

# CURRENT TOPICS

CONCERNING the work on the Panama canal, a writer in the Macon (Ga.) Telegraph says: As the Panama canal is nearing completion it increases in interest. The man who made the Canal Zone possible for health is Colonel William C. Gorgas. He was made colonel and assistant surgeon general by special act of congress for yellow fever work in 1903 and has been chief sanitary officer on the isthmus since March, 1907. He has done marvelous work in establishing health conditions in Panama and Colon and throughout the Canal Zone. He has eradicated the mosquito from that section. Most effective in the fight was the use and distribution of coal oil. The Union Oil company of California has five ships in the trade. Colonel Gorgas is a southern man. He was born in Mobile October 3, 1854, and is a graduate of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn. He is the son of General Josiah Gorgas, chief of the ordnance department, C. S. A., with headquarters in Richmond. After the war General Gorgas was elected in 1870 vice chancellor of the University of the South. In 1878 General Gorgas became president of the University of Alabama, and when he died in 1883 his wife was made librarian of the university, a position she held for twenty-four years. She was a remarkable woman, and was eighty-six years of age at her death January 3, 1913. "Born and bred of the best of a gracious and unique civilization, her young womanhood, caught in the grip of a great revolution, was passed in days of storm and tragedy. The strength of her middle life was spent amid the passion and horrors of reconstruction, and the rebuilding of the land she loved. Her mature years were devoted to an unselfish service to the young men of Alabama, who loved her with an unflinching devotion." So, Dr. Gorgas, who has taught the world how to eradicate the mosquito, was born of this good old ante-bellum stock. Dr. Charles F. Mason of Virginia has been the superintendent of the great Ancon hospital for the past four years, while Dr. W. R. Noble, who uses the hospital car across the isthmus daily, in looking after the sick, is a Tennessean. All of the buildings in the zone are wired against mosquitoes.

ON Tuesday, May 6, 1896, Samuel P. Langley, the pioneer inventor of the aeroplane, made the first successful flight with a model machine in the history of the world. May 6 of each year has been set aside by the Aero Club of America as the day to celebrate the real awakening of the world to the wonders of the aeroplane. The anniversary was observed at Washington under the auspices of the federal government. A writer in the New Orleans Democrat says: On May 6, 1896, for the first time a machine of man's construction sprang from the earth and swept continuously through the air like a living thing. Zeppelin, Wright, Curtis, Atwood are names synonymous with airship, but to comparatively few is the name of Langley known. Yet aviation as it exists today is the result of the dreams and long days and nights of labor of Samuel Pierpont Langley. In honor of this pioneer of the great universal highway a day has been set aside for annual memorial exercises. May 6 was chosen not because it was the day of his birth, but because on that day he saw the fruit of his many years' labor. On the same day a tablet made by John Flanigan, the famous New York sculptor, was unveiled under the direction of the board of regents of the Smithsonian. The story of the life of Prof. Langley reads like a romance. Indeed, one might better say, the story of his life is a tragedy. Of New England ancestry, that fine reserve which is an innate characteristic of the child of the cloud-capped granite hills, prevented the world from getting at the warm, loving heart which beat so tenderly in his bosom and found expression in many ways. He was especially attracted by the friendship of children. Many of his friends will tell you today pathetic stories illustrative of this characteristic of the great scientist. In his drives he loved to have as many children around him as he could crowd in, and dearly prized were the stories this good friend told them. The children's room in the Smithsonian building at Washington was his

happy thought. Over the door is the now famous inscription "Knowledge Begins in Wonder." The most curious and wonder arousing treasures of the institution are there arranged on shelves so low the wee toddler can easily admire. There is but one Latin name and that is the longest of names for the tiniest of humming birds. A bird's playground is another wonder for the children originated by the famous scientist. It shows the peculiar house of the white ant, the way nature helps birds to hide, and is decorated with gay shells, the bright stones and funny little animals being so naturally scattered as to seem quite capable of coming out to play if someone would only open the door.

PROF. LANGLEY'S own story of the day when anxious expectation became certainty is so graphic that anyone can almost see the wide reaches of the shining water and feel the anxiety of the inventor, wearied with long labor and repeated discouragement. Even in the elation of success he is modest as a schoolboy. He said of this experience: "On May 6, 1896, I journeyed, perhaps for the twentieth time, to the distant river station and recommenced the weary routine of another launch with very moderate expectation, indeed. When that, to me, memorable afternoon, the signal was given and the aerodrome sprang into the air, I watched it from the shore with hardly a hope that the long series of accidents had come to a close. And yet it had, for the first time the aerodrome swept continuously through the air like a living thing. One man who saw it said it looked like a miracle. The great universal highway was open. The vision of the dreaming boy lying on his back on the hillside in far off New England watching the soaring birds had become an epoch in history. It was taken uninjured from the water and flown again successfully. Another model was flown the following autumn. Great interest was aroused all over the world. At the request of President McKinley the inventor set about constructing a man-carrying machine. Again almost insurmountable difficulties were met and conquered, and at last the eventful day came. An accident to the launching apparatus caused the aeroplane to fall into the water. It was rescued, repaired and about two months later a similar accident prevented the flight of the airship. The storm of adverse criticism made congress slow to appropriate funds. Private citizens were ready to advance money, but Prof. Langley steadfastly refused to accept it. He declared his work was solely in the interest of the nation, and if the nation was not prepared to support it, he was not willing to proceed at private expense. Although it was conceded that Prof. Langley's man-carrying machine was capable of flight, the failure not being due to the machine, he was not permitted to live to know it. He furnished the first data by which we have been able to conquer the air, and he will always be remembered as the real pioneer of the flying machine as it is today.

