CURRENT TOPICS

A DISPATCH under date of Baltimore, October 25, printed in the Kansas City Star, says: "Mrs. William P. Tonry, the only daughter of Mrs. Mary E. Surratt, who was put to death for being involved in the Lincoln conspiracy, died here early today after several years' illness, resulting from her efforts to save her mother. She was 68 years old."

COMMENTING upon this dispatch, a writer in the Star says: "June 21, 1869, William P. Tonry, employed in Washington, lost his position under peculiar circumstances, and, it is said, with the approval of President Grant. He had served in the United States army during the civil war, and he had been detailed as assistant chemist in the laboratory of the surgeon general's office, which position he had filled with entire satisfaction. The trouble was said to be that he had just married. He had married, at that, a woman whom any loyal citizen of the United States ought not to marry, according to the views of the supposedly loyal citizen of the United States, at that particular time. His bride was Anna E. Surratt. The girl's mother had been hanged a short time before for complicity in the assassination of President Lincoln."

AT CHICKAMAUGUA in 1898, according to the Star writer, when the Fifth Maryland volunteers were encamped there, they were under command of General Frederick Grant. In that regiment were Reginald I. Tonry, sergeant in Company C, commanded by Captain Thompson, and Albert S. Tonry, corporal in Company L, commanded by Captain Boyden. They were the sons of the man who had lost his position because he had married Mrs. Surratt's daughter, and they were grandsons of Mrs. Surratt. Many remember Mrs. Surratt's trial and conviction after John Wilkes Booth had killed the president. They remember her hanging, too, but very few remember that her son-in-law, a loyal union soldiers, was discharged because he married her daughter. And very, very few know that Mrs. Surratt's two grandsons were serving under the Stars and Stripes in the volunteer army. Mrs. Tonry had just left school when her mother was hanged. She was probably about 18 years old and was an only daughter."

IT IS estimated that nearly $2,000,000 worth of licorice is consumed in this country every year from the lands bordering on the Mediterranean. The Kansas City Journal says: "Most people think that licorice is made from the wooden twigs and branches of a tree. But in reality the licorice wood is the root of a very pretty, dainty plant, which has beautifully shaped leaves that are colored bright green on one side and pale silver green on the other. The licorice plant is a perennial, and in England, where they are trying to make an industry of raising it, the experimenters plant it in rows between cabbages and potatoes. In the Mediterranean and Oriental countries great plantations are given up to it altogether. The licorice plant throws out immensely fleshy roots, full of juice when they are fresh. They spread and burrow far into the earth and a good, big hole has to be dug to get them out. The licorice wood, as we see it here, represents only about half the original weight and size of the root, for fully 50 per cent of the juice is lost in drying it. Therefore the licorice dealers are getting to be more and more in favor of squeezing the juice out of the roots on the spot and then shipping this extract."

ONE of the prerogatives of a United States senator is that when he steps into an elevator in the senate wing of the capitol, he is carried immediately to his destination, no matter in which direction the elevator may be bound or who may be aboard. Three rings on the bell indicate that a senator wants to ride and the conductor loses no time in responding to the call. The Washington Post tells the following interesting story: "One day last week Mr. Barnes, the assistant secretary to the president, stepped aboard a senate elevator from the ground floor. In a portfolio under his arm he carried a message from the president of the United States to the congress. 'Senate floor,' said Mr. Barnes, as the conductor shut the door. Just then there were three rings of the bell and the indicator showed that a senator wanted to be lifted out of the terrace. The elevator went down instead of up and Mr. Barnes went along. The senator in the terrace only wanted to go to the ground floor. As he stepped off, however, there was another senatorial ring from the terrace. This senator wanted to go to the gallery floor and the elevator went there without stopping. As the car started down there were three rings from the ground floor, and again the car failed to stop at the destination of the president's secretary. Fortunately for Mr. Barnes, this senator wanted to get off at the senate floor, and the congress, after long delay received the message from the president."

REPUBLICAN leaders argue that the army is smaller in proportion to population than it was in the days of Washington. A writer in the New York World says that these leaders ignore that most important fact in the use and handling of an army; the means of communication and transportation. This writer adds: "It took Mr. Thomson seven days to travel from New York to Mount Vernon to notify General Washington of his election as president. Washington, whose journey was delayed four days by the public honors showered on him, reached New York eleven days after starting from Mount Vernon. An army could not have traveled so fast. There were no railroads, there were no steamships in those days. There was no telegraph by which an army could be ordered from place to place. New York is now less than six hours from Mount Vernon, so that Mr. Thomson could have traveled twenty-six times as fast as he did. The population has increased twenty-fold, the army only slightly less, though the Indian peril and the English menace of Washington's day have disappeared. The larger the army, in time of peace as well as war, the greater the immediate cost, the greater the pension list. If the size of the army is to be dependent upon the number of inhabitants it is fair to ask if the population more than doubled between the administrations of Cleveland and McKinley. The standing army did."

