

It is estimated that the cost of vessels now being built at lake ship yards is about \$3,000,000, as compared with \$2,000,000 a year ago.

King Menelik, of Abyssinia, has ordered a battle picture from a Russian artist, to commemorate the thrashing he gave the Italians.

Greece has only 2,200,000 inhabitants, but every man of them is ready to fight like sixty. Her area is only half a great as that of the State of New York, but every acre of it is dedicated to the cause of liberty and civilization.

That the gentler sex is fast becoming emancipated is shown by the fact that in 1896 there were in the United States 33 women woodchoppers, 147 bartenders, 24 hostlers, 29 sailors, 4 locomotive engineers, 28 plasterers, 59 blacksmiths and 6 boiler-makers.

A great emigration movement of Russian Jews from the Vistula provinces to Africa is taking place at present. The movement has reached such proportions in several districts of these provinces that the Jewish male population is greatly diminished and business in shops is principally carried on by women.

Of the \$200,000,000 war indemnity which Japan is to receive from China it is expected that nearly eighty per cent. will be expended in naval construction. It is therefore in order, declares the New York Mail and Express, to ascertain what portion of this vast sum can be acquired by the enterprise of American shipbuilders, steel forgers, gun makers and competitors in other mechanical industries. A country with that amount of money to spend deserves to be looked after by American manufacturers who have things to sell.

Modern science is beginning to throw all the tales of Munchausen into the shade. There is a rumor that Professor MacKendrick, of Glasgow, has succeeded in devising an apparatus which will enable the deaf and dumb to hear operas. He uses telephones connected with the stage at one end, and at the other with vessels filled with a saline solution, into which the deaf insert their hands. No sooner have they done so than their faces are illuminated with the joy of a new sensation. They can hear the singers and the orchestra distinctly. This sounds "American," as foreigners say, but after the Roentgen rays and kinetoscope everything seems possible. Naturalists believe that insects have senses utterly different from ours, and it is not impossible that with the aid of electricity and Roentgen rays man may practically acquire a new sense or power to perceive the unseen world.

There have been printed recently some astonishing facts about the abandoned farm lands of England. Some of these farms, although within an hour or two of London city, go begging for tenants. Earl Darrington, who has for many years owned 23,000 acres of land in Bucks and Lancashire counties and whose every dollar is invested in agriculture, says the depression of the industry in England has been largely due to the extravagance and bad management of the landlords themselves—keeping up costly country houses, and neglecting repairs and improvements, piling up mortgages, driving away tenants, etc. When he took charge of his estates, they were burdened with a debt of \$2,000,000. He disposed of the great country house, with its tremendous expenses, repaired the buildings on all the farms, lowered rates one-third, and encouraged tenants to work small plots of land. In spite of almost constantly decreasing prices of farm products, during the past twenty years he has by this means paid all but one-tenth of the original debt, and yet his estates are not as well situated as regards markets as are many farms near London that are practically abandoned. While conditions are entirely different in America, it is true that thousands of farmers in this country have, on a smaller scale, by prudent management, paid for their farms and are to-day comfortably well fixed, as the result of good farming and good business methods during the past ten or twenty years of increasing competition, lower prices and readjustment of rapidly changing conditions.

MAY DAY.

FESTIVAL OF THE FLOWERS, ITS ORIGIN AND OBSERVANCE.

May Day 4000 Years Ago—The Day in Egypt, China, Mexico and Peru—Old Customs in Connection With the Holiday.

FOR the origin of May Day with its joyous associations, we are compelled to go back to a time when men personified the powers of nature and called them gods and goddesses. How far back the goddess of the flowers was adored at the season when the earth put on her green mantle with its floral spangles of every hue, we do not know, for the earliest records speak of a spring festival as an institution already well established and even then known from more ancient times. The Egyptians made pictures of everything, so it is not surprising that among the paintings on the walls of their catacombs there should be found some which, from the accompaniments of flowers, garlands and wreaths, are judged by the antiquarians to be of a spring festival, a feast of flowers. May Day is therefore at least 4500 years old. When traces of May Day are discovered in the earliest ages of Egypt and at the dawn of history in Greece, among the Etruscans, among the Celts of the Rhone and the Germans of the Rhine, in Scandinavia and Wales and Ireland, among the natives of the Indian Peninsula and among the Aborigines of America and Australia and New Guinea, the conclusion is safe that such a custom is of universal observance and remotest antiquity. So it may be that the Chinese are not as extravagant as they seem when they claim that May Day originated in the Celestial Empire 90,000 years before



MAY DAY DANCE OF LONDON BOOTHLACKER.

the flood, being instituted by the never-to-be-enough-praised Emperor Chi-Whee, who was fond of flowers and employed exactly 1,000,000 men to take care of his garden.

