

TOPICS OF THE TIMES

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day - Miscellaneous and News Items.

DRINK and destruction both begin with the same letter, and the one is the forerunner of the other.

For most riders there was no necessity for a law limiting bicycle travel to ten miles an hour, remarks the Lynn Item.

SOME men treat dumb brutes as if they had souls; others treat them as if they had no souls themselves. It is only a difference in men.

It isn't good policy for you to punish a child for doing anything it learned of you. Better hire some abled bodied man to deal with you.

A FASHION paper says that the prettiest of the new prayer books are of white morocco bound in silver. There is style in piety as well as in other things.

YOUR neighbors know you pretty well. What they will say after you are dead will not count; be careful about what they can say while you are living.

THERE are worse things than to be called a crank. Galileo, Columbus, McCormick, and Morse were all called cranks in their day. Now they are immortals.

THE killing of the wrong man in suppressing a revolt among the convicts is regrettable, but it emphasizes the moral that every one ought to do nothing that is likely to put him in the State Prison.

ONLY seven out of the seventeen transatlantic cables are in use—ten having given out from various causes. Estimating the cost of each cable at \$3,000,000, here is an irretrievable investment of \$51,000,000 buried beneath the ocean.

THE domain of the "King of the Cannibal Islands" is not remote, even though the Hawaiian dynasty has disappeared. Two American sailors were killed and eaten by the natives of Tiboron Island, in the Gulf of California, and the State Department is taking steps to secure the punishment of the hungry Indians.

NOW THAT the Columbian stamps are things of the past to all intents and purposes, there are some persons just perverse enough to insist that they were superior to the ordinary issues, and to regret that they are no longer in use. Sensible people, however, have long been willing to speed their going.

MEN who prow around with the intention of blowing up public buildings and committing murder—if such wretches can be called men—ought to be run down and taken into custody at any cost, says the Kansas City Journal. When captured they should be given about twenty-five years in some good penitentiary where they still have plenty of hard work and ample opportunity to meditate on their folly and baseness.

THE Americans at Bluefields have checkmated the insolent Nicaraguan despotism, and rendered its forces powerless to do further damage by shutting off its only source of revenue, the customs duties. There the American merchants and planters will pay only in the worthless Mosquito scrip forced upon them while Licayo was in power. Meanwhile the Nicaraguans dare not close the ports to American commerce for fear of the guns and the marines of the Marblehead, which swings at anchor at the mouth of the river.

INDIANS belonging to a Wild West show on Staten Island have got their manager into trouble by stealing a valuable pug dog and utilizing him as the piece de resistance in an aboriginal banquet. People who live in flats and who have been made miserable day and night by the howls and yelps of pampered pugs will sympathize with the Wild West manager. Indeed, if he has any open dates he can undoubtedly fill them all in Chicago, provided his Indians will undertake to decrease the visible supply of pups as rapidly as possible.

ABOUT all there is in life is a good night's sleep, says the Atchison Globe. Instead of worrying and fretting for fame, a man should conduct himself in such a manner during the day that he will sleep well at night. If a man will believe himself, and sleep well, he need not worry about his future; he will succeed in everything that is desirable very much sooner than those who do not believe themselves and, consequently, do nothing worth doing. The real secret of success is to believe in all that one does, and to work hard.

LATEST RAZZLE-DAZZLE.

Ingenuous Contrivance Which Amariah Lake Has Recently Covered by Patent.

Any one who has ever, while sitting in a swing, thought how delightful it would be to whirl in a circle completely above and around the swing's points of supports may now enjoy that sensation on payment of so much an enjoy. For Amariah Lake, of Pleasantville, N. J., has recently patented a device termed the haunted swing, which imparts to its passengers this remarkable peculiar feeling.

Mr. Lake's swing does not really gyrate, but it is operated so as to make its possessor believe it does revolve, and the fact is that a person even forewarned who sits in the swing cannot detect the delusion is what makes the device particularly interesting.

