

CURRENT TOPICS

G. H. STIEFEL, whose home is at Fairview and Gardner avenues, South Orange, N. J., not far from Seton Hall College, owns a freak rosebush. Instead of bearing roses it is white with cherry blossoms. He is hopeful it will bear a large crop of cherries. He says he has no idea what caused the bush to go off at such a flower-bearing tangent. He has not grafted or budded it, or done any of the other floricultural or horticultural stunts which Luther Burbank, the California wizard, does. It is nature's work from start to finish, and the young cherries already have begun to form. The New York Press tells the story in this way: "It is a crimson Rambler rose. Several years ago it was planted at the foot of a cherry tree in the Stiefel garden. Now it is well up the trunk. Never before has it borne cherry blossoms. Last year, and the year before that, it was aflame with roses. The display was so handsome it attracted much attention, and Stiefel gave away hundreds of the blooms to friends and neighbors. This spring the rosebush put out its leaves and the buds the same as usual. Stiefel congratulated himself he soon would be in the rose dispensing business again. He was surprised when he went into his garden a week ago to discover the bush covered with white blossoms. Rubbing his eyes to ascertain whether he had been stricken with color blindness, he hurried to it. The blossoms were white all right, and his surprise increased when he discovered they were cherry blossoms. Neighbors were summoned and a consultation was held. Nobody could explain what caused the phenomenon. One horticulturist suggested that the bush fed on the sap of the cherry tree until its entire nature was changed."

NOW THEY have the "despair fever" in Russia. A St. Petersburg cablegram to the Chicago Record-Herald says: "In 'despair fever,' Dr. Dvoretzky, a well known professor of the Kieff university, has discovered, isolated and given name to a Russian disease. He says it is a disease which is spreading with tremendous swiftness and shows itself in a vast majority of cases in the desire of the patient to commit suicide. As far as the professor knows, the disease is confined to Russia. Here all strata of society, all ages and both sexes are suffering from it. It affects the ten-year-old child and the octogenarian alike. Dr. Dvoretzky does not maintain that it is a new disease. His contention is simply that for the first time the awful ailment with which all Russia is afflicted has been classified and named. The average number of those who commit suicide in Russia each month is 350—more than 4,000 each year. All of these, Dr. Dvoretzky says, are sufferers from 'despair fever.' In Moscow alone there were last year nearly 600 cases, and in St. Petersburg nearly 1,500. Most of the deaths are among young men and women between the ages of 18 and 30. The most popular form of death is poison, but there are numerous other well approved forms of self-destruction. In Odessa, for example, no less than six persons suffering from 'despair fever' consumed themselves with fire. Dr. Dvoretzky says he calls the disease 'despair fever' because its victims are always persons who find nothing but despair in the future, both as regards their own lot and the fate of the country in which they live. They see nothing but weariness and a stagnant life for themselves, and nothing but increasing unhappiness for the country. This stagnant life the Russian youth fears even more than death."

ROBERT WOMACK, the discoverer of Cripple Creek, who died recently, sold his discovery for a song. The story of his life is told by the Colorado Springs correspondent for the Chicago Record-Herald in this way: "Bob Womack was born sixty-six years ago. He began riding the Requa Gulch range for a cattle company late in the '80s. The gold fever burned in his veins as he traversed the ground which the owners believed almost worthless. In 1891 Womack did his first prospect digging. Finally the foreman of the range sent complaints to the Denver mortgagees that Womack was wasting his time

honey-combing the country with prospect holes into which the cattle fell and crippled themselves. An investigation was made. Womack, the gold hunter's look blazing in his eyes, the gold digger's stoop bending his shoulders, listened patiently to the order to stop digging. But the spell was upon him. He gave a sack to W. R. Myers to take to Denver to have assayed. By some mischance the test was never made, but the ranger kept on neglecting his cattle for the shaft until one day going into Colorado Springs with a load of rock, he came back thrilled because he had struck pay dirt. "We'll give you \$300 for the claim," said one of the millionaires of the future. Womack's eyes popped out. He had never had so much money as that before and he closed the deal. The piece of land turned out to be the famous El Paso mine, one of the richest in the district. He prospected thirty other claims and every one of them he gave away or sold for a song before half their richness had been revealed. His was the craving of discovery, not of possession. Winfield Scott Stratton was one of his companions and wanted him to follow him when the mysterious call came from another part of the camp. Womack hesitated, but Stratton went on and discovered the Independence, which he sold for \$10,000,000. The story of the returns from assays on Womack's claims started a rush to the district later called Cripple Creek from the cattle crippled in Womack's prospect holes. As others' fortunes increased, Womack's faded. Then he heard what was doing up on the hills as he split kindling for the fires of his sister's boarding house, washed dishes or did chores about the place, but his only comment was, 'I knew I was right; couldn't fool me.' So Bob Womack lived in poverty until he became helpless. He always believed he would tap another vein of gold."

