederick county, as noted in the Sun's editorial. There the farms are small as compared with the average buildings in Tidewater Maryland, the explanation being supplied by the fact that slavery, which was much more general in the latter region, encouraged the acquisition and holding of large bodies of land.

In Western Maryland the tendency was just the reverse. The thrifty Dutch and Scotch-Irish settlers who drifted down the Cumberland Valley and across the borders of Southern Pennsylvania (its Garrett, Frederick and Washington counties owned few slaves, if any, and seldom undertook to till large acreages. The labor cost was thus kept down, the land was worked more thoroughly, and the resources of the farm, the dairy, the poultry-yard were made the most of. The result was a more even distribution of prosperity. No single individual, perhaps, had an income even approximating that of some great planter of the Patuxent, the Potomac, or the Wye, the "small farmer" had almost invariably a productive farm, a comfortable home, a variety of interests and resources, and usually a happy immunity from debt. It is the class which feels the full the pressure of hard times least. If not rich, they are independent, with fewer wants to satisfy of cash or credit purchases, which must be paid for ultimately not in their own labor at a remunerative price, but in the dwindling returns from the crops.

The same thing is true of the Tidewater region whenever the lesson of a reasonable tillage has been learned. It is on the farms of a hundred acres or less that the greatest degree of comfort and freedom from debt are to be found. The man who owns a small farm usually hesitates long before incurring an obligation. He buys sparingly and seeks to make the largest profit out of every acre of his land, his cattle, his poultry, his hogs. His family are not strained to keep up a large establishment. Their labor being concentrated, tells. The man with more land than he can cultivate economically is at all the greater disadvantage in times of depression from the fact that he cannot curtail his expenditures and he would keep the same acreage under tillage, and he is too often induced to incur obligations that are not actually necessary, by the delusive hope of larger returns. He has neither the time nor the thrift for those small economies which are so important an aid to his less ambitious neighbor.

The term "land-poor" expresses an economic truth which is far too general of the counties of Southern Maryland and of some portions of the Eastern Shore. It is this tenacity in holding on to large tracts which has impoverished so many Maryland farmers and created the impression that farming "no longer pays." Farming of large areas is no longer profitable except for the clear-headed tireless man, with considerable capital at his command. The success of steam Machinery (upon farms to whose owner has been described in the Sun, is due primarily to the fact that he was for many years a thriving merchant and that, having accumulated sufficient capital to start with, he applied to farming the same business principles and closeness of calculation that had won for him success in mercantile life. The history of his operations in Queen Anne's proves the truth of what has been here asserted. For most of his farms—and they range from three or 400 to a 1,000 acres—were purchased from persons who, in the changed condition of things which followed the war, found it impossible to make them pay. Side by side with these improvident estates, which he has improved and rendered profitable, are small farms which have kept their owners in comfort and independence, notwithstanding a series of years of agricultural depression.

The great advantage of small holdings of land for families of limited means and the employment of the family's resources of labor in various house industries is shown not only by the examples here cited, but by the testimony from the agricultural countries of Europe as furnished by the published reports of our diplomatic and consular representatives abroad. There is but little waste on the average farm in Germany and France, and the economies practiced there are so minute that they would be likely to excite a smile of derision on the part of one of our farmers accustomed to disregard everything but the staple crops, and, perhaps, his cattle, sheep and hogs. But the European farmer long ago began to feel the pinch of the world's competition, which has worked such disaster for our farmers in recent years. He discovered that he must not only get out of the land all it could be made to produce with the utmost economy of labor and processes, but must buy nothing that he could make for himself. If he could add to his resources some handicraft such as wood-carving or basket-making, so much the better. His lot, even under these conditions, is not an enviable one from the American point of view, but there can be little doubt but that some of his methods, if imitated here, would effect a beneficial change in the condition of the great mass of our agricultural population. Of one thing, at least, the European farmer is thoroughly convinced, and that is of the benefit accruing from the subdivision of the land in bringing country people closer together and making possible an efficient association, not only for purposes of amusement and recreation, but also for mutual assistance and defense.

This is strikingly shown in the great success in Saxony of the system of "land credit associations" for lending money at rates of interest to farmers from funds subscribed by the agricultural community at large. The operations of these associations were fully described in the September number of the Consular Reports, and the account therein given has excited widespread interest among the farmers of the United States. The Russian government has adopted a somewhat similar scheme for a system of agricultural land banks, and while such government aid and supervision would be neither practicable or desirable in this country, it might be possible to establish a system of purely voluntary organizations, which would accomplish substantially the same results—in protecting farmers from usury and providing the more successful with a means of investing their savings at home. But the first step toward the solving of this question and of the other problems now vexing the farmer would seem to be the general recognition by the farmers themselves of the waste and drain of undertaking tillage entirely out of proportion to their resources and the greater economy and comfort to be obtained from a judicious subdivision of the land and the revival of old familiar forms of farmhouse activity, with perhaps the addition of new ones, which would reduce at least to some extent the cash outlay they now find it so difficult to make.

WHISKEY TEST CASE.

Mr. O. Tilghman Davidson Charged with a Breach of the Liquor License Law in Queen-town.—The Importance of the Case.

On Thursday last Mr. O. Tilghman Davidson was arrested on the charge of selling liquor without a license. There are several of such complaints lodged against him. When arrested he was at once arraigned before Justice Lane. He was released on bail to await the action of the grand jury.