Those who are to sit in the swing are ushered into a small room. From a bar crossing the room, near the ceiling, hangs a large swing, which is provided with seats for a number of people. After the people have taken their places the attendant pushes the bar and it starts into oscillation like any other swing. The room door is closed. Gradually those in it feel after three or four movements that their swing is going rather high, but this is not all. The apparent amplitude of the oscillations increases more and more, until presently the whole swing seems to whirl completely over, describing a full circle about the bar on which it hangs. To make the thing more utterly mysterious the bar is bent crank fashion, so that it seems demonstrably impossible for the swing to pass between the bar and ceiling. It continues to go round and round this way, imparting a most weird sensation to the occupants.

The room is so completely furnished as possible, everything being, of course, fastened in place. What is apparently a kerosene lamp stands on a table near at hand. It is securely fastened to the table, and in a few seconds, as the children say, "the old cat dies." The door of the room is open and the swinging party leave. Those who have tried it say the sensation is most peculiar and the deception perfect.

The illusion is based on the movements of the room proper. During the entire exhibition the swing is practically stationary, while the room rotates about the suspending bar. At the beginning of operations the swing may be given a slight push; the operators outside the room then begin to swing the room itself, which is really a large box journaled on the swing bar, starting it off to correspond with the movement of the swing.

They swing it back and forth, increasing the arc, and the light is supplied by a small incandescent lamp within the chimney, but concealed by the shade. The visitor never imagines that it is an electric lamp, and naturally thinks that it would be impossible for a kerosene lamp to be inverted without disaster, so that this adds to the deception materially. The same is to be said of the pictures hanging on the walls, of the cupboard full of chinaware, of the chair with a hat on it, and of the baby. All contribute to the mystification. Even though one is informed of the secret before entering the swing, the deception is said to be so complete that passengers involuntarily seize the arms of the seats to avoid being precipitated below.

"LIVING PICTURES."

Originated in Paris in the Fourteenth Century, and Were Usually Religious.

In the Pall Mall Gazette there recently appeared an article on the historical origin of the "living pictures" which are now all the rage. It isn't likely that the women who pose in them, the managers who vet them up, or very many of the persons who go to see them, have any idea how extremely illustrious and moral was their beginning. They were a fourteenth century scheme of decoration in a Paris street, adorned in the pageantry that marked the progress of the kings, and they usually represented biblical stories, or scenes from the lives of the saints. The Gazette's writer ascribes their origin to the invention of the Duke of Bedford during his regency of France, but they continued in use long after his day. On a platform 100 feet long, placed in the street opposite the royal palace, the Duke represented with living figures the passion as it is shown on the stone portours of the choir of Notre Dame.

In the reigns of the later kings, we are told, the living pictures were the most popular form of street adornment, and it became customary to build booths for their representation all along the routes of the processions. These pictures, says the writer, would form either a series of scenes telling one story or the subjects composed would make detached and independent allegories. Some times—as in the crucifixion, where a given attitude would be too difficult of performance—war figures were added to the living groups. "Every quarter of the town and each corporation was instructed with the invention and the getting up of some picture," and from the ensuing rivalry most excellent results were obtained. To the sightseer the effect was as if he were passing through a gallery of paintings. Froissart, for instance, tells of a street representation in 1379 of paradise. It was represented with a blue background constellated with golden stars, and with the virgin and the divine child in the center surrounded by a choir of angels. Even the Trinity was sometimes shown, and as the entry of Charles VII. in 1457, we are told that the pictures included representations of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles.

A Famous Ride.

Non of the obituary writers on the late Louis Kossuth seems to have referred to an incident in his career which must always have a special interest for Englishmen. This was one of the most famous record-rides of ancient or modern times, performed by Capt. Charles Townley, a Queen's messenger, in the interest of the Hungarian Liberator. After the collapse of his cause in 1849 Kossuth and a crowd of his compatriots had fled to Turkey from which Austria and Russia were menacingly demanding their extradition. But the "great Elchi," who was then our representative on the Golden Horn, made bold upon his own responsibility to hold up the Sultan in his refusal to deliver up the fugitives, believing that Palmerston, who was then at the Foreign Office, would bear him out in his firm attitude of opposition.

Knowing that his speedy arrival of his approving dispatch at Stamboul "Pam" selected Capt. Townley to be its bearer, with instructions "not to spare himself or others in getting to his destination as soon as possible. Reaching Belgrade on October 20, Capt. Townley there took horse, and on the morning of the 21st he rode or rather reeled, into Pera, having covered the distance of 800 miles in 131 hours—a feat which elicited loud applause when mention was made of it in the House of Commons.—Pall Mall Gazette.

