TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Historical and Know Notes.

KING LOBENGULA has eighty queens. No wonder he isn't much of a warrior.

THE servant girl problem may properly be referred to as the hire education of women.

IT takes all the poetry and romance out of the chrysanthemum to learn that it can be cooked and eaten like greens.

WHY is it that they always lay "covers" at banquets which you read about? At the banquets one attends, plates seem to serve the purpose.

THE Ohio man who invented "the switchboard" has switched off the line of patience with those corporations that have been using the product of his genius gratis, and will sue offenders for $5,000,000. He proposes to cut a big figure for justice while he is about it.

AFTER years of having considered herself divorced from ex-King Milan, ex-Queen Natalie is informed that the tie binding them is as strong as ever. There is still ample accommodation in South Dakota, and an ex-Queen could get into the best set there right from the jump.

CONCERNING the Pall Mall Gazette the New York Sun remarks: "The paper had grown dull and cranky when Mr. Astor gave his mind to it." If his mind had been all that Mr. Astor gave to it the paper might still remain dull and cranky. But his money which he gave it hired other minds.

SOMEBODY has left Dr. Parkhurst a cool $1,000,000 to carry on his war against vice and the Gotham police. It is now in order for somebody having Parkhurst's welfare and reputation at heart to get a conservator appointed for him lest his wily enemies take both the doctor and the $1,000,000 into camp.

LILLIAN RUSSELL made an important concession to public opinion and the law by marrying Perugini in New Jersey instead of in New York. In New York the marriage would have been bigamous. In New Jersey it is just a plain stage wedding. It differs from a good many stage weddings in being legal anywhere.

IT appears that the man whom Chicago officials hanged twice was dead at the time of the second operation. It was considered necessary to have the fact of dissolution announced while the body still swung. It is a fair presumption that a corpse not declared a corpse would have walked away and thus vindicated the grandeur of the technicality.

AN Eastern paper published the story of a man who says he was hanged by a mob in Denver fifteen years ago, but escaped after having been drawn up twice. Possibly the man was in Denver at that time, probably he deserved all he got, except the experience of escaping, but in the interest of truth the fact must be recorded that he is just a plain liar.

A PAPER published in the interest of a big insurance company says that the current talk of an "unprecedented season for accidents in consequence of the World's Fair" is all rubbish, and adds that the experience of its company shows that there has been no large increase in the gross volume of accidents this year. This is interesting, because there is just enough business in it to make it probable that it is true.

AN Anarchist of Tacoma, while returning from a meeting held to consider the best method of blowing society into a satisfactory state of disintegration, was whacked on the head by another reformer, and is likely to go hence with his own devices for bettering the universe incomplete. However melancholy the circumstances may appear, it must be conceded that a measure of reform has been effected.

THE day undoubtedly is not far away when all superfluous fruits and berries will be preserved by the use evaporators, rather than left to spoil or to be fed as waste. There is a steadily increasing demand for dried fruits, and if dried berries have no market it is because they are practically unknown. Once put upon the market, and the demand for them will grow, for though demand regulates supply, it is equally true that supply creates demand in many instances.

THE naval officer who had charge of the Kearsarge admits now that he did not take observations himself for a day or two before the wreck, but made his calculations on observations taken by a naval cadet. He had not seen any sea service for seven years before being assigned to duty as commanding officer of this ship. Thus the system of favortism, which gives long shore duty to favored officers, is doubtless responsible for the loss of a vessel valuable itself and still richer in historical associations.

BOSTON is suffering with an epidemic of profanity. Emerson's soulful proverbs are displaced by strange oaths and Thoreau's moral morsels by awful imprecations. So serious and widespreading has the epidemic become that an appeal for a moral quarantine has been made. Pastors of churches of all denominations have been requested to take the third commandment as a text for lectures and homilies; the school board has been importuned to instruct teachers to give talks to pupils on the purity of speech, and editors of daily papers have been asked to admonish their readers not to supplant English with profane language.

