

Americans are not to be blamed for failing to see "cleverness" in the writer of such stuff as this, for every one knows it is utterly false in all its particulars and only partially true in a few instances. To his credit be it said, the American business man who succeeds feels that he would rather wear out than rust out, and he esteems as one of the minor pleasures of life—not the chief end of existence—the act of eating. At the same time, there is no doubt that amendment in some of the American ways of living could be introduced with profit. The span of life would be lengthened, its joys would be enhanced, if instead of running the machine always at a high pressure, calculation were made on keeping a certain reserve energy to be brought forth only in emergency. The instances of premature decay, the spectacle of men who ought to be still in their prime, fagged out and unfit for mental and physical usefulness, would be rarer if to the divine command of one day's rest in seven were also added the sound, common-sense, mechanical rule that there is danger in ceaselessly operating even the most perfect machine at the highest limit of its capacity. Temperance and moderation are as much the duty of the citizen who cares for his own and his posterity's welfare, as though they were blazoned upon the statute books and enforced through judicial penalties.

### CONCERNING THE COMET.

At the present time there is dimly discernible in the northern sky a tenuous-looking will-o'-the-wisp, and men who have devoted their lives to and make a business of explorations of the upper deep hold nightly interviews with the little wanderer, that is, when the view is unobstructed. The comet—for such in one form or another it undoubtedly is—does not seem disposed to cultivate neighborly relations with our planet, although one or two of the knowing ones have expressed the opinion that the orbits of the two may intersect at a point not set down on the map. This is largely speculation of the baseless sort, a natural product of minds which are constantly bent upon the things that be far away and which, therefore, are impressionable by dreams and airy equations more than by the more fleshly and solid things of this groveling existence.

Even if the earth were to pass through the phosphorescent train of a comet, it would be a circumstance altogether unappreciable to us. In fact, our astronomical instructors advise us that this very thing was done a few years ago, in the case of the magnificent comet of 1862, we believe. The tenuity of a comet's caudal appendage is so great that it does not enter the domain of substantial things at all, but is rather of the nature of a translucent haze. Stars are nearly as easily seen through it as when it is not in the way, this of course referring to the more remote portion of it, for the density increases as the head of the comet is approached, and this itself is undoubtedly a more or less solid mass; if this were to collide with the earth it might shake us up considerably, especially when we consider that

all comets move along at a rate dozens and it may be hundreds of times as fast as our comparatively snail-paced earth does—and yet we lose no time, if the matter of 68,000 miles an hour is to be taken into consideration! However, it is to be hoped that no one will abandon himself to gloomy apprehensions over such a result, for it is not likely to occur.

The word comet is from the Greek coma, meaning hair; planet is from the same tongue and means wanderer. Both appellations are singularly inappropriate and illustrate again how prone is the uncultured mind to attach appearances and meanings to things in accordance with its own limited scope. There is nothing remotely resembling hair about a comet, and the planets are not in any sense wanderers, pursuing, as they do, paths about the center of our system with an unvarying regularity which no mechanism can approach; year after year, age after age and cycle after cycle has it been with them a steady, unswerving course in their mighty sweep through space; yet so nicely are the laws of force from within and without applied that no deflection occurs; indeed, a variance in one of their paths by so much as the curve sometimes imparted to the flight of a baseball might produce a perturbation throughout the entire solar system! There is not much that resembles a "wanderer" in this, surely; but the comet is that and nothing else. But three or four comets are known to have fixed orbits, and only two or three of these are ever seen twice by the same generation, their orbits are so extremely elongated. It is held that there are as many of the other kind as there are fishes in the sea and their deportment in space must be the very *ne plus ultra* of celestial eccentricity. They meander around until our sun by his own movement through the ethereal depths, or that of the comet, and perhaps both, bring the latter within his influence, and then it makes a plunge almost directly for his blazing breast. We may not see it until it has been on the way for weeks at the rate of several thousand miles a minute, and may not see it at all, depending upon its magnitude and our relative positions. It flies to its nearest approach to the sun, its speed constantly increasing, and when it gets as near as is consistent with a flank movement at the right time, it darts past and nearly around the burning zone, thence disappearing as rapidly as it came and being lost to the view of man forever. Why is it that the power which seemingly draws it toward itself becomes apparently all at once a repelling one and that which threatened to plunge into the furnace is kept at a proper distance and sent back to the depths of the shoreless sea from whence it came? As a scientific question, no astronomer or other person can answer with any degree of satisfaction, nor can any of them give us even more than a theory of what comets are, why they are or by what they are controlled; by the aid of the prism and spectroscope we know some of their component parts and that is all we do know. And yet some of them have approached so near the sun that anything metallic

contained in them would have melted as rapidly as a snowball in a blazing fire.

Comets are mysterious visitors, and the comparative frequency of their coming instead of diminishing the interest in them which we all feel does but increase it. Whether we shall ever know more of them than now is merely a guess, but it may be received as a certainty that every time one approaches, a hundred telescopes manned by as many skilled and experienced sky voyagers will be trained upon it, all intent upon adding whatsoever they may to the fund of information now possessed; meantime, theories constructed out of logical premises, beliefs and even well-worded apostrophes to the comet are strictly in order.

### THE PANAMA CANAL SCANDAL.

When France has no governmental crisis on hand, she generally manages to improvise a huge scandal or something equally penetrating to get along with for the time being. She has not had a ministerial overturning for a few years, but the variety and number of the other commodity have led the record somewhat, and this in France means a great deal. The latest thing in the shape of a full-grown, well-developed scandal are the facts coming to light regarding the manner in which money was raised for the Panama canal scheme, as well as what was done with it after it was raised.

It looks as if legislators were much the same in all ages and in all countries. There is sure to be one here and there whose vote and influence are for sale, and the price demanded and received usually corresponds with the extent to which he can cause others to do as he engages to do. Uncle Sam has had several such skeletons in his closet, but only occasionally have the dear public been favored with a view of them, except during the period immediately following the war, when they became so common that no one on the outside seemed to mind them much, and the details of the Credit Mobilier by which the government was swindled out of a few score millions; the De Golyer contracts; the Pacific Mail subsidy (this resembling the present French mud-dle more than any other); the systematic traffic in post traderships, and many others, not forgetting the later Star route transactions, got to be read as so much news and nothing more.

There is no telling at present what will come of the developments ament the Isthmian canal, but in the chamber of deputies yesterday M. de la Haye created a most profound sensation and not a little tumult by showing that money had been raised for the purpose of buying votes in that body, the one who solicited the funds declaring that the modest sum of 5,000,000 francs, or about one million dollars, was all that was wanted to purchase the needed consciences in either house of the national legislature. This, if true, goes to show that the average French statesman is much cheaper than his trans-Atlantic brother, for the Pacific Mail company at the time referred to went into the open market several