Leaving, however, the claims of the glorious Chi-Whee to be defended by his own people, it is worth remembering that a festival, in many particulars bearing a close resemblance to our May Day, was celebrated all over Italy and the south of Europe at the beginning of the Christian era, when every one who could spare the time went into the woods and fields for a day's outing, gathered flowers and returning laid them on the altars of Flora. It is also interesting to know, that on these occasions the goddess of flowers was personated by a young girl, the prettiest who could be found, who, during the day, received the homage of her friends and was crowned with the spoils of the fields, a genuine Queen of the May. As cities grew, it became inconvenient to go far into the country, for the excursion steamers and railroad trains packed full of pleasure seekers were not, and a substitute was found by bringing a tree into town, setting it in the ground in a public place, decorating it with flowers, which the country people, in the hope of gaining shakels, or oboli, or denarii, or whatever other coin was legal tender for debts public and private in the neighborhood, wore easily



THE DANCE OF THE MILKMAIDS IN PROVENCE.

induced to bring in. Thus, in the May pole is seen the descendant of the green tree, and the dancing about it in circles is explained by the fact that the only way to dance around it at all is in a circle, and also, perhaps, the circle has always had a mystic significance, being much used in charms and incantations.

From authors of our own tongue we may glean almost innumerable references and allusions to the pretty custom of hallowing the May Day, and we also learn that less than 200 years

ago the May pole was as indispensable in every English village as the stocks or the pillory. When the Puritans came into power the May Day dancing and flower gathering were tabooed and May poles were all cut down. But after grim old Oliver passed away the people began to amuse themselves



A MAY DAY IN THE DAYS OF CAESAR.

again, erected taller May poles than were ever known before, and danced about them harder than ever. But, as often happens in such cases, when nobody opposed the May Day and its pole, both soon fell into "innocuous desuetude," and now there is hardly a May pole to be found in all England. The custom of remembering the day, however, still survives, and little girls wearing garlands, and carrying with them a doll decorated with flowers, termed the "Lady of the May," still go about the towns on this day, presenting their doll to the passers-by as a modest hint for halfpence.

It is a strange circumstance that the chimney sweeps and bootblacks of London should be the only people in that great metropolis who now do honor to the May Day. When Pepys was keeping his journal the whole court used to go out at sunrise to gather flowers and wash their faces in dew for good luck and looks, but the custom gradually fell in caste until finally it remains only among the dregs of society. Every May Day, however, it is religiously observed by the street boys, who, with green branches or leaves in their hands, parade to the music of a fife and drum, attended by two or three figures fantastically attired and a "jack-in-the-box" who is indispensable to the occasion. Who the jack originally represented, or what was the significance of his presence on so joyous an occasion, can not now be ascertained, but he is always on hand, and in different countries assumes different forms. From street to street goes the little procession of ragged and dirty folk, halting here and there to dance and caper about, while one of the number diligently passes the hat to collect such pennies as the spectators feel like contributing, but, poor and dingy as it may be, it is one of the survivals of the grand parades in honor of Flora, of which emperors and kings were proud to be a part.

In France there are more remains of the old-time customs, and even to the present day the dance of the milkmaids marching in procession with their cows is seen in scores of villages at this season. That the dance originated with dairy people is unquestioned, and it was probably once limited to their numbers, but now it is participated in by any young women who choose, the only requisite being that they shall wear a dairy maid's hat.

When the pole was at the height of its glory in England it was also in great favor in the Low Countries,

substituted for the wreath, but as the tub was hard to get up and easy to fall down, it was not in much favor.

In the quiet country districts of France, Germany and Italy there are still queens of the May, young girls

who are on this day crowned queens of the festivities. A little floral arbor is provided, in which the queen sits in state all day long, taking no part in the festivities; no one speaks to her; save a bow or courtesy in passing, no one pays her any special attention, and the situation would seem rather dreary, but the honor of the position has compensations, and at every May Day there is lively competition among the various candidates.

In many parts of Europe the May festival takes the form of games and athletic sports of various kinds. In England there were formerly the Robin Hood games among the country people, which kept alive the memory of the merry outlaw and his companions. Various persons, dressed in character, enacted in an open square a pantomime representing some scene chosen from the ballads which are the principal literary survivals of the famous hunter. Every entertainment, at one time or another, has a contest in archery as a special feature, a peculiarity of the Swiss games also, which have probably inherited this part of their programme from the exploits of William Tell.

It is a singular fact, as showing not only the universality of the custom, but also the fact that all the varieties probably had one origin, that many of the features of the celebration in countries very widely separated are almost identical. The Chinese, as well as the English, had a Queen of the May, while in Mexico and Peru, the crowning of a young girl with flowers at this season is a hint of the same thing. While there seems nothing so transient as a jovial custom like this, nothing is, in reality, more permanent, and the manner in which apparently frivolous and meaningless celebrations are handed down from parents to children, from race to race, constitutes one of the bonds which unite us to remote ages and countries far distant from our own.

A NATION OF READERS.

That is Why Many American Houses Now Have a Library.