THE "Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee," edited by his son, Robert E. Lee, Jr., has recently been issued. Newspaper correspondents say that in this publication will be found final proof of the story long published and long denied, that General Lee was offered command of the United States army at the beginning of the civil war. A New York correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, in a review of this book, says: "In 1868 General Lee wrote to Senator Reverdy Johnson in regard to a debate in the senate in which Senator Simon Cameron had made certain statements. In this letter General Lee said: 'I never intimated to any one that I desired the command of the United States army; nor did I ever have a conversation with but one gentleman, Mr. Francis Preston Blair, on this subject, which was at his invitation and as I understood, at the instance of President Lincoln. After listening to his remarks, I declined the offer he made me, to take command of the army that was to be brought into the field, stating as courteously as I could that, though opposed to secession and deprecating war, I could take no part in an invasion of the southern states.'"

IT IS pointed out by this same reviewer that "General Lee adds that he went directly to General Scott, told him of the proposition that had been made to him, and two days later, concluding that he ought no longer retain his commission, resigned from the army. Two days later, on invitation of the governor of Virginia, he went to Richmond, found that the convention had passed the secession ordinance, and he accepted the position of commander-in-chief of the state forces. In this book the author does not attempt to enter the field of the historian as far as the war itself is concerned. As the title of the work implies, it is largely composed of his father's letters, most of them to his immediate family, and he makes no addition of value to the military history of the late war. The chief interest of the book lies in its personal phase, as relating to the daily life, the mental attitude and characteristics of General Lee.

THIS correspondence, most of it of the most intimate character, according to the Post correspondent, in measure reflects General Lee's views on the great question with which his career is so closely connected. This correspondent says: "Writing with all the freedom of a husband and father to wife and children, or to intimate friends, letters which he probably never dreamed would see print, the man himself stands revealed. Throughout his correspondence is a devoutly religious tone. Hardly a letter is given but which evidences the deep faith of the man. Writing from camp and from battlefield, he seldom failed to acknowledge or invoke divine help for his cause, his family and himself. There is a notable absence of military information in those letters. Wherever it is brought in it is incidental and those who anticipate light on the military problems of the great struggle will be disappointed. The author condenses into one chapter the period prior to his father's resignation from the United States army, and confines himself to General Lee's own utterances in letters to his family and friends as to the motives which actuated him in his decision. Writing to his sister, Mrs. Ann Marshall, on the day he tendered his resignation, General Lee said: 'Now we are in a state of war, which will yield to nothing. The whole south is in a state of revolution, into which Virginia, after a long struggle, has been drawn; and though I recognize no necessity for this state of things, and would have forborne and pleaded to the end for redress of grievances, real or supposed, yet in my own person I had to meet the question whether I should take part against my native state. With all my devotion to the union and the feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home. I have therefore resigned my commission in the army, and, save in the defense of my native state, with the sincere hope that my poor services may never be needed, I hope I may never be called on to draw my sword.' On the same day he wrote in similar strain to his brother, Captain Sydney Smith Lee of the United States navy."

THERE follows in the Lee publication many letters written by General Lee to his wife in the spring and summer of 1861, counselling her on family matters. The Post-Dispatch correspondent, continuing his review, says: "On May 25 he was transferred with his command to the confederate states army. In a letter he said: 'I do not know what my position will be. I should like to retire to private life if I could be with you and the children, but if I can be of any service to the state or her cause, I must continue.' Soon after the first battle of Manassas General Lee was sent into West Virginia, and in the numerous letters to his family he interestingly describes the country, his raw soldiers, and the difficulties he faced. These letters were continued with great regularity after he was sent to South Carolina in the winter of 1861. Many of these are deeply religious. Writing his wife on Christmas day he said: 'If we can only become sensible of our transgressions, so as to be fully penitent and forgiven, that this heavy judgment under which we labor may with justice be removed from us and the whole nation, what a gracious consummation of all that we have endured it will be.' In the same letter he voices his forebodings for his old home and says if it is destroyed he would like to purchase Stratford (on the lower Potomac). 'It is a poor place,' he adds, 'but we could make enough cornbread and bacon for our support, and the girls could weave us clothes.'"

The Sioux City Journal of October 17 says editorially: "It may be that Mr. Bryan's Commoner will reach Mr. Watson's letter of acceptance, but it may not be able to get to it until after election." Readers of the Commoner do not need to have their attention called to this in order to convince them that the esteemed Journal is as badly off in its predictions as it is in its politics.