ALTHOUGH the great Hungarian patriot had outlived two generations of men who adored him as the incarnate conscience of a nation, he was still a vital figure in contemporary thought when the reaper Death took pity on his ninety years, and called him away. His lofty and noble character had won for him in this country, when he was here on the mission of liberty, profound respect, and his brilliant qualities as man and orator, gained him admiration. Almost all who stood beside him here have passed away. One of the last of the giants of '48, he carried his head unbowed to the end, and goes down to history with a spotless record.

YOUNG ladies who become famous through their connection with breach of promise suits must naturally expect the attentions of the purveyors for human curiosity. It is not strange, therefore, that Miss Pollard should already have received an offer of $500 a week for twenty weeks, to travel with a theatrical company, presumably as one of its bright particular stars. It certainly would have been thought passing strange a generation ago. But in an age when prize fighters play first walking gentlemen, reformed burglars are cast for virtuous blacksmiths, and bridge jumpers for beneficent heroes, we may expect all things—even the sudden blossoming of breach of promise heroines into tragediennes upon the mimic scene.

THE use of small sizes of coal has greatly increased of late years. Formerly the sizes below stove coal were regarded as almost worthless and were left at the mines to accumulate there. It was soon found that chestnut coal was extremely desirable for house use, and it came a dollar a ton cheaper than stove coal for a time. Now, pea coal is coming into use, and this can be got at the mines for 75 cents per ton. Still smaller particles, called barley coal, are now used for generating steam at the collieries. Even the fine coal dust is now mixed with something to cause it to stick together, and is thus made into a valuable and practically costless fuel, as there are immense piles of it left from times when it was regarded as good for nothing.

CHICAGO HERALD: At the dedication of a Presbyterian Church among the subscribers to pay off its debt was a liquor firm which gave $50. Dr. Willis G. Craig of McCormick University, Chicago, commended the firm for its liberality, but noticing a smile in the congregation he learned the cause and merely said: "That's all right." And why not? Why should not the money of sin, as the prohibitionists regard it, be made to serve the cause of Christianity? In all works of charity who asks a certificate of character from a dollar? It may in its career have been stolen, it may have been won or lost in gambling, it may have been a factor in a horse race or a prize fight. It may have aided and abetted many wicked things, but it will help as well to pay a church debt or the minister's salary, will buy food and clothing for hungry and naked children as well as a dollar fresh from the mint. There is no taint on a dollar to prevent its doing good.

Rare Books.

Among the rare and valuable books in the late Duke of Devonshire's library, says a contemporary, there are few of which there are no duplicates anywhere, and, what is still more extraordinary, no one has ever read them. The following are some of them—"Percy Vere," in forty volumes; "Tadpoles, or Tales Out of My Own Head;" "The Life of Zimmerman," by himself; "Boyle on Steam;" "Voltaire, Volney, Volta," three volumes; "Barrow on the Common Weal," and "Recollections of Bannister," by Lord Stair. These curious titles were supplied to the Duke by Thomas Hood for lettering certain chain volumes.

GILDED APRON STRINGS.

How One Mother Keeps Her Boys at Home.

Boys object to being "tied to their mother's apron strings," and wise mothers gild theirs, says an exchange.

A woman near me has on her hands the problem of bringing up three fatherless boys.

This winter she counted out $3 and gave her sons, little fellows, a Christmas present of a ready-made toboggan slide.

With this present she gave them two rules—only two.

1. No boy was to start down the slide until the way was clear.

That to prevent physicial injury.

2. No boy was to use an oath, any bad word, or slang.

This to prevent moral injury.

The boys worked liked troopers, banking up the track and flooding it all, and part of the time the mother was out there, shovel and hose in hand, working with them and directing.

The flooding was conducted almost daily from the upper bath-room window, and leaning out of the same window I have seen the mother again and again, watching if all went well. I have seen her come out among the boys, to wipe away tears, and to enhearten some little fellow who didn't get his turn or was pitched off into the snow. Once in a while she dashed down the slide herself, steered by some proud little lad.

But whether she is coasting with them, comforting, directing them, or leaning out of the up-stairs window, she is there all the same in spirit and influence.

There is a great crowd of boys on that side out of school hours, and another matron on the street said the other day that Mrs. Freeman had managed to gather the riff-raff of the neighborhood.