Wood-Dyeing.

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ment of the nativity to the shepherds of Bethlehem. Opposite this was represented the last judgment, with Heaven and hell, and St. Michael in the center weighing souls.

Rabelais at Home.

Brittany has produced her thinkers and philosophers, the Eastern Provinces their soldiers Pitou her lawyers, the valley of the Rhone her orators. But Touraine is the land of keen wit, gay jest, and rich humor; it is the nursing mother of men of the type of Rabelais, Scarron, and Louis Courrier, and Balzac.

Like his own Panurge, Rabelais was born au jardin de France qui est Touraine, that country which a local historian of the Seventeenth Century calls "la Parais delieieux de Touraine." His birthplace was Chinon, "the first town in the world," for as its name, according to Rabelaisian etymology denotes, it was founded by Cain, the earliest builder of cities. Chinon is the center of a district bordered by a vast forest, a Broceliande, where fairies yet whisper in the trees, and by the barren heath country of la campagne Berrichonne, where the stern imagination of the Celt is tempered by the brighter fancy of the Gaul. Its plains have been the theater of stirring events, in which are epitomized the great periods of French history.

Here side by side umbled together in all the kaleidoscopic confusion of "Lantagruel," stand Druidic altars, Roman emplacements, mediæval abbeys, feudal fortresses, and chateaus like Azay-le-Rideau in which the coquetry of Renaissance architecture has reached its gayest expression.

Close to the town stands St. Catherine Herbois, a whose chapel Joan of Arc sought the sword with which Charles Martel had smothered the tide of Saracen invasion; and on the road over which the Romans passed to their encampment at Chinis is the field where the Maid bewitched the Court of Charles VII. by her feats of noble horsemanship.—Blackwood's Magazine.

Pinched Her Leg.

One of the delights of Coney Island yesterday was a three-legged girl. She is by no means a novelty, for there have been triple-legged young women on the Bowersy before this out the limb has always been stuffed with sawdust or white sand.

Near the Germania House, on the Bowersy, there is a museum where the latest sort of "three-legged girl" is on exhibition. One John Ryan of this city entered the tent yesterday with his girl. The so-called freak on the platform was close to a curtain, from behind which another girl protruded her leg to make the tree. The illusion was excellent, and visitors who were skeptical were invited to feel of the leg.

Mr. Ryan took advantage of the offer yesterday, but pinched the odd limb so hard that the girl behind the curtain screamed and withdrew it. The audience was rapidly chased outside by the lecturer and assistants, and the other girl retired in disgust.—New York World.

Beggars in China.

In China the beggars are organized into companies, each having its own district and all owing allegiance and paying tribute to a "king of the beggars," who lives in all out regal splendor. Every beggar has his own beat, beyond which he is not allowed, under penalty of severe punishment, to go. He is permitted to visit each house on his beat once, and but once, every day, and on making his appearance at the door if his appeal for charity be not at once attended, he may shout, sing, ring a bell, or make any other noise he pleases until he has received one "cash," the smallest copper coin in use, after which he must move on. Some merchants, to save time and trouble, have a frame hung in front of their houses with as many nails driven in it as there are beggars in the district. Every morning a servant hangs a "cash" on each nail, and each beggar comes in turn, takes one coin and moves on.

Law.

As is well known, the law cannot concern itself, in any case before it, with a de iure. These are rigorously excluded.

In a case in which a man was accused of forgery, a witness for the defence managed to say: "I know that the prisoner cannot write his own name."

"All that is excluded," said the judge. "The prisoner is not charged with writing his own name, but that of some one else."

An Enormous Sturgeon.

A monster sturgeon was taken a few days ago in the Caspian. The fisherman had no little trouble in hauling their catch ashore. The fish was found to weigh about 1,440 pounds English. It was subsequently sold at Astrachan for about £33. The head alone weighed 288 pounds. A fish of this kind gives about 120 pounds of roe for caviare.—London News.

Ready for Business.

Practical Aunt.—Do you think you are qualified to become the wife of a pug, man? Sweet Girl.—O, yes, it's all fixed. We are to live in a cottage, and I know how to make cottage pudding.—Life.

The swaggers of a pretty girl is very often like the swagger of a fighter who thinks he can whip everybody.

