

Thursday, January 20, 1955

MISCELLANY

FROM RICHMOND, at the foot of the Yorkshire Dales, comes a matter-of-fact town council report that experts of the Goldsmiths' Hall and the Victoria and Albert Museum have confirmed that the corporation's mace was probably made during the Commonwealth. Later Royalist additions—the crossed arches and an orb and crown surmounting the mace—should be removed, the experts urge, because they have "no importance either artistically or historically." The surplus gold, they suggest, could be used to make a tiny dish.

What the corporation wants with "a tiny dish" is not revealed but the suggested treatment of the surplus gold seems to spring from a narrow interpretation of "historical importance." The later additions to the mace may have spoilt a good design, which would be better without them, but surely that they were added at some date after the Restoration is as significant in the history of Richmond as that they were originally omitted from the design in Commonwealth days. Without suggesting that Richmond may have been a sort of municipal Vicar of Bray, its habits with its mace do seem to reflect something of its history that might be worth preserving.

Where the Buggy Survives

Buggy making, though not exactly booming, still is a business in the United States. At least two companies maintain their listing as buggy manufacturers in farm equipment directories, and here and there work a few other lingering craftsmen. The biggest buggy factory, in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, makes 800 passenger vehicles each year, its catalogue listing nearly fifty models, ranging from surreys and phaetons to sulkies and horse-show pony

carts. For steady transportation, according to the National Geographic Society, only two groups of Americans still buy buggies in any numbers: Amishmen, the devoted Ammanite farmers, whose sombre garb and German idiom may be found from Pennsylvania to the Midwest; and the French-speaking Acadians of Louisiana's southern "Cajun country." Through the Amish valleys of Pennsylvania, square canvas-topped family buggies and open bachelor's runabouts roll along behind clip-clopping horses as if automobiles had never been invented. Although their numbers are decreasing, Old Order Amish stick steadfastly to horse and buggy travel wherever it will do the job.

Probably half the buggies built in the United States go to Louisiana. New buggies are seen as often as new cars in some small bayou towns. Buggy dealers support showrooms, blacksmiths repair iron-rimmed wooden wheels, and stores and doctors' offices keep hitching posts outside. Long-maned Creole ponies pull high-wheeled family buggies into town on roads that often would mire more modern conveyances.

Carriage and Coach

While plain buggies are still fairly common in some rural areas, the day of what the American calls the fancier carriages seems dead. The victoria, brougham, barouche, rockaway, landau, cabriolet, and sociable are among the vanishing models. What has happened to all the countless old coaches and carriages of a short half-century ago? For no one has ever seen a "buggy dump" comparable to the auto graveyards. A few stage-coaches stand in museums, a few buckboards bounce around estates and

dude ranches. Recently a refurbished Conestoga wagon rumbled into Wheeling, West Virginia, following the path of the old National Road and commemorating the forerunner of the covered wagon.

One New York City stableman keeps several hundred old tallyhos, gigs, coaches, and other horse-drawn vehicles for rent, adding spice to college parties and special promotions. In Central Park a few hansom cabs maintain a nostalgic business. But in all New York fewer than a hundred horses now pull wagons, public carts, carriages or conveyances of any sort through the streets.

Diamond-Making

The centenary of James Ballantyne Hannay, born a hundred years ago, raises a puzzle for science which is still unsolved. This concerns artificial diamonds, to the making of which Hannay may have come nearer than others. There is some uncertainty about it, for although in 1943, after his death, some of his specimens were unearthed in a South Kensington museum, these being submitted to the infallible X-ray test for diamond crystal structure and found to be tiny diamonds, there is the possibility that these samples were merely mounted by Hannay as patterns of what he hoped to achieve. School textbooks which state that Moissan made diamonds by crystallising carbon from molten metals give no true picture. Not only was the X-ray test unavailable in Moissan's time but such a statement ignores those fifteen years of exhausting experiments of Sir Charles Parsons in which enormous pressures and all the resources of a great engineer failed to make diamonds.

One need but read some of those Royal Society papers in which Parsons described his efforts to appreciate the struggle which has gone on. Parsons also repeated the experiments of both Moissan and Hannay, but with no success in producing tiny diamond fragments.

A Dour Scot

Hannay's story is one in which authentic science at times rivals anything in fiction. After a somewhat patchy education this dour Glasgow man had taken up chemistry, had become manager of a small chemical works, but then had resigned this job owing to ill health. While a poorly paid laboratory assistant's post which he then took would be expected to suit anyone suffering nervous debility, this could hardly be said of his diamond-making struggles. To heat carbonaceous matter like bone-oil under great pressure with lithium metal to absorb the hydrogen, Hannay tried stouter and yet stouter tubes of wrought iron to avoid the explosions which at times severely damaged his furnace. Some of these tubes were powerful ingots of Low Moor iron made by Cammell and Company, predecessors of the Birkenhead shipbuilders, with a half-inch hole bored down the centre and closed after charging with an enormous blacksmith's weld.

Hannay himself told of the nervous strain while waiting for the expected explosion; of his sickness after the expected had happened. From 50 of his thick tubes only two or three survived the great pressures, these yielding the tiny black fragments which Hannay believed to be diamond.

A COUNTRY DIARY

HEREFORD, JANUARY 10.

Town dwellers blame farmers for the inferior pork sausages of to-day. It is not the meat that is at fault. Seasoning is neglected and there should not be bread put into sausages; it turns sour. You will never find it in foreign sausages. And the meat should not be finely minced into a mush. I give a recipe for seasoning as used in farmhouses: ½ lb. of black freshly ground pepper, ½ lb. of salt, 1 oz. of ground allspice, 1 oz. of dried sage rubbed very fine, ½ oz. ground mace; the ingredients to be mixed together, and ½ oz. used to one pound of meat. Food becomes more and more in the hands of manufacturers, and is tinned in red and yellow "to brighten the home" and the dust heap. The complaint of former days no longer holds that "God sends the food but the devil the cooks." Gone are the cooks, good and bad, into the limbo, and matters may be summed up in the remark of a little boy—"You can't cook, mother, but you can warm up."

Another complaint against the farmer is that "full cream" milk cannot be bought; this is a matter for the middleman. We provide first-class Jersey milk from an attested pedigree herd at an uneconomic price to produce, and would sell cream too, but there is no steady demand and the transport and work make it not worth while. G. MCB.

PENRITH, JANUARY 12.

The spread of myxomatosis among rabbits in Britain has been publicised to such an

extent that some people naturally regard the subject as threadbare. My excuse for again referring to the disease is that a new angle has appeared in Cumberland—and perhaps elsewhere. Stoats are very numerous in the county, especially in the area running westward from the Pennines to the Eden Valley, and hitherto they have fed largely on the rabbits which infest the district. A few days ago a friend who had business among the foothills up there informed me that along less than half a mile of narrow district road he counted 48 dead rabbits, and of those he examined not one appeared to have been molested by carrion eaters or stoats. The latter, as is well known by observers, prefer to secure their prey alive. It is unlikely, therefore, that unless hard pressed they would tackle the bodies of diseased rabbits. And that leads to the new angle. Two or three years ago a new mine was opened in Addingham parish (not far from the famous Druidical circle, "Long Meg and Her Daughters") for the winning of a mineral of the barytes type from which sulphuric acid is extracted. Two or three hundred men from both sides of the Pennines are employed there and, their packed meals being the probable attraction, the mine harbours a number of rats. Now (I am told by an employee) stoats have invaded the mine to tackle the rats. The mine is entered by an adit—not a shaft; therefore it is easy for both rats and stoats to get in. J. H. H.

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