But Mrs. Freeman had her boys around her and she is a power with the "riff-raff." Little girls are encouraged to come to the slide and every boy is put on his mettle by this devoted mother to treat the small ladies with courtesy.

That slide, in connection with occasional candy-pulls and popcorn ngs in the kitchen, is an educator, a good investment.

Snow and ice will soon slip away, but she intends to have a low, flat car constructed, so that the boys can have a summer coast—a safe one, for the slide is not very steep.

A Piano-Tuner's Untimely Appearance.

The story in one of the papers about a lady calling down the speaking tube to Bridget, and being answered by that person, "there's no one here, mum," brings to the Listener's mind an incident related to him by a friend of his, a piano-tuner, who frequently has occasion to tune pianos in Back Bay apartments. It should be said that some flat dwellers depend a good deal more completely on their street doors and the bell and tube arrangements to be found there than other flat dwellers do. Well, the piano-tuner went one day to an apartment house where he had been sent for and, finding the street door open, he went up without ringing. He also found the door of the apartment up-stairs ajar, and walked into the front room, his bag in hand. There he was astonished to find a man, apparently a Frenchman, on his knees on the floor, making a declaration of love to a lady. The man sprung up; the tuner apologized and announced his business; but the Frenchman was furious with rage, and bellowed:

"Vy don't you ring ze tube?"

His anger was not reduced when the lady actually laughed at this question.—Boston Transcript.

Struck the Wrong Family.

The weary wanderer's eyes gleamed with confidence as he stepped up to the back door and knocked.

"I see there's horseshoes over this door and the barn door, mum," he said to the hard featured woman who came to the door.

"Well," she said, with a strong stare.

"I've noticed that where there's horseshoes nailed up you always find warm hearts and a generous welcome," said the traveler with a winning smile.

"You don't say?"

"Yes mum; you people may be a little superstitious, but you are kind to the poor."

"Well, we didn't put them horseshoes up," said the woman, dryly. "The folks that did lives about ten miles from here now. It's a straight road—you can't miss it," and bang went the door.

The weary wanderer felt an electric chill down his spine as he started up the road.

"Say, you!" he heard her call. He turned to go back—she must have relented. "You might rip them shoes down an' take 'em along with yer if you think them folk'll want 'em," and bang went the door again.—Boston Journal.

Great Luck.

Monsieur Calino was greatly disturbed because the city authorities changed the numbers of the houses in his street, and roundly denounced the functionaries who had forced him by this simple change of figures, to live at No. 436 instead of No. 216. But one morning, as he came down to breakfast and took up his paper, he exclaimed:

"Goodness! I was all wrong! What a fortunate thing that our number was changed!"

"How is that?" asked Madame Calino.

Why, here is an account of the total destruction by fire of No. 216! If the number hadn't been changed, we should have been homeless wanderers this minute!"

AHEAD IN ALL RESPECTS.

The American Mosquito Has No Superior in Industry and Efficiency.

Says the Hartford Courant: It is only by wide experience and travel that one comes to a true appreciation of the mosquito. After a long and intimate acquaintance with the flying pests of such varied and various countries as South America, Australia, India and Africa, the world wanderer returns with the firm conviction that the Yankee mosquito is easily first in his particular line of work. For refinement of method, quality of torture and deceptive innocence of appearance this animal exhibits a unique character to the student of depravity. The popular definition of the mosquito would describe it as an insect that stings; perhaps it would be better to say, a sting that insects, for the insectation of the little creature is merely a fringe around the solid central fact of its stingability. A mosquito without its sting would be the play with Hamlet left out. One can even imagine making a household pet of it under such conditions. But the mosquito isn't built that way; where he is, there shall his sting be also. Even the snake, the most loathsome of beasts, has the decency in biting you to get rid of its poison and so becomes harmless. Not so the mosquito; it can bite you red, white, and blue all night, and in the morning by the bright light cry out, "Get 'em up again" without losing the key or flinching an inch.

