

Current Topics

THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF THE COAL STRIKE was recently presented in an entertaining way by the Boston Transcript. The Transcript says: "It is a very serious matter out of which somebody cannot extract fun, and the present coal shortage is no exception to the rule. At the present time it is all but impossible to walk along any of the principal thoroughfares of down-town Boston without encountering a crowd every block or so, drawn to some shop window by an exhibit of coal. In some cases these displays show a good deal of ingenuity on the part of the originators, but the majority are very simple. The display most often met with consists of a hod or bucket of coal, to which is attached a placard bearing some such sign as 'Black Diamonds,' 'Real Coal,' 'Very Rare—Once Used for Fuel,' 'Guaranteed Real Anthracite,' 'We Have Money to Burn, But No Coal,' 'We Give Away a Piece of Coal With Every Purchase.' One exhibit which is attracting considerable attention from people on the way from the North Station up town is a model of a coal breaker carved in a lump of coal. In other places are to be seen vases or ornaments of various kinds done in coal. A down-town clothing concern last week devoted one of its large show windows to a display of lay figures dressed in miners' working clothes, with empty dinner palls scattered about. In the window was a sign, 'Back to the Mines—When?'"

THE READINESS WITH WHICH ENTERPRISING persons take advantage of the popular humor is also illustrated in an extract from this same article, as follows: "Fakirs innumerable have appeared on the streets with the product of jewelry novelty makers. With them a stick pin, composed of a very small piece of coal, is an article that finds a ready sale. The novelty makers were quick to take advantage of the coal famine and their factories are running out all sorts of things for which a sale is to be had. In fact, the old saying that 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good,' applies to them. One firm is turning out one hundred stick pins from a pound of coal, and as each pin retails for 10 cents, it can be seen that coal sold in this way is bringing even a larger return than when sold by the dealers at \$20 a ton. A variation from the plain coal stick pin is one with a small brilliant set into the coal. These are labeled 'The most expensive luxuries in the world.' Other designs are a miniature coal hod bearing the word 'Empty,' another marked 'Bust the Trust,' a small piece of coal suspended from a pick ax of brass or silver, a combination of coal and imitation gold, marked 'Take your pick.'"

A DESCRIPTION OF A FORM OF CURE which has at least the novelty of being new is presented by the Chicago Chronicle. The Chicago publication obtained its information from Colorado Springs, Colo., and relates to the theory of a newspaper editor of that place that a system of fasting used in connection with right breathing will cure every ill that flesh is heir to. Recently this editor finished a fast of fifteen days' duration and all this time he has been laboring hard, even working at meal times, when ordinary laborers would cease their labor for a time. It is said that persons from all parts of the world have sought this editor in the hope of relief through his system and that for these treatments, if they may be called by that name, no charge is made.

FOR MANY YEARS DEATH VALLEY IN CALIFORNIA has been regarded with aversion on the ground that it has caused the death of many a western traveler. It is now said that recent developments have brought to light the fact that the valley is rich in precious metals and minerals and a great rush to the spot is predicted. Ledges of gold and silver of great richness, it is said, have been discovered, and among the minerals the deposit of borax is especially valuable. This has induced the borax trust to undertake the development of the country. Niter is also found in great quantities and it may not be impossible that this valley may come to rival Chile in its production of niter. There is no doubt that the development of this famous valley will be attended with great hardships as for many years it has been thought to be in reality what its name implies, but notwithstanding all this enthusiastic miners declare that the rush to the newly found land of wealth will equal the famed rush to the Klondike some years ago.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN IS JUST now interested in one phase of the gas-lighting problem of the country. Great efforts are being made to discover some means of producing a "mantle" that will be hard enough to wear for a longer period of time than the ones now used. This matter has been a problem with the gas companies and contractors of the United States ever since the introduction of the gas mantle, and in the state of Michigan a gas company has for two years past been giving a scholarship to a graduate of the university who seems able to carry on the work of investigation. The New York American, in an article on the subject, says that this year M. E. Mueller was appointed to the scholarship, and his year's work is awaited with interest. He visited during the summer the various gas concerns in the middle west, and this fall his work is along the line of finding the cause of the deterioration of the mantle. Immense sums have been offered by every large city in the country for the perfection of the gas mantle so as to increase its efficiency. The city of Columbus, O., was the first to get light on the subject, from an old Michigan graduate. He made a groove under the mantle in which quicksilver was placed. The mantle was suspended from above on stiff wires, on the ends of which a small ball rested on the mercury. This enabled the mantle to stand a great jar, but it did not deteriorate any the less. This is the problem now being worked on by Mueller. An offer of \$10,000 is made by M. C. Dunkle, who lights Chicago, to any man who will put a mantle on the market twice as efficient as the present one, but not twice as expensive. Mueller is after the \$10,000, and the Michigan professors will try to help him win.

MANY PEOPLE REGARD THE OFFICE OF secretary of agriculture as of interest only to the farmer, but this view has been somewhat modified by a flower exhibit which Secretary Wilson of the department of agriculture recently presented at Washington. "Uncle Sam's Flower Show" as this exhibit is styled, is one of the greatest flower shows ever seen in the capital city, consisting as it does of 25,000 plants and 122 varieties of chrysanthemums. Particularly attractive among these plants is a variety known as the "Black Hawk" which bears a blossom twelve inches in diameter and in color is pure white with a pink center. The exhibit is attracting very general attention from the people of Washington and many have discovered that instead of Secretary Wilson being interested only in the practical side of agriculture, his good taste and knowledge of horticulture combine to make his department one of the most attractive in the capital.

