Acton Free Press.

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The Acton Free Press,

A FIRST-CLASS LOCAL AND GENERAL FAMILY JOURNAL, PUBLISHED ESPECIALLY IN THE INTERESTS OF THE CITIZENS OF HALTON COUNTY,

EVERY THURSDAY MORNING

AT THE FREE PRESS Printing and Publishing House, next to the Methodist Church, Mill Street, Acton, Ont.

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Confectionery
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This will be found to be the place where the best goods will be kept at the lowest prices.
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Any person in want of a good set of Harness, either
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When they can get better value for their money than any place in the County.
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1st. MATRICULATION.
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15 weeks Commercial Training for $49.00.
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—FOR—
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If you want a good and cheap article in Young Hyson, Japan, Black or Gunpowder
TEAS!!
Sugars,
Syrups,
Spices,
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Of all kinds,
FRESH AND SWEET.
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of all kinds,
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SALT BY THE BARREL,
ALL CHEAP FOR CASH,
—GO TO—
C. T. HILL'S,
Mill Street, Acton.

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BEATTY'S GUIDE
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ELEGANT WRITING
is a perfect self-instructor in PENMANSHIP, by the aid of which young people may become good Writers in a very short time.
It consists of a
Book of Fifty Pages
containing analysis and explanations, a large number of Copy Slips for practicing, a beautiful Ornamental Sheet, and a handsome case to contain the whole.
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Is prepared to call on persons requiring either
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HE HAS AGENCIES FROM THE best manufacturers in the country and will guarantee satisfaction to purchasers. Terms very reasonable. Orders left at his residence or addressed to him to Acton P.O. will receive prompt attention.
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Is prepared in a form perfectly agreeable to children and most sensitive persons. In its manufacture the properties of the oil that produce pain and griping are eliminated, and it is rendered not only mild and pleasant in its action, but absolutely tasteless and palatable. It is pre-eminently the finest laxative and cathartic known, and as a remedy for Costiveness, Constipation, and all Intestinal Derangements it is unequalled, and is destined to take the place of crude oil and all drastic pills and purgatives. For sale by all Druggists at 25 cents a bottle. Don't fail to try it.

The Sea Serpent.

Gorgious monster of the sea,
That wast, and art, and yet shalt be,
Newspaper men make sport of thee,
With snoozing squibbets.
They cannot quite ignore the news,
When they are told that thou art loose,
But print it, adding weak abuse,
In inky dibbets.

Thy being they presume to doubt,
Thy thickness and thy length they route,
And at thy fearful form they flout,
As 'twere a feather.
They dare deride thy head and tail,
And style thee nothing but a whale,
Or seaweed gathered by the gale,
And rolled together.

But thou, grand monster of the main,
Regardest still with calm disdain
The lies or partial truths that stain
The printed pages,
Pursuing thy appointed way,
And seeking thy allotted prey,
As thou, since thy creation's day,
Hast done for ages.

If man, vast serpent of the sea,
Be all he boasts himself to be,
Why don't the braggart capture thee,
In whole or pieces?
With giant ships and monster guns
He ought to gobble thee at once;
But still, to stump him as a dunce,
Thy tribe increases.

(NOTE.—In order to make room for our great Christmas story, the continuation of "Carried by Storm," will be held over for the present.)

LASSIE'S RIDE FOR LIFE.

The Story of a Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER I.

We had been to cure that the troubles that were overwhelming others in the manufacturing world would never touch us! We had been to cure that delegates from the unions might prowl about our "hands," and never gain one single adherent!

I thought our safety founded on a rock. I thought we could calmly and sympathizingly look down upon the troubles of our neighbours.

Now, when I say "we," I mean John and I. This sounds "strong-minded," you are ready to say.

Well, I don't know what other people may choose to call it, but in truth I have been very proud and glad that ever since the day I married the owner of Otway Mills he has liked me to take an interest in his work and in his people.

I don't mean to say that he talks to me about the price of yarns, or tells me of the rises and falls in the cotton market, though I think that if any great anxiety came upon him, even of that kind, Jack would give me a hint of it, and I am sure I should try my best to look as wise as a young owl, and as if the ins and outs of the trade were familiar subjects to my inquiring and enlightened mind.

