

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Historical and News Notes.

A Brooklyn church, yearning for peace on earth, has abolished the choir.

The weight of expert opinion seems to be that spelling correctly is a gift, the same as spellbinding.

When frost magnates begin shying stones at one another there is sure to be a great shattering of glass.

We often hear of a middle-aged man, but never of a middle-aged woman. A woman is either young or old.

George Kennan is bearing up under the repeated misfortunes of the Russians as well as could be expected.

The man who thinks a good deal of his wife should not attempt to conceal his thoughts when he is alone with her.

A New York man is learning to talk without a tongue. This is new; but many people have learned to talk without brains.

Andrew Carnegie has now given away more than \$100,000,000. Hurrah for Andy. May he not stop till he makes it a billion.

It is comparatively easy to discover the germ that produces disease. The real trick is to prevent the germ from discovering its victim.

An excited doctor has run a pin through the mump microbe. It will be a great triumph when they coral the stone bruise microbe.

Many a candidate who thinks he hears the voice of the people calling to him, discovers later on that he has responded to a false alarm.

Sir Charles Dilke will now be voted the loveliest man in all England. He has come out flat-footed for the admission of women to parliament.

Another trained nurse has married a millionaire patient. The training of nurses in some quarters seems to be a comprehensive sort of tutelage.

A great many people devote their best thoughts and energies to bringing prison reforms who never give a thought to the man that never did anything to merit imprisonment.

The geological discovery that the western mines of the United States can produce unlimited quantities of radium follows closely upon the heels of the discovery that radium is not good for anything.

America has begun to set the styles of the world in wearing apparel, as well as in freedom. An English shoe manufacturer with branch stores in many large European cities is making shoes on the American model because his customers demand them.

Dr. E. Benjamin Andrews says that the President's race article theory is a good one but that it can be overworked. Dr. Andrews says that ten children is too many. A few more bits of wise advice and the American people may yet learn how to regulate their family affairs.

Public opinion has turned against lynching so steadily of late that the action of the Colorado sheriff who, single-handed, stood off a mob at the point of his pistol represents a popular new fashion in officers of the law. A few more such instances of determined fidelity and courage will greatly help to cure the lynching habit.

The frequency of the remarks that Russia and Japan will get rich out of their war shows the long life of a popular misconception. Countries at war get poorer with startling rapidity. War does three things which make a nation look prosperous: It makes a scarcity of labor; it taxes the future for an indefinite period and spends the tax money at once in lavish sums; and it enables a handful of capitalists to reap vast fortunes out of the profuse expenditure of money. This true statement of the case cannot too early be mastered.

Verestchagin, the Russian painter who has devoted his life to depicting the horrors of war, with the intention of abolishing the cruel curse of the ages, was on board the Russian battleship Petropavlovsk. He died in carrying out the cause to which his art was dedicated—the securing of peace to the world. He was only in the military camps and upon the murderous engines of sea battle to study realities so as to present to the world the scenes inseparable from war. It was his hope that when the nations saw what they were fostering in the military spirit, they would revolt from it and bring about a new reign of peace on earth, good will to men. The war canvases of Verestchagin have been forbidden the galleries of Russia and of Germany by more than one decree. They were feared for the effect they would have upon the masses.

George Collins, a young man, was hanged in St. Louis recently. A few hours before his execution he said in an interview with a newspaper reporter: "My parents never gave me a show." Nor did he say this because of plague, nor to justify himself. As revealed by his life's history what he said was true. The boy did not get a fair chance at life. In fact his parents gave him no chance at all. His father and mother were unfit for parenthood. They allowed their son to grow up in the streets. There was no home atmosphere nor influence nor training. The only training was in the direction of evil. Very early in life young Collins came into conflict with the police. They pronounced him a bad lot and finally had him sent to the reform school. In this school Collins simply took a post-graduate in vice. After thus fitting himself for a criminal career he was released to prey upon society. The road to the

scaffold was a short one. Primarily the blame rests with the parents. Had they given him a fair chance he could then blame himself for his wrongdoing. His father and mother sent him to the gallows. The lesson of his mispent life is for parents: Begin the education of your boy before he is born—with yourself.

