

CURRENT TOPICS

PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES WHO complain of the tribulations consequent to extreme cold weather and the machinations of the ice trust will understand that their condition after all is very comfortable compared with the condition of some other people in the world. The St. Petersburg correspondent of the Chicago Chronicle says that northern Siberia is threatened with an ice age, and that the winter has never before been anything like so severe as this year. The extreme cold weather began last July before the grain was ripe. The grain froze in the fields and before the end of September, the usual harvest, the earth was cracking with intense frost. According to this correspondent "so unusual an occurrence, extending 1,000 miles, attracted the attention of the Russian authorities and an expedition sent to inquire into the causes now reports that huge masses of polar ice are rapidly leaving the vicinity of the pole and wedging themselves against the coast, where they will never thaw, and that the impact of the masses from the pole is driving the ice far up on the land. About 1,000 villages have been deserted. The Samoyeds, the aborigines of the country, accounted specially weatherwise, say that the Siberian grazing grounds for reindeer are being gradually driven southward and that the zone of tross and coarse grass within the memory of their old men was 200 miles north of the present limit."

A READER OF THE COMMONER WRITES: "Please give us a short history of The Hague tribunal, where located, after whom named, when founded, together with its jurisdiction. There is a good deal of ignorance on this subject." The Hague is a city of the Netherlands. It is famous for its general beauty and the handsome architecture of its buildings. Its streets are intersected by canals with rows of trees planted on either side, the canals being spanned by elegant bridges.

PERHAPS THE BEAUTY OF THIS CITY HAD something to do with its selection as the meeting place for international conferences. Even in 1869 the international statistical congress met at The Hague. The Hague tribunal to which this correspondent refers grew out of a suggestion made by the czar of Russia. Pursuant to the czar's suggestion an international conference was called to meet at The Hague on May 18, 1899. The various governments of the world were invited to send representatives to this conference and the original purpose of the meeting as stated by the czar was to consider plans for the disarmament of the governments and to promote the peace of the world. When this conference assembled the disarmament proposition was regarded as being impracticable, but the conference finally agreed upon a plan of arbitration, which plan was designed to promote peace.

ACCORDING TO THE AGREEMENTS ENTERED INTO at that conference it is provided that in case of disagreement between nations before appealing to arms they will have recourse so far as circumstances allow it to the good offices or mediation of one or more of the friendly powers. In order to carry out this plan a permanent court of arbitration was established, the headquarters of which were to be at The Hague and placed under the direction of a permanent secretary general. Each of the signatory powers were authorized to appoint four persons and these persons constitute the members of the court. The members of this court are appointed for a term of six years. When governments desire to apply to the court for a settlement of differences, they are to choose out of the general list of members of the court the number of arbitrators jointly agreed upon. Other powers that did not take part in this conference or agree to its conclusions have the right to apply to the court under the prescribed condition. The Hague tribunal is merely a court of arbitration and its jurisdiction depends upon the consent of both parties to a controversy. It was expressly stipulated by the representatives of the United States that the agreement did not involve the concession that purely American questions were to become subject for arbitration. By this clause it was intended that the Monroe doctrine, for instance, should

never be submitted to The Hague or to any other court.

THE VAST EXTENT OF LEGISLATIVE OPERATIONS of our government, according to the New York Sun, is reflected in certain specified disbursements which have an extraordinary range. The Sun says: "While it appears that only twelve packs of playing cards and three packages of the game of dominoes were ordered during the fiscal year on the account of the senators, they consumed not less than a dozen quarts of hair tonic, costing \$29.70 at wholesale, and the generally prevailing conditions of prosperity are indicated by their requisitions for not less than 162 pocket-books and purses, varying in price from 45 cents up to \$28, besides eleven of the so-called mesh bags of gun metal or sterling silver which are hung at the waist, four 'beaded bags' and three 'wrist bags.' Three senators indulged in manicure sets, and one a copy of Bowley's 'Elements of Statistics.'" It is further pointed out that the remarkable total of 9,100 grains of quinine purchased at different times on sanitary account of the senate is charged to the contingent fund and one interesting entry is this: "April 28, 5 boxes Copenhagen Snuff, \$3.75," to which entry the Sun propounds the pertinent query, "for which senatorial nose?"

THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO SEVENTH member on the board to be appointed by the government of the United States and Great Britain to discuss the Alaska boundary question has stirred the curiosity of a great many people. They are curious to know what reason there is to expect results from a board composed of six members, three of whom are appointed by the United States and the other three being appointed by Great Britain. A United States senator, a member of the foreign relations committee, provides an interesting solution for the problem. The Chicago Chronicle quotes this senator as saying that for the first time a tribunal of a character to command respect would consider the boundary question and that when the American commissioners, who must be jurists of established reputation, come to a decision after hearing all the testimony that decision "will be immediately accepted by the American people as final," although all the British commissioners may reach a very different conclusion.