THE United Press, carried under recent date, the following London cablegram: Secretary of State Bryan of the United States says his peace plan does not propose absolute inactivity by disputants while their controversy is being investigated by an international tribunal according to an interview with Bryan published in the Daily Express. The interview was obtained in Washington by a correspondent of the Express. "I want to correct the idea that my peace proposal includes a provision for the cessation of all strategic moves by any two disputants during the period of investigation of the cause of their dispute," Bryan is quoted as saying. "This idea was inserted in my plan as originally drawn up, but was eliminated later and ought not to have been included in the public announcement. I am encouraged by the information thus far received concerning the favorable mention given to my suggestion and I have no doubt that the United States will be able to make such treaties with several of the nations. I call them supplemental treaties because they would supplement existing arbitration agreements. It is not intended to call a conference of the powers to

discuss my proposal. All that is expected will be an interchange of views between the American government and representatives of the foreign powers individually. Each treaty would be made distinct from the others and they may not be the same in details, but in broad outline they will contain these provisions: First, a time limit fixed for the discussion of disputed points at issue after diplomacy has failed to reach an agreement. Second, the appointment of a commission consisting of citizens of both countries to investigate the dispute and report. Third, no declaration of war shall be made until after the report is received. Fourth, the powers reserve the right of independent action after the report has been received. My suggestion was proposed on the theory that there is no cause of war that ought to be considered inevitable. It is unnecessary that a peace plan be guaranteed to prevent war, if it is calculated to make war less probable. Such a treaty as I suggest gives opportunity for the separation of essentials from non-essentials, with the possibility of discovering either that what were considered essentials are not really so at all, or that national anger may be due to a misunderstanding of essentials. The plan is a step and a long step in the right direction for it embraces all questions not generally included in arbitration treaties of which national honor is one. The full details have not been worked out and the proposition has been stated merely in its outline. It will remain for diplomatic exchanges of views to elaborate the proposal. I have reason to believe the senate will ratify the treaties when they are signed."

CONCERNING the forecasting of earthquakes a writer in the New York Press says: A number of years ago a great earthquake occurred in Chile. Later the California earthquake wrought havoc at San Francisco. On the day after the San Francisco disaster an eminent American geologist pointed out that the continental backbone of the three Americas, following the Andes in South America and the coast ranges in this country, was a great fault line, along which readjustment of the earth's crust were liable to produce earthquakes. He pointed out that, there having been a slipping and readjustment in the southern section of the fault line, and then a corresponding one in the northern section, it was reasonable to presume that the middle area would have its corresponding disturbance. He declined to predict, but his analysis was widely presented as a prediction, and before many months had passed the thing actually happened, in the exact region he had indicated—the west coast of Mexico and Central America. Predicting earthquakes has not been generally attempted, but that case presents an instance of scientific knowledge at least guessing right. Therefore especial interest must attach to the suggestion of Prof. George Hallock Chadwick, who occupies the chair of geology of St. Lawrence university. He points out, first, that there is an ancient line of fault through the Appalachian region, from Quebec to Alabama. In 1663 a tremendously violent earthquake shook the upper parts of this region, and Prof. Chadwick, by the same analogy that made a prediction of the Mexico shock, declares there is possibility of more shocks along the Appalachian line. The Appalachians are a far older mountain system than the Rockies and Andes. Therefore, their area is less liable to earthquakes. But it has had widespread and destructive shocks in the past, and it is not for anybody to say that exemption for all the future is assured. Geologically, 1663 is not far in the past.

Mr. Bryan's Selected Speeches. Revised and arranged in a convenient two-volume edition. These books present Mr. Bryan's most notable addresses and orations, and cover the chief important phases and features of his career as an orator and advocate. A familiarly intimate and interesting biographical introduction by Mary Baird Bryan, his wife, opens Volume I. The two volumes, bound in cloth, sent to any address prepaid on receipt of price, \$2.00. The half leather edition, 2 vols., sent for \$3.00, prepaid. Address The Commoner, Lincoln, Neb.