During a discussion at the Chicago Woman's Club Professor Arnold Tompkins of the Chicago Normal School said: "A man should dress well—should a woman—but not too well; he should comb, but not too well; he should write well, but not too well, and he should spell, but not too well. The press recently criticized high school pupils because they were poor spellers. It was the highest compliment ever paid to them, because it proved they were in better business." Another speaker endorsed this notion by declaring that there were more important things in education than good spelling, and that the time was coming when the poor speller would no longer be considered illiterate. From these assertions and others like them which proceed from the mouths of school teachers we may infer that a contempt for spelling is being rather assiduously cultivated by a considerable number of our modern educators, and the question arises whether they are not inviting contempt for themselves. It is to be noted, moreover, that they can put forward no superior claims to authority in the matter, because the test of the value of spelling is not confined to the classroom. It is being applied every day in business and in the professions. The high school boy who is assured by Professor Tompkins that the censure of his errors in spelling is in fact a compliment may find that the more he justifies such compliments the more difficult it will be for him to secure the favorable attention of those upon whom he depends for employment. That is a phase of the subject that is of very great practical importance, and that admits, we should say, of little difference of opinion among persons of experience in the world's work. It is a fair conclusion also that where slovenliness is encouraged in one branch of study its influence is likely to be felt in others, and that there are occasionally instances from which it appears that poor spelling and broad general culture are not incompatible. They are to be taken as curiously exceptions. Furthermore, when we are informed that there are more important things in education than good spelling we are entitled to a bill of particulars; also to proof that inaccuracy in spelling instead of being the sign of general slovenliness is evidence of devotion to the more important things. Upon the whole, it would seem that the high school boy is getting sloppier when he needs discipline, and if a professor may defy the rules with impunity the boy enjoys no such privilege. In this connection a story that is told of Dr. Parr, an eminent English scholar and educator, is pertinent. When a gentleman defended his pronunciation of Alexandria with the accent upon the "i" by an appeal to the authority of Richard Bentley, Parr came down upon him with the comment that he (Parr) and Bentley might pronounce the word that way, but that the gentleman had better stick to the ordinary usage. So Dr. Tompkins may spell as he pleases, but he ought to refrain from making a laughing stock of his pupils.

Official Corruption.

THE great Governments and the great municipalities of the world have a problem before them which as yet they have not fairly faced, but which they must face if they are to make sure in times of emergency of the efficiency of their agents. The growing hunger for money as the one absolute condition of endurable life, the increasing severity of the competition for great contracts, and the decaying abhorrence of official all tend to the development of "corruption" in its widest sense, that is, of bribe-taking by officials, and of stealing from State and municipal departments. No form of government seems to protect the nations from it. We have less of it than most countries, because under our social conditions the class which really governs has been taught from early childhood to regard bribe-taking as a worse dishonor even than cheating at cards, and because those who suffer are absolutely free to complain; but even here, when the Government is forced to spend millions suddenly, rings are formed to get some of that money, and the taxpayer is fleeced through preposterous charges and illicit commissions.

It is a great blot on modern civilization, which in many respects depends upon efficiency for success. Efficiency and corruption are wholly incompatible. Some think that corruption produces only waste, and that they can bear waste; but that is a false view. Corruption, in the first place, arrests the employment of the best men in leading positions, for the whole energy of the corrupt is devoted to preventing their promotion, or if they are promoted, to rendering their positions untenable. In the second place, corruption makes energetic administration nearly impossible, for no Government ever loses the hope of preventing it, and to prevent it most of them apply an infinity of "checks," every one of which occupies part of the time of the executive officer, and increases the load of responsibility under which at last he dare do nothing without previous sanction. And, in the third place, corruption is not only fatal to the very idea of duty, but to the habit of performing it.

A perfect remedy for corruption is hard to find, because it requires a change in the motives of the corrupt which Governments cannot produce, and which society will not be at the pains to encourage effectively; but two or three palliatives might at least be tried. One is to protect those who complain. Another is to pay all those who have anything whatever to do with contracts at least decently, a rule often neglected in the case of the experienced but subordinate men upon whose judgment their less experienced superiors in matters of business are compelled to rely. And a third is to declare bribe-giving and bribe-receiving a form of treason severely punishable whenever it is proved.—London Spectator.