The arrest is no means a surprise. It has rather been expected offer several weeks. For some time it has been generally known that Mr. Davidson was selling liquor, and in the popular mind it was incomprehensible why the arrest was so long delayed. It is reported, however, that it has been quite difficult to gather data sufficient upon which to base an arrest. Testimony of acceptable credibility was finally collected, and Mr. Davidson was taken into custody.

This will revive the much controverted liquor license question in the Queenstown district. Our people have been more or less exercised over the settlement of the matter ever since the extreme measures taken by the grand jury of 1895. That was the first time in the history of the new liquor law in this county in which prohibition was enforced upon the Queenstown district by the grand jury. Hitherto, when applications were made, the grand jury merely investigated the personal fitness of the applicant to conduct the liquor business. If there was no satisfactory objections urged against him he was generally recommended to the Clerk for license.

Shortly prior to the convening of the November term of Court, 1895, so many disturbances and disorders prevailed in Queenstown that it excited an organized effort on the part of many good citizens to suppress if possible the liquor traffic altogether. Great pressure was brought to bear upon the grand jury. It developed into a battle royal between the friends and enemies of liquor selling all over the county. No one believed, however, that there would be a general refusal to recommend. It was popularly thought that the number of licenses would be reduced, but that rigid rules of business conduct would be engrafted on the privilege. Imagine the surprise, therefore, of everybody when the grand jury took the radical position of arbitrary refusal. Everybody was denied a license whether personally qualified, acceptable or not. From that moment started the contest which has culminated in this recently made arrest.

The failure of the liquor men to obtain licenses at the succeeding May term did not daunt them. They determined to persist, and persist they did. The intensity of feeling which the controversy had engendered brought the matter to the attention of the Court. It was admitted that the liquor dealers intended to reapply to the grand November jury of 1896. This led to the forwarding to the Court of a communication relative to the several differences involved.

It became generally noised abroad before the Court met in November last that Judge Russum proposed to charge the grand jury specially on statutes pertaining to licenses. A large crowd was in consequence present when the charge was delivered. In this charge Judge Russum informed the grand jury that the law governing liquor selling in Queenstown was in effect a prohibitory law. But, he said, the grand jury had been invested with the power to allow the sale of liquor in that one district if it felt so disposed. It was to be sole judge as to the wisdom of recommending such a privilege. If it believed that the granting of licenses would prove in the leastwise hurtful to the community then it could arbitrarily withhold from everyone the needed license to engage in the traffic.

When Judge Russum delivered this opinion there was no one on the bench but himself. Of course it delighted the extreme temperance wing of the county. If such was the law then liquor selling in Queenstown had been killed by the grand jury. A new condition arose, however, when Judges Wickes and Stump arrived. When they learned of the tenor of Judge Russum's charge to the grand jury they both protested. Judge Russum, in consultation, was made to understand that he had failed to correctly instruct the grand jury as to the law in the premises. The majority of the court, they said, was of the opinion that the grand jury had not been invested with arbitrary powers. On the contrary its powers were discretionary according to the express provisions of the statute.

This placed Judge Russum in a somewhat embarassing position. The fact that he had already charged the grand jury did not alter or modify the determination of the other two Judges to effect a correction of the false impression left in the minds of the grand jury. Two alternatives were left to Judge Russum: one was, to recall the grand jury from its room and reinstruct it publicly in open court, the other was, to provide the grand jury with private instructions, sufficiently plain and explicit to remove all previously formed false conclusions. He ordered State Attorney J. F. Harper as the agent through whom the instructions were delivered. In this quiet, unobserved and somewhat secret way Judge Russum virtually retracted his construction of the law as laid down in his original charge to the grand jury.

Despite this retraction on the part of the Court, the grand jury declined to recommend anyone whatever as a fit person for the sale of liquor.

This action on its part led to the subsequent conduct on the part of the liquor dealers, which culminated, as we stated, in the arrest of Mr. Davidson. Repeated disappointments stung the liquor men into a determination to organize themselves for the purpose of testing the law. They engaged eminent counsel, among whom was Ex-Gov. William Pinkney Whyte, of Baltimore. Under advice of counsel a government license was procured by Mr. Davidson, who was chosen as the active representative to test the law. He at once resumed the sale of liquor, and so continued until the day of his arrest.

Upon what theory of law he was allowed to resume his sales, we have been unable to ascertain. Whether it is prepared to attack the action of the grand jury or resort to the old "original package" defense is one no one knows except the counsel engaged. The matter will probably attract widespread interest when the May Court is called.

The case, should conviction follow, will probably be carried to the Court of Appeals.

Third Extension of Time for Assessorsr—We understand that Gov. Lowndes has once again extended the time of the local assessors. An additional month is allowed them. This will give them until the first of February to complete their work. Completion will necessarily have to be accomplished within that period. This is true because the Governor has intimated that he will grant no further extension. This is already the third extension. The three extensions make an enlargement of the time to a three months additional time allotted. It means an item of cost to the county which in extra days alone will mount up dangerously close to twelve hundred dollars. The next question is, will the new assessment prove of any advantage whatever to tax-payers? We are told that it will equalize taxes if nothing else. If equalization is the sole benefit, the reassessment will be forever remembered as a most expensive experiment. The principal object of re-assessment was to equalize the taxable basis, more particularly by uncovering hitherto untaxed property that in any way else. How much new property has been unearthered?