A GREAT CURIOSITY IN THE POSSESSION of the first assistant postmaster general. This is described by the Chicago Inter-Ocean as being a large silk embroidered picture of Washington crossing the Delaware, surrounded by American flags and surmounted by an American eagle. The work is beautifully done, and is an artistic creation of needle work. The curious feature of it is that Washington and all his companions have the almond-shaped eyes of the Japanese. It was made in Japan, and the artist, while following correctly every other detail of the copy before him, could not resist the temptation to put in the Japanese eyes. This piece of embroidery does not belong to the first assistant postmaster general nor to any one else living so far as known. It is a contribution to the dead letter office. It was mailed from the Philippines to an address in Brooklyn which could not be found. After much effort to locate the man to whom it was sent, it was discovered that this man had deserted from the United States army in the Philippines, and that he had the best of reasons for not furnishing Uncle Sam with his present address. The name of the sender was not given. The beautiful piece of embroidery therefore becomes a contribution to the dead letter office. It will some day be sold at public auction along with the other curiosities that accumulate in the dead letter office, but in the meantime it has become an object of curiosity in the postoffice department, and it has been placed on exhibition in the office of the first assistant postmaster general.

IN AN ADDRESS RECENTLY DELIVERED before the Outlook club Arthur T. Hadley, president of Yale university, said that the colleges like any other enterprise must study public demands and try to meet them. Mr. Hadley thinks that universities have not made the same progress in the development of public spirit as they have in technical training or in scientific laboratory work. He thinks it is the highest duty of universities to be organizers of this public spirit. President Hadley also said: "Many of the so-called practical

studies of a college course deal with matters which a boy is bound to learn speedily in the office or the shop. Some of them simply give him methods which he has to unlearn before he can be of any use to his employer. But the lessons of self-devotion, of subordination of the individual gain to the public good, are things which, if he does not lay the foundation for them at college, may never be learned at all."

THAT THERE IS A GROWING ANTIPATHY to the Carnegie system of free libraries in England is a claim set forth by a writer in the Chicago Tribune. This writer says that the opposition does not come solely from the laboring men and one serious London journal recently pointed out the growing unpopularity of 'the frowsy literature of the free library.' The Tribune writer adds: "Marylebone borough, which is under the jurisdiction of the London county council, has refused Mr. Carnegie's offer of 30,000 pounds to found a free library, point blank. And in approving Marylebone's strange course a London paper, which has heretofore had nothing but praise for Mr. Carnegie and his works, says: 'We are not at all sure that the day is not quickly passing, even if it has not already passed, when there was any reason for these libraries. It is idle to pretend that fiction is not the chief pabulum that the average library goer batters upon, and pretty well every novel that is worth reading can now be had for sixpence. Marylebone has other more pressing needs that she would do well to supply before she thinks of giving her ratepayers the frowsy literature of the free library. On the whole, we think that Marylebone has taken a much needed progressive step by refusing to sanction the expenditure of public money for the provision of what is quickly becoming an unnecessary indulgence.'"

THE BOARD OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE navy department is confronted with a grave problem. The constructors find it difficult to design the armored cruisers so as to combine the greatest fighting power with the highest speed. A Washington dispatch to the Chicago Chronicle, referring to this matter, says: "As is usual in the preparation of designs differences of opinions early developed among the members of the board. The ordnance department wished to cover the vessels with the heaviest armor and place on them the biggest guns; the engineers wished to give a high speed, which meant much engine and boiler space, and the equipment division wanted much room for the large crew which such a vessel must carry and for the complex equipment which modern ships must have. These differences of opinion have become much more pronounced than ever before and there have been some lively scenes in the board meetings recently. Gradually the issues have been adjusted tentatively, save the very important one of weight to be allowed for motive power, which means speed. The act of congress contemplated cruisers of 14,500 tons displacement and Constructor Bowles, for the first time in the history of the department, almost insisted that this limit should not be exceeded by a single ton. This would have been a small consideration except that his attitude also restricted the speed of the proposed ship."

IT IS FURTHER POINTED OUT BY THIS Washington correspondent that Engineer in Chief Melville had pronounced views on that subject and he insisted that the new cruisers should not take the wash of anything afloat. He demanded that they be able to overtake, if need be, or escape from any battleship or cruiser of any other navy, holding that the reserve speed, as in the case of the Oregon at Santiago, often might turn the course of battle. He had secured the plans of the British armored cruiser Drake, which had just made the admirable speed record of twenty-four knots, and he pointed out that she had much more liberal allowance for engine width than as proposed to be given the Tennessee, which is the cruised now being planned. It is probable that Secretary Moody will be called on to decide the issue as to whether speed shall be sacrificed to fighting power and size limitation.

AN INTERESTING STORY OF THE EXPERIENCES of three stowaways is related in a New York dispatch to the Chicago Inter-Ocean. Johnson, Jenson, and Hanson recently landed in New York despite the emigrant officials who were bent on shipping them back to Norway and Sweden. They came over on the steamer Oscar II., and Johnson broke the record for ingenuity in hiding himself away by crawling into a coffin, where he remained for several hours. The three men stowed away on the Oscar II. the night before the steamship sailed from Christiansand. On the second