Very little better than the sting is the buzz accompaniment. The maddening iteration of the mosquito's war song need not be dwelt upon. It were possible to sleep a little if the attacks went on noiselessly, and the temporary oblivion would be sweet indeed, even at the price of blotches innumerable and itches that call for the hands of a Briarius. On the contrary, this enemy of man trumpets along night and day, with never a fall from the pitch, with no softening of the tone, always that shrill, self-assertive shriek of rage and hatred. So awful is it that if a sensitive person and about six mosquitoes were shut up for a week together, we believe one of the two things would happen—either the person would kill the mosquitoes or go mad, and it would be long chances on the mosquitoes. There is only one way of handling this animal. It is foolish to hit at him in the air, and not much use to aim blows at him when he first alights. No, let him get a good grip and let him drink away until his body grows alermanic and assumes a delicate pink, then you can wipe him out and up with little difficulty, for he won't be so fly as he was, in fact, perhaps, because he feels the tie of blood relationship, he seems to want to stay there and suck and inflate forever. Thus the enemy is rendered captive into your hands through his own bloodthirstiness. If you are fullblooded and can stand the drain on the system this is a slow but sure revenge on the mosquito; not an adequate one, of course, but the best his victim, man, can do under the circumstances.

Utility of Filter Beds.

The utility of filter beds in purifying water has been demonstrated conclusively of late years, and the mass of evidence to corroborate the claims ought to have made a much greater impression on the people than is yet apparent. The work done at Hamburg, for instance, unquestionably converted a very dangerous water into one with which little fault can be found. The record of cholera cases for 1892 and 1893 is sufficient evidence on this point, without waiting for confirmation from microscopic and chemical examination of the water. Such examination, however, proves that whereas the water before filtering is largely impregnated with bacteria, the filtered water is almost wholly free from them. Similar tests, with like results, have been made at several places in Europe and this country; one, for instance, at Providence, R. I., and another at Lawrence, Mass. The experiment at Providence has already been described in these columns. That at Lawrence has been in operation since Sept. 20, and the results up to date are worth notice.

First, as to the prevention of typhoid fever. The time is too short to give final results, but it appears that whereas for the past five years the average number of deaths in Lawrence from this disease has been five for October and five for November, there has been only one such death in each of these months this year. The special importance of this lies in the fact that the water for the city is taken from the Merrimac River, which is contaminated by sewage, and has for years been held responsible for the most of the typhoid fever in Lawrence. Turning to the physical properties of the filtered water, it is found that ninety-eight per cent. of the bacteria in the river water disappear during the process of filtration. What is quite as important is that this same filtration removes so much of the organic matter which contributes to the propagation of bacteria that the few which pass through the filter find themselves at a great disadvantage in the struggle for existence.—Fire and Water.

One Advantage.

People who have found sleeping-car berths "stuffy" will appreciate the following, borrowed from the New York Weekly:

Two tramps were preparing to spend the night in two pieces of drain pipe which had been left for some reason by the roadside.

"I say, Mike," said the first one, as he crawled in, "this ain't quite so warm as a palace car."

"No," said Mike; but there's more room."

THE WAYSIDE PUMP.

"Shake hands!" says the wayside pump—
Best of friends on a summer day,
And sweetest tipler you ever knew,
Although, no doubt, 'tis true
My spirit through his nose in a careless way
Will make a prohibition jump!
"Shake hands!" How his arm of oak
Straighten out, as you draw a-nigh!
All he asks is an easy stroke,
To pour you out, as smooth as smoke,
A sweeter nectar than you could buy.
What! do you doubt it?—only try!
Take that cup from the rusty nail,
Hold it under the gurgling spout.
Well, how goes it, this Adam's ale?—
Pump away; you can't pump him out!
Bearis like his weren't made to fail.
Three full cups? Ah! you need not tell
Whether you like him ill or well.

So he stands by the dusty way—
God's own landlord—and seems to say:
"Drink your fill; there is naught to pay!"
Thirsty horses, with nostrils wide,
Plunge their heads into his mossy trough,
Drink, and crop from the cool well-side
A bunch of grass—and then amble off.

And now the deep-chested oxen come,
And drain the trough at a single draught,
Their great eyes glisten, though they are dumb,
And thank the pump for the nectar quaffed.
The smoking team 'neath the load of hay
Lovingly turn their eyes that way—
They too shall drink for the axle swings,
And the outstretched noses kiss the cool,
Sweet stream from the spout that springs
Like a mountain brook in a mossy pool.
The farmer's dog with his lolling tongue
Laps and pants, till he laps his fill.
Then the creaking wheels from the rut are swung,
And the fragrant load sways up the hill.