Social Gravitation.

THE census proves incontrovertibly that the drift of population cityward reached its maximum some years ago, and has begun to recede. Some one has said: "Hereafter the city and the country will march side by side, with even steps." Even this is hardly probable. The change of drift is owing to economical conditions that will continue strongly to favor the country. Population will still move out and differentiate from the masses. In fact, the coming deal seems to be rather an evenly distributed suburbanism, covering the whole country; while the city will remain as a ganglia. Following this ideal the city will grow more country-like, while the country will steadily acquire those privileges which have heretofore belonged to the city.

According to a recent census bulletin, 159 towns show an increase of 32 per cent during the last ten years, which is about the average of the increase of the whole country. The relative gain of cities from 1880 to 1900 was from 22 to 29 per cent—or 7 per cent positive increase—but from 1850 to 1900 this increase was only about 2 1/2 per cent. This tells the story with accuracy. It does not warrant us in assuming that cities will cease to grow, but that they will gradually they will cease to grow as fast as the country.

A COMIC TRAGEDY.

John Banvard, who afterward became famous as the painter of a great panorama of Mississippi scenery, set out in his boyhood, in the early thirties, to travel down the "Great Water" in a flatboat with a number of companions. They built their boat on the Wabash, and were to pay their way by exhibiting diorama views in the cabin at landings. Unfortunately the candle-lights were not then shining through the sycamores along the Wabash, and before the adventurers reached a settled region they ran out of provisions. In the woods they could find nothing but papaws, luscious at first, but quickly cloying.

For two days, wrote the sixteen-year-old Banvard, we had nothing whatever to eat but those awful papaws. The very sight or memory of one made me shudder. Then, on a joyful sunny afternoon, we approached Shawneetown, Ill., on the Ohio river, where we were advertised to exhibit.

As we came in we could see on the compressed yeast, which will raise, not bread, but crops; for when applied to certain plants it will enable them to take abundant nitrogen from the atmosphere. The "yeast" is really a mass of germs, which bid fair to become most efficient gardeners.

It has long been known that clover and other leguminous crops flourish in "worm-out" soil, and when plowed into it partially restore the fertility of it. Studying this phenomenon, scientists have found that in such a soil the plants have nodules, little bunched or swellings, on their roots, which they do not have when grown elsewhere. These nodules are formed by bacteria called rhizobium.

Professor Nobbe, a German investigator, found that lupines which had the nodules would grow in soil devoid of nitrogen. Without the nodules the lupines would not grow. He obtained some of the nodules from the lupines and propagated them in gelatine till he had many millions of the germs.

He then put into three jars equal quantities of sterilized sand containing no nitrogen whatever. In each jar he planted beans. The first he fertilized with all the usual plant foods except nitrogen. The second he supplied with the same food and salt-peter, a form of nitrogen easily absorbed by plants. The third he fed like the first, and in addition inoculated sand with his rhizobium.

The result was extremely interesting. The beans all came up, and for a few days grew alike. Then the first lot, having no nitrogen, turned yellow and died. The second continued to grow in normal fashion. But the third, although it got no nitrogen in the soil, flourished far beyond its neighbor, and developed a luxuriant and healthy growth, showing that the rhizobium

had enabled it to draw its nitrogen from the air.

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Having done this, his next move was to place them in the farmers' hands. He grew them by millions and packed them in bottles of gelatine. All that the farmer needed to do was to dilute the gelatine with warm water, mix it with the seed and a little soil, partially dry the mixture and sow it. The germs did the rest.

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But although these fields are diminutive they are numerous, and the combined output makes up a large trade in Bermuda products in the New York markets, for probably nine-tenths of the product, except bananas, finds a market there in spite of the duties. The lands vary wonderfully in price—from very little for the exposed eleva-

EDITORIALS

Opinions of Great Papers on Important Subjects.

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Forta and Naval Attacks.