You see I have had such an example in John's mother and then—well, my family thought that I ought to have done better than marry a Lancashire mill-owner, and they said a good many bitter things. Aunt Denison used to give her shoulder the least little shrug, and draw her shawl about her as if she shivered slightly when I alluded to my future home; and when she shook hands with John, she always managed to convey to me an affected misgiving that she rather feared her delicate fingers might be soiled by the contact. These things hurt at the time; though they lost their sting quickly enough when I got him all to myself, and he held me close in his arms, and told me how hard he would strive to make me happy. Happy! well, well, I wonder does there live a happier woman than John's wife in all the length and breadth of England! Yet no life is without it days of trial, and the story I am going to tell you now is of one of those dark times that comes to us all sooner or later.

The way that Aunt Denison and others of my own kith and kin behaved about my marriage naturally put me somewhat "out in the cold" with them, and threw me more completely upon John's people than might have been the case otherwise. And how good they were to me!

I had never seen Mrs. Ralph Otway, John's mother, until I came to the land of smoke and tall chimneys, for she had not come South to our wedding. Her delicate health was the excuse put forward, but my own private opinion is that John was afraid of auntie. He could put up calmly enough with that shiver and shrug when directed against himself; but both he and I had once inadvertently heard her say that "she believed that all Lancashire ladies spoke in a loud voice, and had very red hands," and I think that was enough for John.

When first I saw Mrs. Ralph Otway this saying at once darted into my mind, for never, among all the grand London ladies that visited at my guardian's house, had I ever seen a lady so completely, beautifully refined in look, voice, and manner. Then her hands! Why they were such soft, white, womanly things, and closed over one's own with such a tender, faithful clasp, that once, sitting by her knee, I could not help bending down and kissing them as they lay upon her lap.

She used to tell me stories of Jack's boyish days; stories that she never tired of telling, or I of listening to; and sometimes she spoke of her dead husband, and of how he had been revered and looked up to by everybody, until at last his name became a sort of proverb, and people in the business world had been heard to speak of him as "honest Ralph Otway." You could hear a tremor in her voice when she spoke of things like these, and see a faint flush, like the pink in the inner side of a sea-shell, rise to her delicate cheek.

"It is a great responsibility to have so many hands under one head, and to be answerable for the welfare of them all; it needs wisdom to rule them well, and to be just as well as kind," she would say to me, speaking of the great mills where the machinery whirred and buzzed all day long, and the "hands" came rushing out when the dinner-bell clanged its noisy summons, like bees swarming from their hive. Listening to her wise and tender words, it was borne in upon me that from his early boyhood John had been trained in the best school to make a man good and true.

He had wanted his mother to live with us—and you may be sure, I had no will apart from his—but she said: "No; married folk are best left to themselves." She had her way; but we could not let her go far from us; only a "step or two," as John said, so that we could run across of an evening, and she could come to us without fatigue.

By the end of the first year of my married life I seemed to have forgotten the fact of being a south-country woman. I found that there were plenty of art-lovers and music-lovers among the people whom Aunt Denison once told me went into society with little fluffy bits of cotton sticking to their dress-coats; while for honest warmth of heart, and true, ungrudging hospitality, I soon came to the conclusion that the South couldn't hold a candle to the North.

I was very happy during that strange new year; happier still during the one that followed, when I held John's son in my arms, and saw the clear grey eyes that had won my girlish heart look up at me from my lap.

At first motherhood seemed to me such a sweet, new, precious joy that I was ready to be over-anxious. I might have fallen into the mistake that so many young wives make, and in my love for baby let the even decree possession of my husband's companionship slip from my hold. However dearly a man loves his children he does not want to be always hearing about them; least of all when he comes home tired with the day's work; nor yet does he like to see his wife gradually become little better than a nurse-maid. I know all these things now; but in those early days I might have lost the freshness of John's sympathy for me, and mine for him, if it had not been for the gentle word in season that fell from his mother's lips, and made, as it were, scales to fall from my eyes.

She spoke with her hand on my shoulder, and her deep beautiful face all a-quiver in the dread lest I should be ready to resent her counsel.

"Don't let the baby keep you from being the heart of John's life, child," she said. "Let no one ever have the power of taking that from you."

