

## TIMELY TOPICS.

Engineering in China has certainly achieved a notable triumph in the bridge at Lagang, over an arm of the China sea. This structure is five miles long, built entirely of stone, has 300 arches seventy feet high, the roadway is seventy feet wide, and the pillars are seventy-five feet apart.

Certain portions of New Mexico abound in petrifications of various kinds. It is no uncommon sight to see trees three feet in diameter and fifty feet long petrified and often crystallized. The crystals—red, yellow, black or white—are often very beautiful, and would make handsome ornaments for Eastern parlors.

One of the latest anecdotes of Colonel Burnaby, killed in the Soudan, is that when in Africa with Gordon one of the native tribes, captivated with his feats of strength, wished to make him their king. To convince him of their sincerity they threw the old king into a river, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Burnaby succeeded in inducing them to allow the monarch to swim out.

In 1884 there was not a single death from smallpox in either New York or Brooklyn. Boston, Baltimore and San Francisco had each one death; Chicago, two, Cincinnati twenty-two, Philadelphia thirty-five and New Orleans 291. New York takes the lead in deaths by measles, diphtheria and whooping cough; Philadelphia in deaths by scarletina and typhoid fever, while Boston heads the list with deaths by diarrhoeal diseases, having over 800 cases more than New York.

This is an age of shams, and the art of giving to bronzes an appearance of antiquity is not the least of them. This is readily done by applying a mixture of ground horseradish and vinegar to the places on the statue which it is desirable to stain a verdigris green. It will take three or four days to work the transformation. Meanwhile the horseradish must be kept wet with vinegar. In the *Art Amateur*, from which we glean this information, we are also told that by painting a plaster cast with yellow wax dissolved in turpentine it can in a short time be hardly distinguishable from real ivory.

The *New York Times* asserts that the sagacity of cows is generally underrated. A great deal is said of dogs and horses, but the ingenuity displayed by cows in opening barn doors, feed boxes, and gates, and in upsetting fences far surpasses that of any other farm animal, and proves them to be thinking and reasoning creatures. One who has watched the eloquent eye of a cow engaged in withholding her milk cannot fail to be impressed with her evident power of thought and determined will. And now as a further proof of the cow's sagacity Mr. Coles Carpenter says one of his herd goes to the pump when the water trough is empty, and, taking the pump handle between her horns, pumps water into the tub and satisfies her thirst, and will even pump more if the supply is not satisfactory. This story, perhaps, goes far enough, if not too far, for it will certainly encourage the dishonest milk—and water—men to charge some ambitious and vain cow with diluting her own milk for the purpose of increasing her record.

The sculptor of King George on horseback, set up in the city of Hull, went and killed himself when a young street arab pointed out what all the critics had overlooked, that the rider was without stirrups. Boston has a similar case except that the effect of the criticism on the sculptor has not yet been reported. Boston has always been very proud of her equestrian statue of Washington by Thos. Ball, located on the public garden. It is the one figure of all Boston which the critics admit is excellent. Even foreigners state that there is nothing finer in Europe. The horse has been declared perfect. When they laugh at what they are pleased to term our monstrosities in the way of statues we have led the carping critic to our Washington and exclaimed with pride, "Look at this." A good Bostonian had a friend from the country whom he introduced to the statue. The old gentleman looked at it some time and finally exclaimed: "A erydid horse, but he hain't got no erge." All these years no Bostonian has discovered that a horse with

the bits in his mouth would naturally show his tongue.

All the North Americans who have spent any time in Venezuela think it might be made one of the richest and most prosperous countries on the globe. It has three distinct climates, ranging from unendurable cold to the intensest heat. Mines of the precious and other metals and coal—these are unworked—and the finest tropical products abound, with any quantity of valuable woods and native cattle. The soil is, in the main, very rich, producing two crops without fertilization or irrigation. Venezuela's greatest length is 900 and its greatest breadth 770 miles, giving it, with the islands, a territory equal to France, Spain and Portugal. Its present population is not much more than two millions—about equal to this city and its suburbs—though it might easily support fifty times as many people. The curse of the so-called republic, as of all South America, is the character of its inhabitants, chiefly half-breeds and hybrids; the whites not being more than one per cent. of the whole. Occupied by North Americans, Venezuela would be one of the most productive and opulent regions of the earth.