Dear old wayside friend
Doing good in thy time and place,
Full of cheer as a good man's face,
Overflowing with simple grace
Of giving whate'er thou hast to spend,
Would that I were as true a man
As thou art pump, on thy humbler plan!
Out of my hands kind deeds would go;
Out of my heart sweet love would flow,
Round me all nourished life would grow;
And every pilgrim with thirst oppress,
Would stop to bless me and to be blest.
—Youth's Companion.

A PRAIRIE DUEL.

In the tepee sat Pretty Hair and the scout whose capture had cost three Indian lives. He lay on a bearskin, placidly puffing the thin tobacco leaf which Pretty Hair had rolled for him. Pretty Hair bent her great, glorious brown eyes on his pale, handsome face, but the young fellow was thinking of his comrades at Fort William, little dreaming of the compassion he had awakened in his companion's dusky breast.

Three weeks before the Arapahoes had attacked a wagon train under an escort of United States cavalry. Blue Jem, the advance scout, had scented danger ahead, but reported that the force of hostile Indians was not large enough to attack them. When the escort reached a bend in the ravine the valley suddenly swarmed with shrieking, ferocious red men. The troops were in a trap from which there was no escape.

Only one white man came out alive—this was Blue Jem. There was a long score against him which even his scalp would not wipe out. Bleeding from a dozen wounds he was lashed to his horse and led by White Feather into the camp.

He wanted to die, but Pretty Hair, fascinated by his white skin and his blue eyes, dragged him back from the verge of eternity. She was the daughter of Hole-in-the-Head, who, next to the chief, was the most powerful man in the tribe. She wrestled with death for his life. But Blue Jem did not thank her, he knew that the days of torture were not far off.

He little thought, however, of the plan Pretty Hair was weaving for his sake. That very day Hold-in-the-Head had promised the white man's life if he would marry his daughter and become one of the tribe.

"White man stay with Pretty Hair?" the maiden was saying, as she swept her beautiful hair on one side and looked earnestly into his face.

Blue Jem hesitated. Then he shut his eyes and nodded his head. After all, it would be preferable to the stake.

Pretty Hair crept towards him and rubbed her soft, brown face on his cheek. As she did so a stream of sunshine burst into the tepee, and they saw White Feather standing before them.

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That night White Feather sat outside his wigwam thinking deeply. There was jealousy in his heart, malignant hatred in his eyes. In fancy he saw Pretty Hair—the maiden for whom he had braved the sabres of his enemies—rubbing her beautiful cheek on the face of the man he despised.

An hour later White Feather crossed to the scout's tent. The Indian sentry was sleeping. White Feather crept in the tepee and awakened Blue Jem from his heavy sleep.

"White man, escape!" he muttered excitedly.

Escape! Blue Jem opened wide his eyes. Did he hear aright? Yes, there was White Feather urging him to fly. He must make up his mind at once. In another hour daylight would be here.

He peered into the darkness. His old horse was tethered to a tree outside. He hesitated a moment. He saw Pretty Hair's smiling face, and felt her smooth cheek against his own. She loved him and had saved his life.

"Bah!" and he pushed his sombrero firmly on his head and threw himself into the saddle. "Break faith with an Indian girl. P'sh! Treachery runs in their blood. Why think of my own?"

And the darkness swallowed him up.

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A wailing cry awoke the camp. Braves scrambled out of their tepees and surrounded Pretty Hair, who was torn with grief. The cause was soon explained. Blue Jem had gone.

Hole-in-the-Head strode into their midst. White Feather pointed in the direction the fugitive had gone. Hole-in-the-Head, his eyes burning with a fury his lips could not express, significantly pointed in the same direction. The brave darted off like an arrow from a bow.

He turned to different points of the compass, and at his bidding five other braves swept across the plain. Each face was firmly set, each right hand grasped a deadly weapon. Pretty Hair's tears had roused a fiend in each heart that only blood could allay.

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When the sun rose over the Sierras Blue Jem was twenty miles from the camp. He lay down at the foot of a hill while his horse cropped the sweet herbage of the plain.