Then I remembered how the night before I had been chattering away about baby's remarkable feats and marvellous doings, and how weary John had looked—nay, how I had caught him in the loving hiding away of a yawn that would not be wholly repressed; and wisdom came to me as I pondered.

Times were bad; trouble was around us everywhere in the mercantile world; evil counsel was leading honest men astray, and wanton hands were sowing the seeds of dissatisfaction in the hope of reaping harvests of advantage to themselves. First one class of operatives went on strike, and then another. The "hands" at this mill or that refused to go on working except under the spur of higher wages, and to the busy whirr-whirr of the machinery was silent until stranger hands could be found to set it going again.

Darker shadows crept into the picture after this; men, an hour ago hale and hearty, were maimed, blinded, battered almost out of life; and these crimes were done in the dark. The masters did not escape; one was fired at—the cowardly bullet coming from no one knew whither. I grew fearful, and in spite of struggles after courage more than once I had to turn away my head after John's good-bye kiss had pressed my lips, as he set off for Otway Mills.

Our hands seemed all right as yet.

Yet I saw, day by day, how the cloud deepened on my husband's face. I used to sit very quiet, just within reach of his hand, of an evening, or we would stroll down to Mrs. Otway's—John very silent, but yet I knew, by the magnetism of touch, happy in the feeling of my hand resting on his arm. The mother and son spoke earnestly together of the state of trade, and the dark mists hanging over the north country, and well typified by the black smoke that came from the big chimneys and hung like a canopy above the town.

Who shall tell of the tribute paid in pain and tears by the women and children in those troublous days? Surely no bitterer pang there can be than the sharp stab that goes through a mother's heart as the cry of her child for "Bread! bread!" has to be smothered against her breast, lest the sound drive the brooding man by the fireless hearth to madness and violence.

This is what being "on strike" means to the wives and little ones of our mill hands. I say "our" because—alas! that I should have to write it—the day came when John returned from town looking as I had never seen him—as the mother who bore him had never seen him.

Otway Mills were stopped. The men, whose relations with their masters had been a proverb in the trade, were on strike.

John did not say much. He was never a man of many words, and silence is natural to men as a refuge from possible tears.

"Our turn has come at last; it is hardly the men's fault; this sort of thing is as catching as the plague. They know they have been fairly dealt with. That blackguard Jim Stevens is at the bottom of it; he was seen talking to one of the delegates from the union."

That was all John said. His mother and I listened; and noting the set line of his lips, and the stern look in his eyes, we knew that, let the men at Otway Mills be as stubborn as they might, the master would not yield an inch.

Our home, the dearest spot on earth to me—the fairest, too, in spite of its nearness to a manufacturing centre—was some three miles out of the town.

John used generally to drive in and out, to and from the mills, but sometimes he rode his big black horse, King Cole, and now and again I would ride by him on my pretty little bay mare, Lizzie, returning with the groom.

Well, the night after he told me of the strike, I lay wide-eyed through all the long, long hours, hearing each one strike below stairs, and thinking those thoughts of mingled love and fear that gather about a woman's heart like a flock of ill-omened birds when her nearest and dearest are threatened with danger. The stillness of night is a terrible magnifying medium; possibilities take gigantic proportions seen through its voiceless quiet. How glad I was when faint lines of light began to creep into the room!

It was past—that night of thoughts that were almost prayers—and prayers that were only like thoughts that I trusted to God to read the meaning of.

Breakfast over, the passionate protest in my heart bubbled up to my lips, like a spring that must well up to the light:

"Jack! oh, Jack! you will not go to the mills to-day!"

The answer came, calm and clear, smiting me with a bitter despair.

"I did not think my wife would try and make a coward of me."

He did not speak harshly, I could have borne it better if he had.

He kissed me a moment after—held me very fast and close—then, before he went, he kissed me again.

"That is for the youngster up-stairs," he said, with a tender smile softening the set look of his mouth; "give it him when he wakes."

The groom, an old and faithful servant of the Otways, looked grave as he led up King Cole, and gave the bridle into his master's hand. Then John rode away, and I went into the house, seeing nothing clearly for the mist that gathered round me, not even baby's face, as nurse met me with him at the foot of the stairs.

That night and morning formed the initial letter of a time of anxious foreboding that seemed long to me, though in reality its duration was scarcely a fortnight.