IT IS EXPLAINED BY THIS SENATOR THAT after this has been done "the president can safely and honorably take his stand and announce to the world that the boundary of the United States will run exactly where our commissioners run it. The people here will back him up in this, and the result of the commission will therefore be a final delimitation of the panhandle of Alaska." The Chronicle, commenting upon this statement, says that while the American people will accept the conclusion of their jurists as final, the British people may be expected for the same reason to accept the conclusion of their jurists as final and the Chronicle thinks that therefore there is small hope for a final settlement of the boundary question. Perhaps the Chronicle may be reassured by reading the famous address written to the British ministry by Richard Olney. In that address Mr. Olney said in effect that "on American soil the United States is sovereign and its fiat is the law."

THE PLANS FOR THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE recently made public indicate that that will be the longest city bridge in the world. The structure will be 10,000 feet in length. The New York correspondent of the Philadelphia Press, describing the plans for this structure, says: "The eye-bar-link cables will be a feature. There will be four of the cables, each a succession of nickel steel bars, joined together by bolts through eyes in each end of every bar. The roadway will be in the center and the lower decks will be broad enough for four three-horse teams to pass abreast. There will be four trolley tracks, two on each side of the roadway, with four elevated train tracks on the upper deck. Two promenades, each nearly twelve feet wide, will be on the outer sides of the lower deck. Two hundred million passengers a year can be carried across the bridge.

A unique feature of the bridge will be the steel tower, which will work backward and forward on pivots so as to take up the strain and slack of the cables."

THE WOMAN WHO AT ONE TIME OWNED Dred Scott died recently at Springfield, Mass. It will be remembered that Dred Scott was the slave who became the subject of the great legal controversy so frequently referred to in history relating to slavery. The name of this woman was Mrs. C. C. Chaffee. At her death she was eighty-eight years of age. A Springfield, Mass., dispatch to the New York Sun says that "Dred Scott was left to Mrs. Chaffee a slave by her first husband, Dr. Emerson of St. Louis, and she had practically given Scott his freedom after moving to Springfield. A lawyer brought suit on the claim that Scott had been freed by being taken into a free state. He hoped by this to gain Scott's freedom and obtain fourteen years' wages for him. The local court decided in his favor, but in three succeeding courts up to the United States supreme court, it was declared that the negro's ownership was not affected by his being taken into free soil. Immediately after the suit had been decided in her favor Mrs. Chaffee liberated the man."

THE DRED SCOTT CASE WAS ONE OF THE famous legal battles in the world's history. Dr. Emerson, the first husband of Mrs. Chaffee, moved from Missouri to Wisconsin in 1834, taking with him his slave, Dred Scott. Dr. Emerson, accompanied by his slave, finally returned to Missouri and Scott brought suit in a St. Louis court claiming that he was entitled to his freedom and that of his wife and two children because his master had taken him to live in a free state. The St. Louis court decided in favor of Scott. Dr. Emerson appealed to the Missouri supreme court and that tribunal in 1852 reversed the lower court and decided that Scott was yet in slavery. Subsequently Scott and his family were sold to John F. A. Sandford of New York and Scott again brought suit for freedom, this time in the United States court at St. Louis. This suit was commenced in 1854. The federal court in St. Louis decided against Scott and the slave appealed to the United States supreme court. Montgomery Blair and George P. Curtis volunteered to represent Scott free of all expense. The case was tried in 1856 and the judgment of the lower court to the effect that Scott was still in slavery was affirmed.

THE POINT UPON WHICH THE SUPREME court largely based its opinion was that the act of congress that prohibited slavery north of latitude 36 degrees 30 minutes was unconstitutional. Commenting upon this decision Thomas F. Benton said that it placed the government in a new light; indicating slavery to be the organic law of the land while freedom was the exception. The Dred Scott case had much to do with contributing to the energy of those who insisted upon the abolition of slavery altogether. It seems that after Scott was sold to Mr. Sandford and after he had lost his case in the United States supreme court Scott and his family passed by inheritance to Mrs. Chaffee whose husband was Calhoun C. Chaffee, a member of congress from Massachusetts. Mr. Chaffee and his wife conveyed Dred Scott to Taylor Blow of St. Louis, and Blow formally gave Scott and his family freedom, that being the purpose of the conveyance made by Mr. and Mrs. Chaffee.

ALL THE STORIES RELATING TO VERY aged people, stories very familiar in the United States, have been discounted by a tale that comes from the Moscow, Russia, correspondent of the Chicago Chronicle. This correspondent says that a man who is more than 200 years old, already in the third century of his life, is said to be in a hospital in Tomsk, the capital in the far-away province of that name in western Siberia. He is a small peasant farmer, bedridden, but still sound in his mind. He remembers seeing Peter the Great and the Catherines. Among the documents given as proof of his extreme age is a passport bearing the date of 1763, in which he is described as a man 60 years