Over the crest of the hill came a solitary horseman. He started up as he saw the figure outlined against the bright morning sky.

"An Indian, too," said Blue Jem; and he gave a low whistle which brought his horse to his side.

The figure drew nearer. The scout grew uneasy. He was no match for his pursuer if he should turn out to be one. He had a tomahawk White Feather had given him, but that was of little use in his unskilled hands.

He was only a mile away. Blue Jem almost held his breath. The Indian paused at the top of the hill below which the scout was lying. He swept the plain with his eye, saw the object of his gaze, gave a whoop, and rushed like a whirlwind down the slope.

Blue Jem leaped on his horse and dashed across the plain. The Indian, yelling furiously and brandishing his tomahawk, came in hot pursuit.

The scout turned his head. Was he mistaken? No: it was White Feather! What could be the meaning of this strange pursuit? The man who had helped him to escape was now seeking his life.

He drew in his horse, prepared for explanation or attack. As the Indian approached Blue Jem saw that his eyes were full of excitement and the desire to kill. He grasped his weapon, determined to sell his life dearly.

The Arapahoe cleaved the wind with his tomahawk, and aimed a deadly blow at the scout's head. Blue Jem—too much astonished to ask the meaning of this strange conduct—caught the blow on his tomahawk, and staggered under its fearful force. The steel blades clashed in the morning sunlight as the two men, alone on the prairie, battled for their lives. Blue Jem's blood was up, but he felt his strength giving way. He was no match for the Indian, who was the strongest and most dextrous fighter of his tribe, but as White Feather aimed a crashing blow at his head the scout caught it on the blade of his axe. The force sent both tomahawks flying into the air.

Blue Jem touched his horse and the faithful animal sprang across the plain. White Feather waited not to recover his weapon. He darted in pursuit of his foe. For over a mile they ran side by side, the wily scout evading every attempt of the Indian to drag him from his horse.

In the distance curled up the smoke of a settler's homestead. If he could reach it he would be safe.

The supreme moment had arrived. The Indian freed himself from the hide stirrups, put his bare feet on his horse's back, and, with a splendid bound, alighted on the horse of his rival. His arms like lightning twisted around Blue Jem's neck, and, with a shout of devilish glee, he bore him on his back. Then his elastic fingers clasped around his throat, and—

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Blue Jem returned to the camp, and when Pretty Hair saw his lifeless body she flung herself upon it in a paroxysm of despair. White Feather stood watching her, a grim smile on his face. Her tears, to him, were like the raindrops on the parched prairie.—Elmira Budget.

Becoming Extinct.

Although the dugong is undoubtedly the original of the mermaid, her name is not so supple on the lips as the soft pet names given to the sirens of mythology. The dugong forms the connecting link between the real whale and the seals and walruses. Like the whale the animal has no hind feet, but a powerful horizontal tail. Its interior extremities are more flexibly jointed than those of the whale, and this is a distinguished characteristic between the two animals. The dugong is said to have attained a length of twenty feet, but the usual length is from eight to twelve feet. In appearance the animal resembles the sea cow. Its upper lip is large, thick, and fleshy, and its snout is like the trunk of an elephant cut short across. The rude approach to the human outline observable in the shape of the head of this creature, and the attitude of the mother while suckling her young, holding it to her breast with one flipper and, while swimming with the other, holding the heads of both above water, and, when disturbed, suddenly diving and displaying her fish-like tail—these, together with her habitual demonstrations of strong maternal affection, probably gave rise to the fable of the mermaid. The dugong is becoming rapidly extinct.

Writing to the Queen.

The paper on which letters to Queen Victoria are written must not be folded. No communication which bears evidence of having been creased will ever fall into her Majesty's own hands. The proper methods is to write on thick, glossy white paper, and to dispatch the missive in an envelope which fits it. Any folded communication never reaches the Queen, for the simple reason that she won't look at it. All such letters are opened by the mistress of the robes, and as a rule their contents never get beyond her, or, if the letter is of importance, it is returned to the writer with directions how to forward it.

PRETTY girls are having their pictures taken on cards just large enough to fit a man's vest pocket.