There is a law in San Francisco, aimed especially at the Chinese, requiring that sleeping apartments shall contain 500 cubic feet of pure air to each occupant. Recently two San Francisco police officers made raids on two lodging-houses in the Chinese quarter and arrested forty-seven violators of the law. As a matter of precaution so that he might be able to identify the prisoners when they came into court, one of the officers marked each with a small sign written with an analine pencil. When the defendants were brought before the judge they were represented by counsel, who declared that as a separate complaint had been filed against each party accused, each would have to be tried separately. The first one called up was found guilty, he having been identified by the small mark on his neck. In the language of the day, the other defendants "got on to the mark business," and in a few minutes forty-six Chinamen were each observed wetting the tip of the right index finger in saliva and rubbing the spot where the mark had been. Two more of the number which he called for trial, but each was unable to find the identification mark. The cases of the others were postponed.

Perhaps the sign of the three balls is the saddest in a city. It is associated in the minds of a great part of the community with bohemia and is never mentioned in polite society. The pawnshop, however, contains more that is interesting and romantic than the finest collection of bric-a-brac in the country. In it is found the last trifle of many a poor wretch who has gone to the land from which no traveler returns to redeem pawn pledges. The spoils of murderers, the treasures of love, the homely possessions of the pauper, are mingled indiscriminately awaiting the return of owners who never come. The *Montreal Star* publishes a catalogue of unredeemed articles for sale by a pawnbroker of that city. The list is one of great interest and doubtless represents untold volumes of curious human history. The list numbers thousands of articles, and includes almost everything which pertains to man's personal comfort or luxury. One of the most striking features of the catalogue is the large number of trousers unredeemed by their owners. The contrasts are striking in some cases. A diamond pin is advertised just under the notice of a toothpick, while two pieces of ladies' underwear appeal to the public above a line describing a gold signet ring. To those who enjoy speculating on the curious ups and downs of human life such a list is full of suggestion.

For the first time in English warfare balloons are to be utilized in the Soudan campaign. The transport Queen has sailed from the Thames with the balloon and telegraph corps for the Suakim expeditionary force. Three balloons are taken out with all the necessary appliances to be used for taking observations of the enemy's positions. All have been made at the school of engineering. Compressed hydrogen for inflating the balloons is carried in iron cylinders twelve feet long by one foot diameter, but these are only for a reserve supply, and, weighing half a ton each, will be left behind at the base of operations, where, also, a gas factory and a pumping station will be put up. Materials for this purpose are

on board the ship, including a small gas-holder, and all the necessary chemicals for making more gas are provided. About a hundred lighter cylinders, easily carried by men, form part of the equipment. Each of these, which are nine feet long, contains 120 feet of hydrogen in a compressed state, and as they are emptied they will be taken back to be recharged at the Suakim station. One wagon, containing one ton of stores, will suffice for a balloon ascent. Captive ascents only will be made, in which the balloon will be tethered by rope or wire, both of which are taken. Communication by telephone will be established between the car and the ground, and the chief employment of the balloons will be to take observations of the enemy's movements.

It is illustrative of our times that the English government, as part of its plan of bringing the Soudan under control, has contracted with an American firm to run a line of pipe across the desert from Suakim to Berber to carry water. The distance is 260 miles and the tanks will be placed about thirty miles apart. It is claimed that 150 gallons of water a minute can be delivered by this method. This will overcome a serious difficulty, and while it will require guards along the line, it will not be a serious matter to maintain these. Should a railroad be built, England will have the facilities not only for maintaining military control but also for commercial development. Thus as successive steps are taken, each under the compulsion of necessity, the revelation is made of new possibilities in the desert regions of the Soudan. In time artesian wells will provide abundant supplies of water; but pending this, the pipes proposed will meet present needs. Modern skill is meeting the numberless emergencies of the race and facilitating the conquest of the material world. The new revelation of means whereby supposed insuperable difficulties are overcome seems to just meet emergencies that have hitherto not required solution. It has become necessary to have speedy, certain and easy communication with the Upper Nile. The cataracts prevent the ascent of the river, and the route from Suakim to Berber across the desert is the only one feasible. At once the difficulties are considered. The route will not admit of the passage of a marching column without great difficulty and suffering. The lack of water and the sands of the desert are the trouble. The water difficulty is to be met by the method we have in use for transporting oil, and the sands will be traversed by iron rails.

### Coats of Mail Worn by Arabs.

Coats of mail are still in use among some of the Soudanese Arab tribes. Whether original or a copy, says Colonel Colbourne, in speaking of one of these coats of armor, it was undoubtedly the dress of the Crusaders. The hauberk of mail was fastened round the body by the baltan, and formed a complete covering from head to foot. The long two-handed double-edged sword was borne between the leg and the saddle. The wearer of this mediæval garb was Sheik Mohammed Sebekh of the Halawin tribe of Bagarra Arabs. His armor had been in his family 310 years. The horse's head was encased in steel, and its body covered with a quilt thick enough to turn a spear. It was shaped like the armor one reads of in Froissart.