ONE of the surprises of the Far Eastern war is the failure of the forts guns to do more damage in the attacking fleets. It was a matter of faith among the authorities that not even the strongest modern batteries could safely attack an effective modern fort, armed with long range heavy guns. England is at present making a number of long-range fort guns for the defense of her south coast, and it is calculated that these guns will easily be able to throw a twelve or thirteen-inch shell across the Straits of Dover, so that it would not seem to be worth while for France even to take her Channel squadron out of port, much less to attempt to land in the face of such an overwhelming attack. But this is mere theory. The truth is, that although the weight and range of these guns have been steadily increasing the human powers which are to use them have not shown, and are not likely to show a corresponding progress. While a gun can carry a shell across the Straits of Dover, the gunner who could make a hit of twenty miles is yet unborn; neither eyesight nor fineness of hand are equal to the task. Nor would the atmosphere permit it, if they were. Attacks by fleets are made by sea and the sea is proverbially untrustworthy in the matter of weather. Air currents, mists, uneven radiation, mirage, and a dozen similar causes deflect the shot and the vision which directs it. Moreover, no one nowadays is likely to attack a fort at close range in broad daylight. The Por Arthur bombardments were nearly all at night, and some of them in snowstorms. It is intelligible that a ship at sea can more or less locate a position on land, such as the Golden Hill above Port Arthur, or a town where there are certain to be some lights at least; but the fort has no lights to guide it in locating the ship, except the momentary flash of the guns, which give hardly any opportunity for aiming. In the case of the Vladivostok bombardment, it seems that the Japanese fleet were too far off to do any damage, and, therefore, too far off to receive any. It is also likely that the object of that attack was to draw the Russian fleet in order to locate their forts; the Russian seemed to have divined this, and naturally abstained from firing.—Harper's Weekly.

No Thought of Annexation.

THE United States regards Canada as under British Imperial suzerainty, an independent sovereign nation, whose title is as valid as that of any nation on the globe. It has no thought of annexing Canada against her will, nor does it, indeed, regard annexation as necessary or inevitable. It is not sitting up at night to consider or to coerce the Dominion into union with the Republic. If ever Canada should at her own will seek such union, the United States would probably be cordially responsive. But, if Canada never does seek it, the United States will regard with entire unanimity and satisfaction the prospect of continuing for all time to share this continent with another great English-speaking commonwealth, and will only hope for constantly increasing sentiments of mutual esteem and constantly strengthening bonds of friendship between these two sovereign nations.—New York Tribune.

GREAT AGRICULTURAL DISCOVERY.

Four-fifths of every breath of air which the lungs inhale is pure nitrogen. It is one of the components of the elements. And yet, says a writer in Harper's Monthly, it is the one thing that is lacking in our wheat fields, cotton fields and corn fields are abandoned as "worm out" because it is the most expensive plant food for man to supply to the soil, and one which most plants are unable to absorb in its pure state from the air. To remedy this the Department of Agriculture at Washington is preparing to distribute among farmers a substance resembling compressed yeast, which will raise, not bread, but crops; for when applied to certain plants it will enable them to take abundant nitrogen from the atmosphere. The "yeast" is really a mass of germs, which bid fair to become most efficient gardeners.

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tion to \$500 per acre for good pieces in the little valleys. The high price of these pieces and limited amount of land on the islands—there are less than 10,000 acres all told—has enforced a very high state of cultivation of the lands. The islands comprise a series of smart garden hollows, and the hard-made, white walled roads, white, snug houses and profusion of compact garden growth all unite to make the place a delightful picture-land.

Comrades.

Bobby was ten years old and an alarmingly light-hearted and careless young person. It was supposed, however, that he would be capable of escorting his grandmother to the family Christmas dinner, one block away from her home, without mishap.

He was tall for his age, and he offered his arm to his grandmother in a gallant and satisfactory manner as they started off together.

"I hope he will remember that she is almost ninety, and not try to hurry her," I'm sure I've cautioned him enough," said Bobby's mother, as she began to dress her younger children. But when she arrived at the family party it appeared that grandmother had turned her ankle and was lying on the lounge.

"Bobby," said the mother, reproachfully, "where were you when grandma slipped?"

