OUR PECULIARITIES.

Max O'Rell Pays His Compliments to the Indispensable Spittoon.

American houses are furnished very luxuriously, and for the most part with exquisite taste. Here you see the influence of woman in the smaller details of life; indeed, at every step you take you see that woman has passed that way.

The luxury displayed at receptions, dinners and dances surpasses European imagination. At a ball given in New York in the month of February, 1888, the walls were covered with roses, which did not cost less than $10,000. When one considers that the supper, and every thing else, was on the same scale it becomes doubtful whether such luxury is to be admired. I was present one evening at a dinner given in the large dining hall at Delmonico's restaurant, in New York. We were eighty-seven guests at an immense round table. The center of the board was covered with a gigantic star of flowers—roses, arum lilies and heliotrope. At that season lilies were worth a dollar each, and all through the winter the price of roses was from a quarter to two dollars apiece, according to kind. The Americans at this feast estimated the star of flowers at six or seven thousand dollars.

At a dinner party given recently at Delmonico's, I heard that each menu had a chain attached, consisting of pearls and diamonds, and valued at $1,000.

In houses, in clubs, in offices, one can not help admiring the ingenious forethought, the wonderful care with which the smallest wants and the slightest conveniences of life have been studied; it seems as if there were nothing left to desire.

It is impossible, however, in speaking of American interiors, to pass over in silence a certain eye-sore which meets our eye at every turn.

The most indispensable, it appears, the most conspicuous at any rate, piece of furniture in America is the spittoon. All rooms are provided with this object of prime necessity; you find one beside your seat in the trains, under your table in the restaurants; impossible to escape the sight of the ugly utensil. In the hotel corridors there is a spittoon standing sentinel outside every door. In public buildings the floors are dotted with them, and they form the line all up the stairs.

The Americans, used to these targets from the tenderest age, are marvelously adroit at the use of them; they never miss their aim. I saw some really striking feats of marksmanship; but perhaps the best of all at the capitol in Washington.

The Supreme Court of Judiciary was sitting. As I entered an advocate was launching thunders of eloquence. All at once he stopped, looked at the spittoon which stood two yards off, aimed at it, and Kerrron—craahk—ptu! right in the bull's eye. Then on he went with his harangue. I looked to see the seven Judges and the public applaud and cry bravo! Not a murmur, the incident passed completely unnoticed. Probably there was not a man in the hall who could not say to himself: "There's nothing in that, I could do as much." — From Max O'Rell's "Brother Jonathan."

BESIEGED BY NUNS.

A Curious Incident in the Early History of the Canary Islands.

A curious tale of a besieged and conquered monastery belongs to the early history of the Canary Islands, and is retold by Charles Edwards in his recent description of the isles. In the early part of the eighteenth century there lived in Orotava, on the island of Teneriffe, a convent of Dominican nuns, who, after some years of ease, had the misfortune to be burned out of house and home. They went into temporary quarters for a year, but became dissatisfied with such unconventual walls, and began looking about for a permanent abiding place.

At that time there was in Orotava a house of Jesuits which had lost its former importance, and, though commodious and healthful, gave lodging to but two men, the rector of the house and his assistant. On this mansion the nuns cast covetous eyes, and soon resolved to appropriate it. One morning about forty of them advanced against it, by strategy induced the Jesuit brother to open the outer gate, and then, trooping into the courtyard, fell on their knees, thanking God for their preliminary success. In vain did the two monks reason with them on their scandalous conduct. They merely held their ground, exclaiming:

"Father Andrew, this is a large cage for so few birds!"

Some of the more reasonable members of the sisterhood explained that they were really in need of a dwelling as spacious as this, and that they did not propose leaving it. The rector, in despair, fled into the sacristy, from which retreat he exhorted his colleague to be of good cheer.

"Patience, brother," cried he, "and do your best to extricate yourself from those ladies!"

That, however, was more easily said than done, especially as the nuns were becoming so excited that they might momentarily have been expected to resort to the argument of nails.

The siege lasted for three or four hours. News of it flew about the town, and bands of young men, scrupulously neutral, watched proceedings from the bars of the outer gate. Eventually the Jesuits yielded, and the nuns occupied the house until a new convent, entirely to their taste, was erected for them.—Youth's Companion.

LAW ADMINISTRATION.

A Glimpse at Some of the Peculiar Institutions of Colonial Life.

The sentiment against lawyers was at this time nearly as strong in Virginia as in New England, although in the former it had sprung more from experience than from doctrine. Episcopacy, unlike independency, was not hostile in spirit to the legal profession. But Virginia, it would seem, was a prey to a band of unscrupulous, broken-down attorneys from England; and the extent of the affliction appears from the legislation on their account. In 1643 an attempt was made to regulate the practice of law by a system of fees, licenses and oaths, but without avail; and two years later it was enacted that "mercenary attorneys be wholly expeled from such office." As in New England, the expedient was adopted of allowing a magistrate or some one from among the people to assist parties in pleading causes. This plan, however, was soon found unsatisfactory, and a second attempt was made to regulate, rather than exclude, the practice of law, but, as before, without avail. In 1658 all persons, attorneys or others, who should assist in pleading causes for a compensation were made liable to a fine of five thousand pounds of tobacco.

Fortunately, these worthless adventurers confined their attention to Virginia. The middle colonies, at this time, were not subjected to such visitation. In an account of Pennsylvania and West New Jersey, by Gabriel Thomas, published in 1698, and dedicated to "Friend William Penn," is the following naive observation: "Of Lawyers and Physicians I shall say nothing, because this country is very peaceable and healthy; long may it so continue, and never have occasion for the tongue of the one nor the pen of the other, both equally destructive to men's estates and lives." Against the attorneys, the lawgivers, apparently, deemed some special precaution necessary; for the Fundamental Constitutions of East New Jersey provided that all parties might plead their causes either in person or by friends, no compensation being allowed.

With this practical exclusion from the colonies of men educated and devoted to the law, there was of course much crudeness in the early judicial systems. From devotion to particular religious theories, or from the tendency in new communities toward centralized government, the colonists disregarded an important English precedent—the separation of the judiciary from the executive and the legislature. The highest court was identical, in Massachusetts, with the Legislature, and, in the other colonies, generally with the executive. The very men that sat on the bench sat also in the executive council and in the legislature. As a result, the distinctions between law, morality and religion were constantly overlooked. Not merely man's relations to his fellows, but even his relations to his God, were placed within the province of the Legislature and the courts. To take a striking example, blasphemy and idolatry were capital crimes at the same time in Massachusetts and in Maryland. In Virginia, one neglecting the daily service of the Established Church might find himself sentenced to the galleys for six months. If he did not attend the Sunday service, he might need to prepare for the next world.

The men who presided over these early tribunals were as much a product of the times as were the laws they applied or the justice they dispensed. Legal training was, indeed, a rare quality. But usually they were "able and judicious persons," according to the requirement of the Virginia statute. They came chiefly from the ruling class—the Independent oligarchy in New England, the gentry or planter class in the South. Their deficiencies and eccentricities were overlooked by the people. The judgments of John Winthrop, the Puritan Governor of Massachusetts, and of Thomas Olive, the Quaker Governor of West Jersey, were equally acceptable, though delivered in the one case from the platform of the Boston meeting-house, and in the other from "the stumps in his meadow." It was reason and common sense, not legal precedents, that the judges consulted, considering each case as of novel occurrence. When these simple expedients did not suffice—in cases of doubt or of other perplexity—application was made, at least in New England, to the ministers.—Frank Gaylord Cook, in Atlantic.