It has been asserted in connection with this curious subject that the practice survives in the Soudan aïone. It may, therefore, be well to state that it is also found among the Khevsur people of the Central Caucasus, who still habitually wear chain armor, shields and helmets, like mediæval knights. In fact, it was formerly general among all the Caucasian tribes, and the Chechenzes of Daghestan still wore coats of mail down to the beginning of the present century.

The armor does not appear to have been forged by these people themselves, but was handed down, as among the Soudanese Arabs, as an heirloom from generation to generation in the families of the chiefs. Hence the inference that this armor dates everywhere from the times of the Crusades, of which it may be regarded as a remarkable reminiscence.—*London Athenæum*.

Men of quality never appear more amiable than when their dress is plain; their birth, rank, title, and its appendages are at best invidious; and as they do not need the assistance of dress, so, by their disclaiming the advantages of it, they make their superiority set more easy.

### Dog Teams in Siberia.

Engineer Mellville, of the lost Jeanette, in his book describing the search for Commander DeLong, thus tells how the native Yakuts cover long distances by aid of dog teams: There are interesting descriptions of the huts of these Yakuts, their mode of life, their food and manners, which are too "highly flavored" to quote. Their mode of conveyance by dog teams is worth a few words. "There were eleven dogs in our team, the largest weighing about forty-five and the lightest about twenty-five pounds, and they make the icy air resound with their discordant solos and chorus. I seated myself sideways on the sled with my feet trailing on the ground or snow, allowing room in front for Vasilli. Composing himself he seized the great iron-shod staff with which he guides the sled dogs, and when in ill temper beats them, too, and grasping the bows of the sled gave it a gentle sway, shouting the while to the team. Away we went with the dogs in full cry, all yelping, snapping, biting and seizing each other from behind, those in front turning round to fight back until some were drawn off their feet and dragged along at a fearful rate; Vasilli, yelling at the top of his voice, coaxed, scolded and anathematized by turn, until at length, by dint of twisting and rolling over, the team became entangled into one living mass of vicious flesh. To pacify and disentangle the crazy canines, Vasilli leaped upon them with his iron-pointed guiding staff, and the only astonishment to me was how the brutes could live under such a heavy basting. It is true, some of them, after receiving a severe blow on the small of the back, did drag their hind legs for a few minutes, but in the end it did not seem to check their desire to bite and fight. Yet they were considerably more tractable after their first beating, and ran along at a more even pace, following the leaders, who in turn were guided and governed by Vasilli's word of command.

"Directly the dogs had outlived their excitement and settled strictly to their work, they looked beautifully picturesque, with heads down and manes and tails up and wagging, while only an occasional yelp burst from their ranks as they scudded along the ravines and over rivers, taking the top of the hard snow at about six miles an hour. After a run of an hour or less the dogs are usually brought to a stop and permitted to rest; whereupon they stroll around and rub the rime out of their eyes and ears, and from their heads, and then stretching out, lick their paws, which soon become very sore from travel. A team can seldom endure more than ten days' continuous work, for, no matter how well fed, the feet wear out and bleed, and the dogs are shortly so enfeebled as to be almost useless. A native will not willingly drive his team two days in succession, the custom being to travel one day and rest the next."

### Attacked by Weasels.

Delos Lante, an Elk county (Penn.) farmer, has been annoyed greatly the past winter by weasels in his poultry yard and houses, the bloodthirsty little animals having killed his fowls by the score, and defied all efforts to entrap them. On a recent Saturday Mr. Lante was walking through a stony field on his farm, and saw a weasel run into a big heap of stones piled loosely in the middle of the field. He had a walking stick, and, going to the stone pile, began to throw down stones to get at the weasel or scare it out. Presently a weasel jumped out and he struck at it with his cane. It did not run away, but sprang at Lante's throat—the spot the weasel instinctively tries to seize. The farmer struck at it again and hit it, but it returned gamely to the attack, and, whether in answer to a signal or not the farmer does not know, weasels began to swarm out of the stone pile on all sides, and in a second were springing upon Lante, climbing nimbly up his clothes, trying to reach his face. They bit him with their sharp teeth, and finding that he would be unable to keep the savage little blood-suckers from fastening their teeth in his neck without help, he shook them off as best he could and started at the top of his speed for home. The weasels followed him until he scaled the fence. His hands were bleeding from a dozen wounds, and if he had remained to fight the weasels they would undoubtedly have overpowered and killed him. In the afternoon Mr. Lante returned to the stone pile with two men, two guns and a dog. The routed out the weasels and killed thirty—a colony which had been devastating the entire neighborhood for a year or more.