

A MEXICAN CHRISTMAS.

How the People of Mexico Celebrate the Yuletide.

"The people of Mexico have a grand celebration every year, beginning December 16," says a writer in the December Woman's Home Companion, "and continuing until after New Year's. Every night they have jolly family parties and feasts; a few gifts are given out each evening. But they have no stocking hanging, no mythical Santa Claus and no Christmas tree. Their substitute for the latter is the pinata—which would be a popular novelty if introduced to American homes.

"These pinatas are queer figures about four feet tall, which dangle by the neck or head from a rod six feet long. They are made of paper over a fragile oblong jar, which forms their body and holds the Christmas gifts. Some look like huge paper dolls in holiday array; there are queer animals, crazy clowns, gorgeous dancing girls, etc., all decidedly fat in body and decidedly flat in the extremities.

"Early in December, street corners and squares are crowded with vendors who offer these grotesque tinsel creations at whatever price they can get from passersby. People of all classes haggle over the amount, and then carry them jauntily—and very carefully—home on their shoulders."

The Story of Fire.

Today the world in which we live is a veritable paradise, to which each day's advance brings a new development for our betterment, education and comfort; it might seem we were becoming too civilized as compared to our rugged and uncultured forebears, who lived and prospered without the luxuries we have come to need. One of man's earliest and most important discoveries was fire, the story of the finding, the gaining of knowledge and the preservation of which is uniquely shown by a collection of objects and implements assembled and arranged by the National Museum, and now on display in the Smithsonian exhibit at the Panama-Pacific International exposition, in San Francisco.

To appreciate the true value of fire to the world it is necessary to imagine an existence without fire, and light and heat, its accompanying features, as well as the industries, arts and sciences dependent thereon. We would at once drop back to the stone age in our daily occupations and social life; our houses would be unlit at night, our food uncooked, our communication with the rest of the world would be broken, and only by foot or on the back of domesticated animals could we journey abroad. Not only this, but we would be unable to renew our existing stock of tools, apparatus, supplies and everything made or fashioned by the assistance of heat, and thus we would be carried back to the early days of the world by the loss of fire alone.

No one really knows just how primitive man came to discover fire and utilize it; but at some far distant period he certainly found that fire existed in nature, derived from the volcano, lightning or friction, though he seems to have made no use of it for a long time. He may have come to know that it could be transported or transferred through having seen red-hot volcanic rock ignite dry grass, leaves or wood, or possibly by having seen the lightning strike and set fire to a tree. He may even have secured a light, as it were from one of these sources and carefully preserved it for years by keeping something constantly burning. It became invaluable to him, since it cooked his food and kept him warm, as well as gave him light at night. But it was at least a long time before he realized that he could himself create or make fire by rubbing two dry sticks together. Once discovered, this process alone was used for centuries before it was found that by knocking flint and pyrites together sparks capable of igniting tinder might be struck. Somewhat later, in the iron age, flint and steel were substituted, a common method employed in fire-making until late in the seventeenth century. A little later there came chemical inventions which eventually gave way to matches.

The use of fire also marks the beginning of artificial illumination, developed successively through the bonfire, torch, lamps and candles, to the gas and electric lights of today. To fire as well the beginnings of metallurgy, ceramics and other arts which have attained a high degree of perfection in this century owe their origin. The specimens exhibited by the United States National Museum show the implements used in making fire by the friction of wood, percussion of minerals, compression of air, focusing the sun's rays, and through chemistry, and terminate with the electric lighter. The series itself is preceded by three drawings; the first illustrating volcanic action, the hot lava setting fire to a forest, the second shows

ROBBERY AT WILLISTON.

\$800 in Jewelry Taken, Most of Which is Recovered.

Williston, Dec. 5.—Dr. J. L. Smith's drug store was broken into and robbed some time Friday night. It was found when the store was opened Saturday that the thief had forced an entrance through the rear door and made off with about \$800 worth of jewelry. The police were immediately notified and they looked carefully over the ground for a possible clue. While they were still busy trying to locate the thief some one came in from the country and reported seeing a man about half-way between Williston and Windsor, walking on the railroad; also reported that he had a grip. Dr. Smith got a constable to go with him and they soon overtook the suspect and brought to light all the missing jewelry but two diamond rings, which have not yet been recovered.

The suspect proved to be a hanger-on with a carnival company, which was in town last week.

a forest fire ignited by the lightning; while the third illustrates the primitive campfire, and the method of conveying fire from one camp to another. The first two being presumptive natural sources from which man may have obtained fire before he knew a manner for kindling it himself.

The progressive steps of man's acquaintance with fire are three: The knowledge of fire, the means of utilizing it, and the means of preserving it. The last step, which is one of the most important in the history of man's development, is fully illustrated by the series of different apparatus and materials. Many improvements have followed the first steps in man's progress, and each method has been subject to various modifications by different peoples. What was probably the first method, that of rubbing two sticks together with the palms and resting on a second lying horizontally on the ground, then by the addition of a bow and socket, followed by the weighted stick as in the pump drill, and finally the machine with cog wheels and crank as employed in Soudan. The Indians of the two Americas, Somalis, Kaffirs, Veddahs, and Australians, were generally exponents of the simple two-stick method. The four-piece apparatus was used by the Eskimo, Hindoos, Dyaks, and some Athapascan tribes, and the weighted drill was employed by the Iroquois and the Chukchis.