A worthless man dearly loves to carry a guitar on the street.

It is awfully disagreeable and sticky during this weather.

SLOWLY STRANGLING AN ELM.

A Connecticut Wisteria Vine Which Is Paying the Role of a Python.

At the top of the hill in Church street in Norwich a big vegetable python is slowly strangling a large elm, says the New York Sun. It is a wisteria vine, said to be the largest in the State, perhaps in the country, in the open sunny garden of the George D. Colt place, next to the Storm-sec and Congregational Church. At its base it is about a foot in diameter. A foot above the ground its trunk divides, and it sends one fork, an important one, though a hundred feet in length, northward along the front of the handsome Colt house. Its other and interesting fork, consisting of three huge strands, each four inches thick, trails along a broad garden fence for twenty feet, and then enters a stately elm that is at the inner edge of the flagged city walk. Noting the great snake vine from the street, one has a keen and lively impression that it is a veritable serpent that has just leaped upon the tree, enfolding it in a deathly constriction. Before entering the elm the three strands are firmly bound in a monstrous cable with manifold small, round, withe-like bands emanating from the strands themselves. Singularly uncanny and menacing they seem interlaced, twisted and contorted, as if writhing in each other's hostile embrace, and the fact that their bark is smooth and of a dusky brown hue, like the hide of some venomous viper, deepens the impression that they are pythons. Immediately after entering the elm the cable divides into its several strands, and each travels up the tree in its own eccentric, serpentine way. One strand, three inches thick, throws a coil so tightly about the elm trunk, just below its lowest branch, that it has cut a deep circular furrow into the bark. This coil is choking the life out of the tree. Ascending, the threefold serpent flings fold after fold about trunk and branches, and finally lifting its plumed green crest high above the elm's crown gathers it into its embrace. The tree is naturally thrifty and luxuriant, but it already shows plentiful tokens that its powerful enemy is throttling it. The tips of its lower boughs are dry and dead, and aloft its foliage is sere or yellow. Before another year it doubtless will be dead, and then the vegetable serpent may east at will on its leafless carcass. In the end it may pull the tree's skeleton down and thereafter, if it had its own licensed way, would travel on to another elm in the street and throttle and destroy that. When in full bloom, with a hundred purple flower clusters, the wisteria is gorgeous and beautiful, but one easily fancies then that the splendid blossoms are mottled patches on the python's hide, and the vine does not seem so lovely.

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION.

Numerous Recorded Instances of Human Bodies Going Up in Smoke.

Medical literature of this country, as well as that of England and continental Europe, relates many remarkable instances of the spontaneous combustion of the human body, says the St. Louis Republic. In all such cases, which are all the more interesting on account of their comparative rarity, the victim has been a person addicted to the immoderate use of spirituous liquors, either as a beverage or in the form of a bath. Little by little all the water and other liquids of the body are replaced by alcohol, and then all that is necessary to cause a catastrophe is to find some means of applying flame to spirituous gases which are escaping from every pore. Occasionally the breath of the poor victim is fired while fighting a pipe or a cigar, or it may be that a flame comes in contact with and lights the alcoholic vapors which are escaping from some other portion of the body. When once the fire is applied a bluish flame extends very rapidly to all parts of the body, leaving it a shapeless mass of charred flesh and calcined bones. In many instances attempts have been made to extinguish the flames with water, but always without success. When the affected parts of the victim are touched a fatty matter attaches itself to the finger, still continuing to burn, and giving off a very disagreeable odor, something similar to that which arises from burning a mixture of horn, hair, and wool. During all this time a thick, black smoke arises from the body and attaches itself to the surface of all objects with which it comes in contact, the "settings" from it being in the form of a sweat, unctuous to the touch, and of an unbearable fetor. In the majority of such cases combustion is only arrested when the flesh has been reduced to cracklings, and the bones to powder. Vincent, in his "Curiosities Respecting Man," says: "Commonly the feet and portion of the head are not burnt, but usually when the combustion is finished it is difficult to believe that the incinerated mass is all that is left of a human body."

A Queer Vice.

