

CURRENT COMMENT.

The Worth of a Child's Life.

The Rhadamanthus of a New Jersey court, Judge Gummere, has been made the target of widespread criticism, not to say attack, on account of the charge he gave in a recent litigation. The case was a trial for damages against a railway company, and the matter at issue was the valuation of a child's life. The judge declared to the jury that, according to the law, damages could only be assessed on the basis of the actual financial damage the loss of the child had been to the father, not on any punitive grounds nor yet by any sentimental measure. Of course there can be no absolute justice in such a case, and the best possible is only a proximate rule. Many children remain expense to their parents rather than advantage, viewed as a matter of arithmetic. Even in the case of working children the ameliorated factory laws have greatly reduced the financial aid which they give to the family. In the affair referred to Judge Gummere decided that the jurors would be justified in valuing that assistance at \$1.

The torrent of popular animadversion appears to have been misdirected. It should have been aimed against the law, not the interpreter; the legislature, not the judge. If such matters are made questions of court assessment, sentiment must be completely banished from any consideration in balancing the scales of justice. From the standpoint of sentiment no money damages could possibly compensate a parent. Wounds to the affections, amounting sometimes almost to heartbreak, cannot be measured in terms of gold and silver. In going to any court for compensation the parent deliberately puts himself out of the realm of emotion and sentiment and confesses that he remits for the advantage of the defendant any influences flowing from these powerful springs. When he chooses dollars and cents as the measure of value, he defines the sole basis from which the problem must be treated. This thought appears to have been confused in the minds of many who have been made indignant by the words of Judge Gummere's charge. It should not be stigmatized as the measure of the value of a child's life. It is the answer which the cold blooded law gives to those who seek to draw balm from it in a cold blooded way.

An Odd Situation.

The hostility of the English and Dutch in South Africa has bred many an interesting imbroglio, in some cases leading to battle and bloodshed. But the dilemma now agitating Cape politics, while it does not involve war with the Boer republic, is a queer complication, full of important consequences to

the whole future of South Africa. It is not dissimilar in its elements to that political condition of suffrage power existing in America before the civil war which gave a preponderance to the south in congress for so many years by making the slave population the basis for an increased representation.

As things now stand in the Cape Colony it takes about half as many votes to elect a representative to parliament in a Dutch district as it does in an English district. When the division of seats was made, it was a fair one; but as the rural districts, where the Boers have the majority, have grown slowly and the towns and cities, where the English are ascendant, have advanced in wealth and population rapidly the just ratio has been completely upset. The Boers, who always vote against English interests and in sympathy with the wishes of their fellow Dutchmen in the neighboring republics, have so far fought successfully against a redistribution of seats. The forthcoming election will probably settle the question for the English side, but create a most passionate ill feeling, which may lead to dangerous consequences. The same anomaly as to distribution of political power exists even today in some of our own states in America. For instance, a rural hamlet in Vermont with seven voters sends as many representatives to the legislature as does Rutland or Montpelier, both goodly cities.

Po Mun, the editor of Mun Kee, a Chinese paper of San Francisco, is credited with having perpetrated a "beat" on all other newspapers in having published the first cable news of the battle of Manila. It was only ten words long and sent as a piece of guesswork from Hongkong by another Chinaman, but it smote the nail square on the head. Now Po Mun has retired on his laurels and will print no more cable news.

The study of forest preservation becomes a more serious problem in this country every year. It is only true in part that the natural increase provides for the devastation of the lumberman's ax. Thrusting aside all those serious questions touching climate, rainfall and riverine volume, which proceed from the denudation of our forest areas, let us glance for a moment on the problem of spruce supply. Cellulose, or wood pulp, which has become one of the most important of the crude manufactured products from its amazing adaptability to such a wide range of uses, is in the main made from the spruce, as other woods are far inferior for the purpose. Though spruce grows freely again, the demand for it is much greater than the natural supply. It is becoming more and more difficult to secure it at easily available points, and a quarter of a century will banish it to regions remote from transportation facilities. A similar fate has banished the soft pine from its

old homes. Great as is the productive energy of this land in forest growth it will not be very many years before we shall be in a predicament like that of England, where lumber sells for more than double the prices of the American market. A judicious use of the science of forestry will be of the greatest value in regulating inordinate waste. It should be made a course in every scientific and agricultural school in the land.

The attitude of Russia toward the United States is that of traditional friendship. Since that critical time when a Russian fleet lay in New York harbor under sealed orders, which have since been revealed to be co-operation with us in case of any attempt to smash the southern blockade, nothing has disturbed a cordial harmony. We do not clash in any possibility of Asiatic developments with Russia. There is not even a shadow of contention between the two, so far as one can see, in posse or in esse. Russian expansion of commerce and power in northern Asia has a zone widely apart from any which we could possibly wish to occupy as a competitor. Any theory of Russian alliance with other continental powers in putting the screws on the United States in a contingency which has been discussed is too vague to be seriously considered.

The new ruling of the postoffice department refusing to reforward second, third and fourth class mail matter, except extra postage is prepaid, carries with it many inconveniences. Yet it was the abuse of the privileges relating to these classes of postal matter which mainly caused a deficit in the annual report. So the individual must stand it for the public good.

Betrothal Rings.

Modern Greek peasants exchange a gold and silver wedding ring, and they drink wine from the same cup. But the regular ritual of the Greek church ordains that solemn betrothal precedes the actual marriage, in which are used gold and silver wedding rings blessed by the priest, the gold ring being given to the man, the silver ring to the woman. The form of the espousal is then repeated, and the rings are placed on the right hands and then exchanged that no inferiority may be betokened by the woman wearing the silver ring and also to indicate a common ownership of property.

An Armenian mother usually chooses her daughter's husband. After all business preliminaries are settled between the families the bridegroom's mother, accompanied by a priest and two matrons, visits the bride and gives her a ring in token of espousal, and with this ring the couple are ultimately married. Among the fishing communities very ancient and elaborate rings are used, and they descend as heirlooms from generation to generation.

In Japanese marriages arranged between very young people the girl receives a ring in evidence that the union