Threatening letters—missives of that most cowardly character called anonymous came at intervals. Many husbands would have hidden such things from a wife, but I think John knew that of all trials I could have least endured the thought that he kept a trouble from me.

Mrs. Otway's face grew pallid with a more transparent whiteness every day; her eyes, always tearless, had a fixed, hard look, the look that comes from grief restrained from outward show by might or will.

At length negotiations for the employment of alien "hands"—men willing to work for the wage that was all the masters could give in those bitter times—were spoken of. Wrath that had simmered now seethed; scowling men gathered in groups about the narrow streets that surrounded the mills like a labyrinth; muttered curses made starved and frightened women hurry by; clinched fists threatened the world for grievances brought about by the bad counsel of wicked men and the brute resolve and stubbornness of uncultured natures.

Many cases of low fever, the result of insufficient food and fuel, occurred among the wives and children of our rebellious operatives; and my time was soon taken up by ministering to the necessities of the sick. In this work John never strove to hinder me; not yet, in the want-stricken homes of the people, was one word of reference to the strike ever uttered in my hearing. The people were kindly, and grateful to me in their own rough way, and I crossed no threshold that a welcome did not greet me.

God knows how full my heart was in those days of darkness! He was teaching me the deepest lessons for life; for "in the day of my sorrow I sought the Lord." Not with long prayers, or any outward acts of devotion, but with a close dependence on His care that became as the very air I breathed. Nor was I without comfort. The sympathy of those dependent upon us is a beautiful thing in time of trouble—and there was not a servant in our household whose heart did not beat in sympathy with me in the safe return of the master evening by evening, and enter into my repressed anxiety as we saw him ride away in the morning.

At length came a day—one of those days that are to be found in most lives—a day that, however long we live, however far away from its scenes our after fate may drift us, is traced upon our memories in indelible colours, and forms a picture upon which we turn and look back, to marvel again and again how we lived through its horror and its anguish.

CHAPTER II.

It was Christmas Eve; and late in the afternoon. The shadows were lengthening out; the snow was falling, softly and slowly; and robin was piping the first notes of his plaintive even-song. I sat alone in my cozy morning-room.

My mother (I call her this because, in my creed, John's belongings were mine, too,) had been ailing for a day or two. The strain of anxious, loving thought for her son had told upon that fragile frame, wearing it as the sharp sword wears the scabbard.

For our troubles were black around us as ever.

"If I had dealy unfairly by a single man in my employ, I would own to the wrong and make reparation," my darling said. "Some hands have just cause to complain of the masters; mine have none. I will not budge one inch."

It seems to me that I am telling my story in a strange, desultory fashion, but I cannot help it. I give you the memories of those days as they rise one by one before me.

The illness of Mrs. Otway kept her a prisoner to her own home, and day by day I went to sit beside her couch and talk of John, and of scarce sight else. Women who are leal and true can give sweet store of comfort to each other in time of trouble by community of sympathy, even if they be but close friends; how much more, then, could we two, to each of whom the man upon whose head sorrow had fallen was the best and dearest!

Baby, on the day of which I now write, and from which I seem ever wandering in devious pathways of thought, had seen fit to take his sleep at a unwonted hour; and I was all alone for once.

The house was very still just then, for the servants were at their tea, and a thick, green-baized door shut off their premises from the rest of the rooms. It was so quiet that I could hear Lassie whinny softly in her stable across the yard; so quiet that the sound of my own name, spoken hurriedly and almost in a whisper, made me start, and seemed, as it were, to tear the mantle of silence that was brooding over the early winter evening.

"Mistress Otway! Mistress Otway!" said the voice: "for God's sake coom round to t' door and let me in. I'm nigh drooping!"

In a moment I had reached the porch, opened the door, and was half-supporting, half-leading a figure so ghostly, so death-like, that it might almost have been taken for a visitant from the spirit-world.

It was Jim Steven's wife; a woman haggard and fever-wasted, whom I had seen only the day before lying weak and wan, with her two-days-old baby by her side.

"Lizzie!" I cried, as she staggered into my room, and, still holding my arm in a wild, convulsive grasp, gasped out something I could not understand, "are you mad?"

