

CURRENT TOPICS

SO VIVIDLY interesting to the whole world has been the siege of Port Arthur, that considerable comment has been aroused concerning famous sieges. The Memphis Commercial-Appeal recounts two memorable sieges as follows: "Before the Christian era, Greece camped nine years on the Trojan plain before she 'burned the topless towers of Ilium.' Rome, with her primitive battering rams and wooden weapons, pricked ten years at the walls of Veli before her eagles were triumphant. And her splendid legions were held at bay for two years before Scipio at last stood as conqueror among the ruins of Carthage. During those two frightful years the women of the city in mortal terror of the 'wolves from the Tiber,' worked shoulder to shoulder with the men in the trenches. In more recent years the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimean war easily takes precedence for daring and picturesque achievement. For eleven months the smoke of battle hung like a halo over the Redan and the Malakoff, those supposedly impregnable forts."

THE same writer mentions the siege of Lucknow which took place in 1857. He says: "The year 1857 was made memorable by the siege of Lucknow. Here in this city of glittering Oriental beauty 300 English soldiers, with the indomitable spirit of the Anglo Saxon, beat back the hordes of Sepoys that swarmed about the residency, while the women, knowing their fate if surrender came, prayed every hour for death or rescue. Four months of this slow torture went by, and despair began to settle on the garrison; defeat seemed inevitable, when one day a new sound mingled with the noises, the garrison already knew, and a Scotch lassie, with her ear to the ground, recognized the new note and cried out the rescue to the others: 'It is the pibrochs o' the Highlanders! We are saved; we are saved!' And to the music of those pipes that gallant band of Scots and English cut their way to their starving countrymen, leaving behind a path of blood thickstrewn with Sepoy dead. In the Franco-Prussian war, Paris held the enemy back for 132 days; yielding at last not to assault, but to save her children from the horrors of starvation. Then there is Plevna. Here the Turks, under Osman Pasha, entrenched themselves against the Russians, and in the 142 days of siege that followed 70,000 men gave up their lives. Then the pasha capitulated. The siege and capture of Plevna make interesting reading for the student of military tactics."

POINTING out that sieges in the history of our own country are rare, this writer says: "There was the so-called siege of Boston; the twenty days at Yorktown, which closed the revolution, and in the civil war the siege of Vicksburg which city held out against Grant for some seventy days. During much of this time the people of the town lived in their cellars or burrowed into the bluffs and cliffs to escape the bursting shells of the assailants. Here in Memphis was heard the detonation of that fierce bombardment. During the Spanish-American war there befell the siege of Santiago, too familiar for more than a mention. During the Boer war in South Africa, people all over the world asked for 118 days: "What is the news from Ladysmith?" for during that length of time Ladysmith was holding out against the beleaguering foe."

IN AN article entitled "Freakish Mintage," a writer in the Washington Star contributes this bit of interesting information: "There are a number of valuable gold coins, some of them being what we term freakish mintage, struck for members of congress and other officials, and not intended for circulation. One of the most freakish of these is the \$4 gold piece, authorized by the coinage committee of the house in 1878. There were issued 450 of these, and they were paid for by members and senators and other officials. There was the gold dollar and the metric dollar, also, which were freaks and only issued as souvenirs. Lots of time and postage stamps have been wasted by people who want to know about these issues. If you have a \$5 gold piece of 1822 almost any numismatist will give you \$20 coin

of the realm for it. Of these there are three known to be in existence. Coin collectors don't hanker after gold coin very much."

WHAT is probably the oldest letter in the world is one that has recently come to notice. A writer in the Chicago News says that this letter was discovered in some excavations being made in the province of Attica, Greece. This writer adds: "M. Wilhelm, secretary of the Austrian Archaeological Institute here, who has succeeded in deciphering it asserts that it was written four centuries before Christ. It is engraved on a leaden leaf, folded in two, and it bears on the outside the following address: 'To the porter of the market at Potis, to be delivered either to Nausias or to Thrasicles, or to their sons.' The text of the letter is as follows: 'Mnesiengos sends his greetings to those in the house and informs them that he is in good health. Please send me a blanket or some sheepskins, if possible of the ordinary kind, without ornaments. As soon as the occasion offers I shall return them.'"

ACCORDING to the Kansas City Journal, Argentina is the only South American country that produces cereals for exportation. The Journal says: "Thirty years ago it imported cereals from the United States, from Chili, and even from Turkey, but in 1902 the value of the quantity exported was \$65,000,000, and according to all calculations it will exceed \$100,000,000 in 1904. Argentina, with nearly 250,000,000 acres of land suitable for agriculture, has not even 10 per cent thereof under cultivation. It has been calculated that in 1902-3 the area of land cultivated was 20,782,000 acres, distributed as follows: Wheat, 9,066,900; linseed, 3,222,000; maize, 3,706,700; other grains, 247,100; alfalfa, 3,261,900; peanuts, 59,600; sugar cane, 113,700; grapes, 103,700; tobacco, 31,400; other crops, 964,000"