JOHAN GUNCKEL is a resident of Toledo, Ohio. He is called "The Benevolent Bogymen of Toledo," for he looks after wayward boys. William B. Forbush, writing in the Congregationalist and Christian World of Boston, describes Mr. Gunckel's work in this way: "Seventeen years ago Mr. Gunckel was a ticket agent of the Lakeshore railroad. The way, he says, he got interested in boys is this: One day he was walking in a field near the city, when he noticed a boy scattering something on the ground. The day was Friday. He asked the boy what he was doing. He said that the school children would be coming there the next day after hickory nuts, and, as the trees were nearly dead, he had 'blowed himself' to fifteen cents worth of nuts, so they would not be disappointed. Mr. Gunckel could see that he was a poor boy. It seemed to him a fine thing that this boy was doing and he was so pleased that he made an appointment to meet him there the next morning and watch the children find the nuts. At that meeting 'Jimmie' agreed to be Mr. Gunckel's friend, and the next Monday he consented to bring some of his chums to Mr. Gunckel's office to become his friends also. Before Monday Mr. Gunckel did some hard thinking. Few persons had studied books about boys then, and I don't believe he has read any about them since. For his is not a book knowledge. It is first-hand. On Monday morning the Toledo Newsboys' Association was formed, by five boys solemnly signing their names to the famous agreement which over 5,000 have signed since. It begins, 'I do not approve of swearing, stealing, lying, smoking,' etc. Not long after this little organization was started, one of the early members broke the agreement. Mr. Gunckel was grieved, and hardly knew what to do. But his friend Jimmie solved the difficulty promptly. He took the offender out in an alley and punched his head! This worked an instant reclamation. This act gave Mr. Gunckel his first idea as to the way to run his association—for he started without any theories. This idea was, self-government. It soon grew to another one, which Mr. Gunckel states in this wise, 'To make a bad boy good, send him out to take care of another bad boy.' Mr. Gunckel showed me how his system works. When a boy has signed an application to become a member of the association, Mr. Gunckel hands his card to one of his officers,

of whom there are sixty in various parts of the city. This boy is to report on any habits which the applicant needs to correct in order to become a worthy member. One card I saw read, 'He smokes;' another, 'He uses cuss words to his mother.' When improvement comes, Mr. Gunckel writes across the card such a phrase as, 'Cut it out March 16, 1909.' If a member falls from grace he receives a card reminder, signed, not by Mr. Gunckel, but by a boy officer, and containing a curt warning and a picture of a boy being spanked by his mother."

IN TIME Mr. Gunckel's work among the boys interfered somewhat with his railroad business. But so important was the work that the railroad officials told him to keep it up, using, if necessary, the company's time. For two years now, fifty citizens of Toledo have paid Mr. Gunckel a regular salary. A building costing \$100,000 has also been provided for his work. Mr. Forbush adds: "Everybody knows him. The adults call him 'John' and the boys call him 'Gunck.' Postmen and policemen who are too much away from home to discipline their children send them to him; and when boys do wrong their mothers make them behave by threatening to tell Mr. Gunckel. He is benevolent bogymen in Toledo. * * * All this work is intensely personal. 'Gunck' is the center and soul of it. To please him is goodness, to displease him is disloyalty. It seems somewhat theatric. But boys are in the theatric stage. The Sunday afternoon meetings, with brass band and boy 'stunts' and talks by business men, do not please all the people who go to Sunday school, but 60 per cent of Mr. Gunckel's boys are Jews and most of the rest would never see the inside of a Sunday school, anyhow. Some of Mr. Gunckel's graduates are now teaching in Sunday schools. He has certainly established among many boys in Toledo and elsewhere a practical code of decent living, upon which Sunday schools can build up."

IN CONNECTION with the Vandevanter injunction against Nebraska's guaranteed deposits law, the Omaha World-Herald says: "S. H. Burnham is president of the First National bank of Lincoln and one of the influential bosses of the republican state organization. We mention this by way of identification, since it throws a light on a circular letter Mr. Burnham has addressed to the banks of the state jubilating over the Vandevanter injunction of the Nebraska guaranty law. In the concluding paragraph of his letter Mr. Burnham says: 'So far as I am concerned I have no further fear regarding the outcome of the entire proposition. We have knocked them out in the first round, and we will give them a body blow in the second that will put the proposition to sleep forever.' By 'them' Mr. Burnham doubtless means the majority of the people of Nebraska who demanded, and elected a legislature to enact, a law for the safeguarding of bank deposits. That Mr. Burnham and his associates did succeed in 'knocking them out in the first round' may be admitted. This is not due to any virtue or strength in the position of those bankers and politicians who, for selfish reasons, oppose the guaranty law. It is due simply to an extraordinary and vicious power assumed by the federal courts, under which they assert the right to suspend the operation of a state law for an indefinite period, while they and the supreme court are making up their minds whether it is constitutional or not. It amounts only to judicial despotism. It is a denial of the principles of representative government, and the establishment, instead, of the irresponsible rule of an oligarch. But Mr. Burnham's boast that he will soon 'give them a body blow that will put the proposition to sleep forever' may well be taken with a grain of allowance. It is a pretty difficult thing, even for the great and mighty bankers of the state of Nebraska, to put the people, and any proposition to which they are committed, 'to sleep forever.' They will find it hard to accomplish even with the assistance of the supreme court. The slave power was as stiff-necked and defiant in its day as