"Ay, a'most," she whispered, raising her fever-bright eyes to mine, and wiping the sweat from her poor thin face with a corner of her shawl. "Listen, lady," she went on; "if they miss me fro my bed, and Jim learns as I've coom oop here, I'm a dead woman; he'll brak every boan in my body, as sure as theer's a God above; but I dunnot care. Yo've bin a good friend to me, and the like o' me, and I wosnt see yo' made a widder, and yer little one fatherless."

The words struck me like blows, telling me where I stood with their terrible force.

On my knees, with my head in that poor creature's lap, I wrestled with a pang so awful that as I write about it now, after long years, it seems to rive my heart again.

"Nay," said Lizzie, lifting my bowed head with her poor, shaking hands; "yo' munna greet—yo' mun be strong and hale—for the sake o' him as loves yo'. If summat ain't done he'll be carried whoam to yo' dead this neet, wi' a bullet i' his breas."

"My God, my God!" I cried, staggering to my feet; "help me!"

"Ay, I say Amen to that, lady," said Lizzie, catching my hand and pressing it against her bosom. "Yo've helpt others; happen God 'ull mind that now and help yo'."

"What can I do! Tell me—tell me the whole truth, Lizzie. See, I'm strong and hale now; God has helped me already. He has put courage into my heart."

"Thou'll need it, my lass," said Lizzie, forgetting in her eager trouble all barriers of class, for pain, the great leveller, set us for the nonce side by side, just two sorrowing, timorous women, and nothing more. "It's Jim as is at t' bottom o' it all—may God forgive me for speakin' agen my mon, Mistress Otway—I wudn't, but it's ta hinder murder hein' done, and afore I tell thee, wilt swear tha no'er a word shall pass thy lips to hurt him! He's a bad mon, I know; but for a' that he's my mon—and it's hard for ony women to speak up agen her mon!"

In sorest anguish of impatience I wrung my hands the one in the other, and, with lips as white as Lizzie's own, swore the oath she craved for.

Then she told me all the shameful story.

The foreign workmen whom (so report had it) John had decided to employ were on their way to the North; there was no chance now of bringing the owner of Otway Mills on his knees. The furnace of hate, heated seven times with the fuel of drink, seethed like a mighty cauldron. Jim stirred it with bitter, angry words. He had been at fault more than once, and at last dismissed; he had wrongs to revenge, he said—they all had.

Thus the evil tongue tried to stir up strife; but only one or two other turbulent spirits like himself would be led into plotting against the master. These then had laid a foul plot—the plot that poor, faithful Lizzie had left her bed of weakness and pain to warn me of.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Greek Coinage.

Greek coinage, however rude at first, soon acquired a beauty and perfection surpassing all our modern efforts. The starters, for instance, of Philip and of Alexander, the coins of Syracuse and Metapontum present to us the most lovely female faces and deities—perfect models of human beauty. Animals are also admirably represented, not only the horse, the lion, &c., but other smaller creatures, as the harvest mouse on an ear of wheat on a Metapontum coin, and even insects, as, for instance, the praying mantis. The heads on the earliest coins represent gods and goddesses, the first human head being that of Alexander the Great on a coin of Lysimachus, and even in this case the great conquerer is represented in his divine character as descended from Jupiter Ammon, which is indicated by the ram's horns. It would not, however, be fair to modern Mints to attribute the comparative poverty of modern coins to want of skill. It is a great convenience that coins should lie flatly one on another, and the greater boldness of ancient coins however it may add to their beauty, necessarily rendered this impossible. Not only were the Greek coins admirable for their beauty, but they were also made of pure metal and full weight, offering in that respect a striking contrast to those of most other countries. There were, however, of course, exceptions. Thus the money of Phocæa was notorious for its bad quality. Herodotus mentions though with some doubt, that Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, having to pay a large sum to the Lacedæmonians, "coined a large quantity of the country money in lead, had it gilt, and gave it to them; and that they, having received it thereupon took their departure." That the true theory of coinage was well understood in Greece, we may see from the words of Aristotle, who thus describes the origin of coins: "It became necessary, therefore, to think of certain commodities, easily manageable and safely transportable, and of which the uses are general and so numerous that they insured the certainty of always obtaining for them the articles wanted in exchange. The metals, particularly iron and silver and several others, exactly correspond to this description. They were employed, therefore, by general agreement as the ordinary standard of value and the common measure of exchange, being themselves estimated at first by their bulk and weight, and afterwards stamped, in order to save the trouble of measuring and weighing them." In ancient Greece, as now, the right of coinage was a prerogative of the sovereign. And here we find a curious difference between the Basileus and the turannos. The former coined in his own name, but the turannos, however absolute, never did so; their money was issued in the name of the people. Coins are, of course, very instructive from a historical point of view. Nevertheless, it is somewhat remarkable that the Greeks do not seem to have ever struck commemorative medals. Even on their coins they did not for a long time admit any allusions, to contemporary events, and then only in an indirect manner. Almost the only exception is the enormous gold piece struck by Eucratides, King of Bactriana, of which the French possess the only known example. The fact that it is just equal to 20 staters does not prove that it was ever intended to serve as a coin, against which its size must have been a great objection. Moreover, it would appear that very few specimens were struck. Indeed, there is some reason to suppose that the French example is the only one ever made, as the die appears to have been broken in striking it. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any name for a "medal" as distinguished from a true coin.

