

CURRENT TOPICS

IT IS A VERY COMMON occurrence to pick up a newspaper these days and find therein lugubrious walls to the effect that there is a growing contempt for our courts of justice. The trouble is, the newspapers pay much more attention to the detail of bemoaning the growing contempt for our courts than they do to attempts to remove the causes for the growing contempt. If the people have become convinced that the courts make a distinction between the rich and influential offender and the poor and friendless offender, the fault lies with the court, not with the people. One needs but to read carefully the daily newspapers to find plenty of evidence upon which to base the suspicion that in all too many instances courts construe the laws indifferently for rich and poor.

A CASE IN POINT comes from Nebraska where the United States court has just inflicted upon Bartlett Richards and W. G. Comstock a fine of \$300 each and a sentence of six hours in the custody of the United States marshal. Richards and Comstock were found guilty of illegally fencing 212,000 acres of government land in Sheridan county, and the government had worked for four years and spent several thousand dollars in securing the evidence that led to the conviction. A few years ago a young man was arraigned before the United States court at Omaha on the charge of robbing the United States mails. He had help up a star route carrier at the point of a revolver, rifled the mail and secured a total of two cents in pennies. He had no money to employ counsel, but the court kindly appointed an attorney to defend him. The attorney advised the prisoner to plead guilty, which he did, and the judge sentenced him to the federal penitentiary for years.

THESE TWO CASES are not unique. In fact, they are altogether too common. The rich and influential prisoner escapes with a nominal fine while the poor and friendless prisoner gets the maximum. Richards and Comstock pleaded guilty to the charge of fencing and using 212,000 acres of government land, and were fined a total of \$600 and given into the custody of the marshal for six hours. This is a very small rent to pay for the use of 212,000 acres of government land for ten or twelve years. The cattle kings certainly are laughing in their sleeves, and the ridiculous punishment meted out to them will not even have a deterrent effect upon other offenders. Such cases are a farce and amply explain why some people lose faith in the courts. They breed contempt for the law in the minds of offenders, and contempt for the courts in the minds of the people. The man who steals a loaf of bread from necessity is sent to the penitentiary, while the rich man who steals from avarice rather than from necessity is given a nominal fine and turned loose to resume his lawlessness.

THE UTAH COURTS, according to a writer in the New York Tribune, record a peculiar verdict in a breach of promise suit. A young woman who, after having been divorced twice on cruelty charges, brought a suit for \$50,000 because a third suitor broke off an engagement. This young woman said that her latest suitor frequently visited her at her home on the country road, and that he had repeatedly asserted that he "loved her better than hot cakes, and of them he was just terrible fond." She admitted that she had led him to the proposal by preparing generous supplies of cakes. After being out for three hours the jury delivered this remarkable verdict: "We, the jury, find the defendant in this case guilty as charged and award to the plaintiff, as prayed for, damages to the amount of \$50,000 cash money and one-half of the acre of willow land on the bottoms; and, finally, lastly and to the end, \$1.60 for attorney's fees and the costs of this action. Except, that, whereas the plaintiff has caused the defendant extreme mental anguish and suffering in writing the note which broke the contract of marriage, 30 per cent of the damages is hereby declared cancelled. And, whereas the plaintiff has been the cause of greatly reducing the pecuniary prominence of the defend-

ant to the extent of allowing and persuading him to make gigantic preparations in the matter of household furniture and rented rooms, 30 per cent more of the damages is hereby declared cancelled. And, furthermore, whereas plaintiff has caused defendant unlimited humiliation, mortification and isolation in depriving him of the necessary affableness and stamina requisite for the procuring of a suitable, or, in fact, any member of the fair sex, as a social companion and for causing him to be sympathetically looked upon as a dismal, hopeless destitute among the children of men, the remaining 40 per cent of the damages is hereby declared cancelled."

THEM LITERARY FELLERS," as a certain well known politician called the literary workers who were driving spikes into greed and graft, seem to be doing business at the old stand. The election of Brand Whitlock to be mayor of Toledo is ample proof of this. Mr. Whitlock was, perhaps, Mayor "Golden Rule" Jones' closest friend and confidant. It was natural therefore, that the "golden rule party" should turn to Mr. Whitlock when it sought a successor to the able gentleman who for so many years officiated as mayor of Toledo. It must not be imagined that because Mr. Whitlock is a "literary feller" he is ignorant of what people call practical politics. If there are those who labor under this delusion they should read Mr. Whitlock's novel, "The Thirteenth District." It will convince them that he is well acquainted with the devious ways of the machine politician and in good position to know what the machine politician will do when he has an opportunity. And knowing this Mr. Whitlock is armed for the defense of the people.