WHY does a woman take the name of her husband when she is married? The St. Louis Republic explains in this way: "The custom which makes it proper for the wife to assume the name of her husband at marriage is involved in much obscurity. A recent authority advances the opinion that it originated from a Roman custom and became common after the Roman occupation of England. Thus, Julia and Octavia, married to Pompey and Cicero, were called by the Romans Julia of Pompey and Octavia of Cicero, and in later times the married women of most European countries signed their names in the same way, but omitted the 'of.' In spite of this theory it is a fact that as late as the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century a Catharine Parr signed her name without any change, though she had been twice married. We also hear of Lady Jane Grey, not Dudley, and Arabella Stuart, not Seymour. Some think that the custom originated with the scriptural idea that the husband and wife are one. This was the rule of law as far back as 1268, and it was decided in the case of Bon vs. Smith, in the reign of Elizabeth, that a woman by marriage loses her former name and legally receives the name of her husband."

ACCORDING to a writer in the Minneapolis Journal, a queer custom prevails in Denmark and parts of Switzerland, whereby parents exchange their children. Danish children are exchanged for the holiday season through the medium of newspaper advertisements. This writer continues: "The youngsters from the villages go into towns and become the smarter for their knowledge of city life. The place of the young 'hayseeds' on the farms is taken by the little city folks, who come back to town, after a spell in the fresh country air, with rosy cheeks and robust constitutions. In Switzerland parents exchange their children for a much longer period—sometimes for a year or two. The object is to improve the children's education. Three languages are spoken in the Swiss cantons—German, French and Italian. A child born in a French canton will be sent, in due course of time, to live successively in the German and Italian cantons,

and vice versa, so that practically every Swiss speaks the three languages of his country perfectly. He usually speaks English, too."

SPEAKING on the subject "Insurance on Women," a writer in the Minneapolis Journal says: "It is a toss-up since the last policy was taken out, which woman carries the heavier life insurance, Mrs. Leland Stanford of California or Mrs. James Dunsmuir of Toronto. The odds are in favor of Mrs. Stanford, for she now is rated as insured for 'over' \$1,000,000, whereas Mrs. Dunsmuir is put down at an even million. There is no question they are the most heavily insured women on the American continent, and far ahead of any of their sisters in the east. The next nearest is Mrs. Basil N. Duke of Durham, N. C., who has policies amounting to \$385,000. In New York there is no policy on the life of a woman for more than one-tenth of that carried by Mrs. Dunsmuir. Mrs. Gage E. Harbell is insured for \$100,000. Mrs. Henry C. Alexander carries a policy for a similar amount, and so does Mrs. Robert K. Stafford. The total in New York, however—in policies of more than \$50,000 each—is not much greater than the insurance on the life of the widow of the California multimillionaire."

WHILE it may sound ridiculous that some person owns a volcano, a writer in the Sioux City Tribune, declares that Mount Vesuvius is held in communal ownership. This writer says: "Four communes—Resina, Torre del Greco, Boscoe Trecasse and Ottagano—are competing for its overlordship and have gone to law about it. The dispute will not make any difference with the mountain. Pompeii and Herculaneum may have had a similar one for all that is known. Vesuvius, like Niagara and the Yosemite and a few other natural features of unusual sublimity, belongs to the great world and to time, and can admit no other possession. Farmers may own the farms, as Emerson says, but none among them nor all together can own the landscape. The Vesuvian villages are pushing too ambitious a claim, and might almost as well extend it to the sky overhead, which, indeed, is fine enough to justify covetousness if that could be of any avail."

COMMENTING upon the statement that American consuls are underpaid, the New York Independent says: "It goes without saying that they ought to be able to return their hospitality in a suitable manner, but few American consuls can do so unless they have a private income. 'When we deprive our consuls of the necessary means to enter the social circle to which they properly belong, we reduce them to mere ciphers,' said President Monroe. It is very true, but there has been little improvement in this respect since Monroe's day. 'It is not sufficient to have our representative living abroad as cheaply as he can afford to exist,' said Senator Sumner, 'because his social position is an important factor in his power to be useful.' Yet it is the regrettable fact, as a consul wrote some time ago, that there is hardly a consulate in the world where the American representative is not the most shabbily housed, poorly served and poorly paid among his consular associates."

THE Andre monument, which was erected by the late Cyrus W. Field at Tappan, N. Y., has been sold for non-payment of taxes. Referring to this, the New York Herald says: "The monument stands upon Andre hill, just over the spot where the British officer was buried after his death by hanging. Since the death of Mr. Field his family has neglected to pay taxes on the plot of ground, 100 feet square, within which the memorial shaft stands. This property was one of several pieces recently offered for sale by the treasurer of Rockland county, and when it was put up for sale there were no bidders. The amount of taxes due was \$6.38, and for this sum the ground and the monument were bought in by the treasurer for the county. If it is not redeemed the shaft and land upon which it stands will pass out of the hands of the Field family and become the permanent possession of Rockland county."