The second method is that of sawing, and the apparatus comprised a thin strip of bamboo which was drawn edgewise across a section of the same wood, in which a corresponding groove had been cut across the grain, the sparks created falling through the groove upon some inflammable substance lying beneath the large section. This was also accomplished by drawing a thong of rattan across a stick in which a longitudinal slot had been cut partway through, the sparks lighting some tinder placed in the slot. These methods were used by the Malays and Burmese, as well as some other races.

Fire was also made by plowing, that is, a thin piece of wood was forced along a narrow slot cut lengthwise in a large piece until the friction ignited the tinder. This system was evolved by the Polynesians, the Australians and the Papuans.

Another and more advanced system, of striking fire was by percussion, first employed through the use of flint and iron pyrites, or stone containing iron, by the Eskimo and Northern Indians, and later superseded by flint and steel, a custom which became quite general, and remained popular for many years.

The collections of the museum, which include several examples of different forms of apparatus under the above subdivisions, are supplemented by examples of more recent devices. One is a tinder pistol, an English adaption of the flint and steel in a gunlock, which threw sparks on some tinder. What was known as a fire piston was made by the Siamese and Malays. This comprised a cylinder of wood with a closely fitting wooden piston, a smart thrust of which kindled tinder within the cylinder. A lens for focusing the sunlight on tinder is shown as an example of a method first employed by the early Greeks for kindling a fire.

Other apparatus includes what was known in Germany in 1824 as a hydrogen lamp, the hydrogen being derived from the action of acid on zinc, was made to play on spongy platinum, thus causing it to glow; a match light box of about 1809, from Vienna, consisting of a bottle of sulphuric acid into which splints tipped with chlorate of potash and sugar were dipped, and matches of sulphur and phosphorous, as well as an electric gas lighter. The latter exhibits bring the series up-to-date and cover in a general way the development of fire making from the earliest days to modern times.



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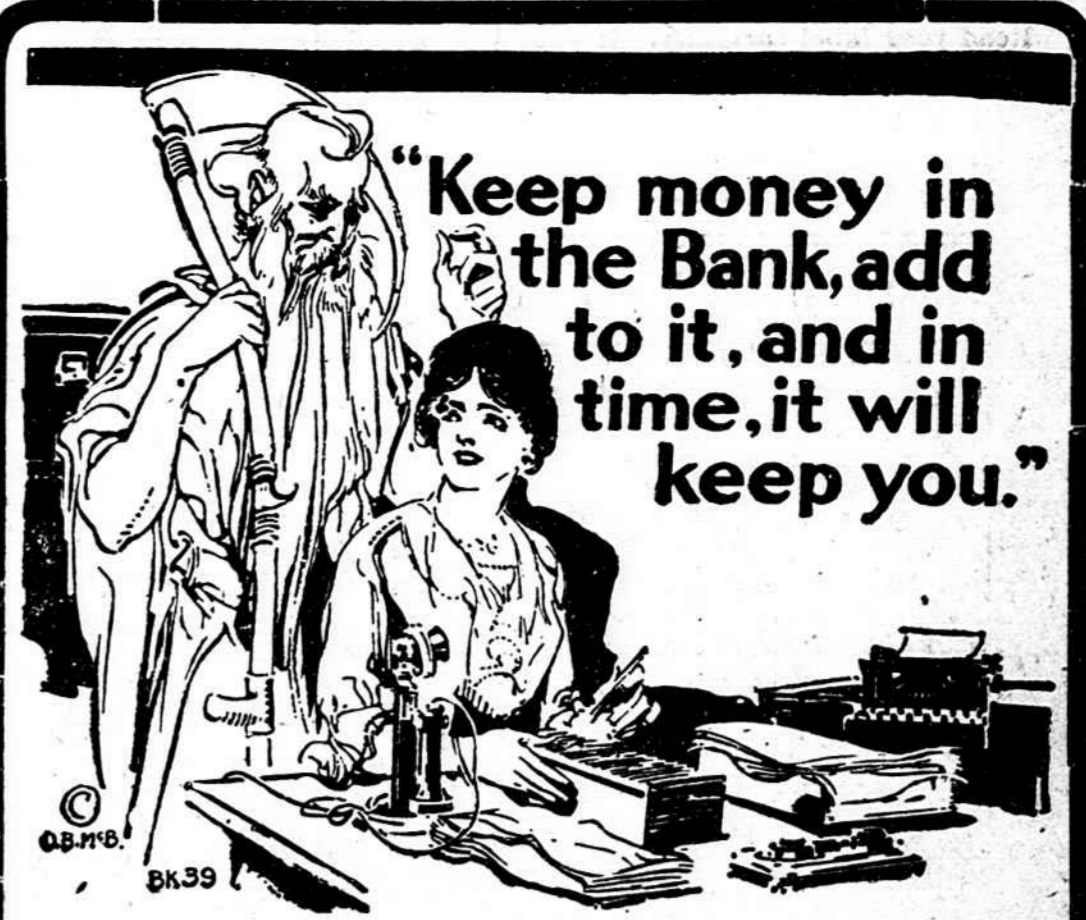
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