M-R. WHITLOCK'S election is not surprising in view of all the facts. Mayor Jones was beloved of all the people, and doubtless would have been re-elected mayor of Toledo as long as he lived and cared to accept the office. His friendship for and confidence in Mr. Whitlock were well known, and the people believed that if Mr. Jones could have named his successor he would have named Mr. Whitlock. Believing this the people who always rallied to the election of Mr. Jones rallied to elect Brand Whitlock, and those who opposed Jones opposed Whitlock because they believed that Whitlock not only stood for what Jones stood, but had the ability and the earnestness to carry them into effect. Mayor Whitlock will be closely watched by the country, and if he measures up to the standard set by "Golden Rule" Jones he will have achieved an honor as high as any man could well covet. He will certainly have the best wishes and the moral support of all men who believe in equality before the law.

A FUNERAL WITHOUT a parallel took place November 19 at the Midvale Steel Works, Philadelphia. There a 40-ton ingot of steel, permeated with the flesh, blood and bones of two workmen was buried with solemn rites. An Associated Press dispatch says: "The workmen who were so strangely laid away were John Forkin and Joseph Gazda, two foreign-speaking laborers who met a horrible death a week ago. They were in a pit near a cupola containing many tons of molten steel. A plug gave way and 80,000 pounds of the fiery fluid poured from the cupola and overwhelmed them. The men were completely incinerated and not a trace of them or their clothing was left. The Midvale Steel company was averse to selling the steel or using it for the purpose it was intended, and it was decided to bury it with the rites of the church to which the unfortunate men had belonged. Accordingly the 40-ton ingot, oval in shape, twenty-eight feet long, six feet wide, and five feet thick, was moved last week by a traveling crane to the rear of the machine shop, where a grave ten feet deep had been made. The great mass of metal was laid in the hole and a platform built over it so that the burial services could be better performed. In the center of the platform was an opening six feet in diameter. A great crowd sought admission to the works today, but only the two sisters of Gazda, who de-

pendent on him for support, and about 100 workmen who were on Sunday duty were permitted to attend the services along with the officials of the company. Forkin had no relatives in this country. Among the officials was President Charles Harrah. All heads were bared and flags were lowered to half mast while two priests conducted the services. After the sisters of Gazda had been led away the great ingot was covered with earth and the funeral party dispersed. The grave of the men will be appropriately marked by the company."

THIS IS THE STORY told by Rev. Henry A. Stimson of New York: "A dozen or more insurance financiers were assembled in a room just prior to the exposure of the affairs of the Equitable Life. Its president, James W. Alexander, stood before them and pleaded for a change of methods, announcing the course he proposed to take in case of their refusal. He could endure existing conditions no longer. They said, 'It will ruin you.' He replied: 'I know it. There is a saying of the ancients, 'Let the man who has the fewest years to live be the sacrifice.' I am the oldest man present. You with your millions may weather the storm. I shall go upon the rocks, but my conscience will be clear.'" Referring to this tale Harpers Weekly says: "Mr. Alexander did go on the rocks. According to current accounts he is a man broken in body and in mind, and with slight chance of recovery. But of all the men seriously involved in the insurance investigations, he has suffered least in reputation. There is a strong sentiment to the effect that he never knowingly or intentionally did what was wrong. If it is true that he brought the crash down on his own head from the motives, and with the expectations, that Dr. Stimson relates, the policyholders may one day build a monument to him."

IT HAS DEVELOPED in the testimony before New York's insurance committee that there is in existence a lobby supported by great financial interests, provided with a joint huddle fund and maintained for the purpose of fighting any measure that threatens to advance the public interests or curtail the power of special interests in any particular. Referring to "the scope of the insurance lobby" the Denver News says: "The letters read in the investigation, written by Thomas D. Jordan, former controller of the Equitable, proved this fact beyond a doubt. The New York Tribune, in its report of the proceedings, said that the instructions given to lobbyists 'revealed a range of legislation practically without limit.' Here are some extracts from these letters: 'We are in favor of bill No. 99 for the widening and improvement of West One Hundred and Thirty-fifth street.' 'Please note we are opposed to assembly introductory bills 135 and 136 amending the stock corporation law in relation to books of account of stockholders.' 'Please note that we are vigorously opposed to senate bill 150, Malby. I want to keep track of this measure till it is killed.' 'We are vigorously opposed to introductory No. 272, Robinson, ceding to the town of Islip certain water rights.' 'We are interested in Senator Moran's bill, introductory 350, reducing the rate of interest to 5 per cent. I imagine this latter measure will have a long sleep.' 'I desire to again call your attention to Senator Malby's bill, introductory 250. We are opposed to this bill.'"

SOME OF THESE "objectionable" bills related to the employment of women and children, some to labor laws protecting or aiding the workman, some relating to tenement houses, to the security of guests in hotels, to the taxation of banks and trust companies and the News asks: "Can anyone doubt that what is true of the insurance trust and legislation at Albany is also true in Washington and in all state capitals and of many other financial combines? Can they longer doubt that machine politics, whatever the party, always works with wheels oiled by corporate funds? Can they not see that something fundamental is required to free the nation from such a clutch upon its throat?"