The Welsh Love of Music.

At the Welsh musical festival there was a rare musical treat as well as a most enjoyable national reunion. The bone and sinew of the assemblage were the coal-region miners and workmen. These, with their city compatriots, have preserved to their children, and for their children's children, the language of their native land, and have cultivated not only a love for music, but the science of it, to a degree that enables them to present grand choruses with wonderful precision and effect. The language that looks so hard and repelling to American eyes in print, when wedded to the Welsh national airs, produces fine musical effects, marked, however, more by force than liquid sweetness. The singers themselves were nearly all miners, or members of miners' families, though there were choirs from the larger cities of the anthracite region, which combined the hardest underground toilers with men and women who have had better opportunities for musical culture. The feature that marked all the singing, even of the combined choirs, where twelve hundred singers joined in the national airs of Wales and America, was that there were no laggard voices taken their one from other singers. From the youngest to the oldest—and there was probably a range of fifty years of difference in the ages of the singers—each understood his or her part, and sang it with a will, guided by the baton of the director, to whom all paid strict attention. Such results could not be reached if the Welshmen of Pennsylvania had not well maintained the national love of music as something more than a sentiment. That they have done so was shown by the presence in the choirs of whole famies of miners—the husband and wife, with the children, the mother attending in some cases with a child in her arms. The large country choirs that competed for some of the prizes have had few opportunities for rehearsal. These are made up of a large number of the smaller choirs and glee clubs organized in the mining towns; but music is so thoroughly studied by all the singers that they can unite together without rehearsal, and sing with even better effect than many well-drilled choruses composed of less skilled vocalists. If any part of what has been said by philosophers of the refining influence of music is true, these cultivated Welshmen should serve as leaven for the whole anthracite region. It certainly is true that these lovers of music are the reverse of the rough characters who have heretofore been accepted as typical miners. A more orderly, good-natured, happy-looking set of singers is seldom seen at an public gathering. It is to be regretted that their festival was not seen and their music heard by a much larger proportion of Philadelphians than the assemblage gathered in the Exposition building.

A thorough man of the world is one who can shake hands cordially with a friend whom he has just black-balled at a club.

Two base ball clubs, composed entirely of deaf mutes, have been playing in Ohio. They say it is the saddest thing in the world to see the club that gets beat swearing at the umpire and calling him a "hide-bound, black-hearted liar," with their thumbs and fingers.

THE spire of the Russian Admiralty in St. Petersburg is, hard times notwithstanding, to be regilt at the cost of $15,000. The Admiralty occupies a vast square facing the Neva, and one wing of it is confronted by the Imperial winter palace. The gilded spire forms the final point of perspective of five long "prospects," and is surmounted by a gilded ship in full sail.

IF ever we begin to feel gloomy at the rapid approach of our shortest days, we should call to mind such places as Hamburg, in Germany, where the shortest day has only seven hours; Stockholm, where the shortest is only five and a half hours long; or St. Petersburg, whose shortest day is five hours. On the other hand, at Wondorbris, Norway, the longest day extends from May 21st to July 2nd, and at Spitsbergen the longest is three and a half months.