The fire insurance companies (writes James Pa n) ought to get reading in bed made a penal offense. It is a habit that grows upon people, like drinking at last, however tired they are, they can not get to sleep without reading—a thing which ought to be punished in itself as an insult to literature. Lord Alvanley was so well-known a slave to the habit that a servant was always placed at his bedroom door, with orders not to leave till his light was out. He himself had two methods of extinguishing it. He threw things at the candle as it stood on the floor, or simply put it under his bolster.

Coal First Discovered.

British writers say that the Britons as early as the Roman occupation (B. C. 55—A. D. 43), used coal, and coal ashes have been found in the ruins of Roman houses in England. The ancients did not use coal, and perhaps the Britons were the earliest to use the fuel. About 1231 Henry III of England granted a license to dig coal near Newcastle, but not for 150 years later was there any traffic in coal, even in England.

GREELEY'S MANNERS BAD.

Was They Were Forgiveness for the Fine Speech He Made Afterwards.

Horace Greeley stories being in order, in view of the unveiling of his statue a short time ago, I will tell one that I heard in New Orleans. The genial old philanthropist went there after the South had taken him to her heart in grateful recognition of his action in going on the Jeff Davis rail road, and the people were anxious to show him every attention in their power.

A dinner seemed to be the proper thing, and the markets of New Orleans, than which there are few better in the world, were ransacked to make the occasion as notable for its viands as for the distinction of the guest and diners. Judge Walker, the veteran editor of the Picayune, presided; he was a great gourmand, and, after the manner of gourmands, wished none of the fine points of the dinner to be lost to the guest for lack of commentary.

"Mr. Greeley," said he, "these orders are the best that come to our market and we think they vie with those of Norfolk. I observe that you are not eating them."

"Well, no," replied Greeley; "the truth is, I never could abide shell fish," and he passed.

Then came some delicious green turtle soup, which Judge Walker explained was prepared from the finest fat turtle the Florida bays could afford.

"No, doubt, no doubt," was the reply in Greeley's peculiar whine, "but cold-blooded animals are an abomination to me."

The pompous, imperial son that it is, and fresh from the Gulf, was open to the same objection, despite Judge Walker's eulogy, and that, too, was passed. Mr. Greeley barely tasted the accompanying Parisian dainty, and shook his head ruefully at the idea that anybody would impair his digestion by eating cucumbers. Shrimp salad, another New Orleans delicacy, proved no more tempting; shrimps, he said, looked so much like worms that they always gave him the creeps.

"Ah, here is something you will like—a homely dish in name," said Judge Walker, "but fit for the gods. It is a Gallician ham." And then he went on to tell how the hogs from which these hams were obtained were fed only on chestnuts, making the flesh luscious and delicate.

"Perhaps so, very interesting indeed," observed Greeley; "but do you know Judge, that there is so much talk of tri-ling nowadays that I wouldn't dare taste a bit of pork."

The Judge gave up in despair. The only things in all of the array of dainties which had been provided which Mr. Greeley would eat were bread, potatoes and cauliflower, and he feared that he might be overloading his stomach at that. But when it came to the speaking, although he had drunk nothing but cold water, he spoke as one inspired, and with a fervor, eloquence, and tenaciousness that nobody at the table could forget.

"Murders in the Rue Morgue."

The employment of an orang-outang in the committal of these murders has always seemed to me one of the most original ideas in fiction with which I am acquainted, until now, when I light upon an extract from the Shrewsbury Chronicle, tucked away in the "Chronicle" columns of the "Annual Register." Poe's story was published in Graham's Magazine for April 1841. What took place at Shrewsbury occurred in July or August, 1841.

At that time certain showmen visited the town with a "ribbed-faced baboon," which, it was afterward shrewdly suspected, had been taught to burgle, or, as the Chronicle puts it, to "commit robberies by night, and by climbing up places inaccessible to men, and thereby gaining an entrance through the bedroom windows"—precisely the method of procedure adopted by Poe's anthropoid.

In her bed room one night a Shrewsbury lady found the creature. She raised an alarm, and the baboon "instinctively attacked her, and with such fury that the lady's husband, who had come to the rescue, was glad to let it escape by the window." The orang-outang of the rue Morgue makes a similar, though fatal, attack when it is discovered in a lady's bedroom there, and effects its escape by the same means. It is, of course, possible that Poe may never have come across this episode, but it seems something more than probable that he did. Anyhow, the coincidence is singular.—Notes and Queries.

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