"Now I won't have that boy blamed," said grandmother, briskly, smiling up into Bobby's remorseful face. "We came to a fine ice slide, and he asked me if I thought I could do it, and I told him I did. And I want you children to remember one thing: when you get to be most ninety you count a turned ankle a small thing compared with having somebody forget that you've outlived everything but rheumatism and sitting still. Anybody that likes can rub this ankle a minute or two with some liniment, but I want Bobby next me at dinner, mind!"

Two Seasons.

Towne—Got your spring suit yet? Brown—No; I was thinking of a nice, neat pepper and salt. What do you think of it?

Towne—That sounds reasonable.—Philadelphia Press.

When a small boy gets his finger caught in the pantry door it isn't the jam he is looking for.

Of course, the real test of a pudding is your inability to sleep after eating it.

MODERN SEA BATTLES.

None of the Pomp and Pageantry of Nelson's Day.

The pomp and pageantry of sea warfare in Nelson's day, with its stripped crowds of men swarming about the encumbered decks and streaming flags from every mast, have gone with the towering ranges of sails and nimble sellers who leaped about aloft handling them even during the height of battle. The new man-of-war goes into the fight grim, unadorned and apparently proceeding by her own volition, like some unthinkable marine monster.

Far more terrible, but mercifully far more swift, will be the conflict between hostile fleets in the future. There will be scarcely any such thing as the long days of sea fighting. For one thing, modern iron-clads and cruisers going into action will choose the lesser of two evils confronting them. Because of the deadly peril of spindlers and of fire-everything of wood in their fittings, even to the boats, will be cast away at the beginning of the fight.

Then, when the battle is joined, the seaman must needs have a heart of brass incased in triple steel, a mind that refuses to meditate upon the immediate possibility of one of those terrible twelve-inch projectiles plunging down upon his vessel's deck, and out, amid the disintegration of all her ganglions of energy, through the bottom, rendering her an easy target to an uninjured foe and her sinking a matter of minutes.

The modern man-of-war will not, at any rate, prolong the agonies of her crew when she is scuttled. She will go down quick into the pit in a halo of steam, a whirling vortex of waves, and in five minutes from the commencement of her downward plunge there will be no sign that she has ever been, and only if other vessels be very near will there be any possible chance of saving the handful of sturviest swimmers whose superhuman struggles have wrenched them clear of the devouring, down-dragging eddies.—London Mail.

AWAITED THE EXPLOSION.

Missouri Pioneer Tells of First Use of Shotguns.

When the electric light was turned on here this week it recalled to C. M. Shackelford, a pioneer resident of the county, an event of 1855 that created far more excitement, says the Kansas City Star correspondent at Clarence, Mo.

"I was running a drug store at Shelbyville, the county seat," said Mr. Shackelford, "and on one of my trips to St. Louis I purchased a couple of lamps and two gallons of coal oil. When my fellow citizens learned of the proposed illumination something like a hundred of them assembled at the store to watch the anticipated explosion. I didn't feel so safe myself, but as it was my show I had to face the music. I loaded the lamp and turned up the wick. Then I got a long pole, and tied a piece of paper to the end. The paper was lighted, and the crowd ran out and looked in at the window. I reached the fuse over and touched off the wick, without casualty. The boys fled in and watched the lamp glow, with contradictory opinions. I bought several more gallons of oil, and I tried to induce the farmers to use it, but sold only one gallon the day following.

"It then cost \$3 a gallon, and the home-made candle was regarded as better and cheaper. The manufacture of candles was turned over to the housewife and one of the children. There were molds that would hold from four to a dozen, and every farmer had plenty of fat and grease to make the candles. Usually it took about two days to make enough candles to last the family a year, and they were laid evenly away in boxes. They furnished a satisfactory light, and I never heard of young people in those days having trouble with their eyes. And there was no swearing by the head of the house about gas and electric light bills."

A Law to Protect Hunters.

Michigan recently passed a statute which makes it a criminal offense for one hunting in the woods to kill or injure another accidentally. The law is the result of the many accidents in which human beings were mistaken for animals and were shot. The penalty is ten years imprisonment or a thousand dollar fine.

A chance to test the new law came at once during the last open season. A man shot and killed another sportsman, whom he mistook for a deer. The case was interesting in its outcome.