There may be one or two countries where the percentage of illiteracy is lower than in the United States, but there is no country more deserving to be called a nation of readers. The peasantry of other lands rarely make a practice of reading; but in America the laborer, the artisan and the farmer are ardent readers of the daily newspapers, and often of class publications, even if they do not venture into the field of general literature. The magazines owe their enormous circulation to their widespread love of reading, there being dozens of them that sell more than a hundred thousand copies every month, thus proving that they must go into millions of households.

The tremendous and ever-increasing output of books is another testimonial of the habit of the people. This growth of love for reading must to a great extent influence their lives for



INTERIOR VIEW.

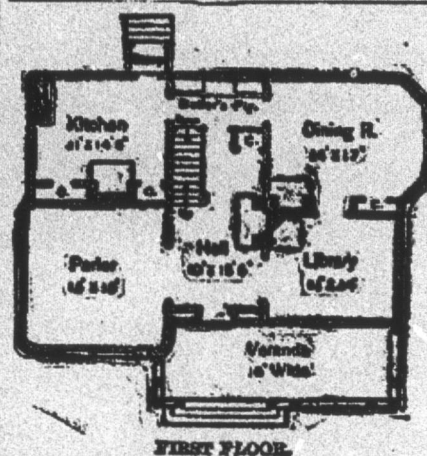
the better; and although it by no means follows that a library will make readers, there can be no denying the

fact that a convenient and comfortable room, with something of artistic simplicity and finish about it, set apart and dedicated as a library, encourages and fosters the habit of reading. That this is generally known and appreciated is shown by the fact that of late years a very large proportion of the houses built contain a room set apart for that purpose. It is well within the memory that when a house contained two rooms on the first floor in addition to the dining-room, one was called "front parlor" and the other "back parlor," or, more euphony, perhaps, parlor and reception room. At the present time, however, one of the rooms is almost invariably dubbed "the library," even if it has only a beggarly array of books.

It is most fitting that the library should be a general sitting room and the place where the best of the home life centers. Most plans that are drawn now give the library one of the choicest locations in the house, and full advantage is taken of this fact in the fitting and furnishing of the room.

Reds and browns are the most pleasing colors, but these may be shaded to light fawn color, terra cotta, or warm yellow if necessary. There may be a paneled ceiling and hardwood floor, the latter covered with rich Oriental rugs, if means permit. Of course these are not essential; some of the most delightful libraries have merely papered ceilings, and floors covered with cheaper carpets or dark matings.

In a new house where everything is planned from the beginning, the problem of fitting the library is comparatively simple. Instead of movable bookcases, which are always cumber-



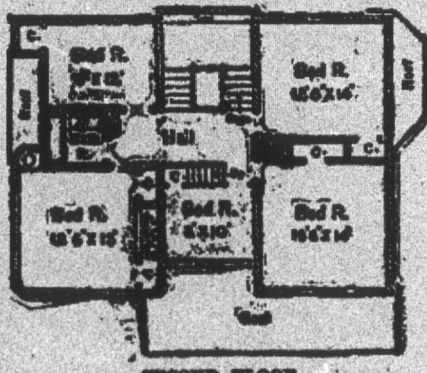
FIRST FLOOR.

some, low shelves should be arranged around the walls as permanent fixtures, or they may be carried up to the ceiling to fill odd corners. Dust is a great enemy of books, and to keep this out is the excuse many people give for sticking to the old-fashioned way of having bookcases with glass doors; but this end is just as well obtained by placing esaloped leather valances on the shelves, or hanging attractive India silk curtains in front of them.

The central feature of the room should be an elegant library table for books and magazines, a desk made for writing and not for mere display, one or two straight-backed chairs, several easy-chairs and a comfortable lounge.

The attached plan shows that the architect has provided a most attractive library, finished in cherry, with flooring of maple, the whole room lending itself to the most artistic furnishing, and that without a great outlay of money.

The arrangement and sizes of the rooms are shown by the floor plan, the width of the house being forty-



SECOND FLOOR.

four feet four inches, and depth, including veranda, twenty-five feet two inches.

This design can be built in the vicinity of New York for about three thousand five hundred dollars, though in many sections of the country the cost should be much less.

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The Language of a Pet Eagle.

Mr. W. L. C. Beard writes in St. Nicholas of a pet eagle named Moses, which he caught in the Arizona desert. Mr. Beard says: Moses had a language of his own, which, by the constant practice he gave us, we soon learned to understand. It consisted of a series of cries, all harsh and nerve-rasping, but perfectly distinct, each one expressing a different emotion. Thus, rage, entreaty, excitement and pleasure were each easily distinguished by those who knew him well. His one syllable note of greeting was more explosive and perhaps a shade less disagreeable than the rest; and he had also a low, crooning sort of murmur; but this he used only in soliloquy, so to use it expressed only the fact that Moses was talking over things with himself.

Heli Chatalein, the traveler in Africa, says that among the 200,000,000 of people in the Dark Continent, 50,000,000 are slaves.