

# CURRENT TOPICS

**V**ALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CURRENT discussion on the municipal ownership proposition is provided in a report recently made concerning municipal ownership in England by the local government board. From this report printed in the London Economist, the Chicago Record-Herald makes an interesting summary. According to this report it is shown that there has been a very rapid growth in England of municipal ownership. On March 31, 1902, all but eighteen of 317 municipal corporations in England and Wales were engaged in "reproductive undertakings." In the period between January 1, 1898, and March 31, 1902, seventeen corporations undertook water supply, nine gas supply, sixty-two built or bought electric plants, and thirty began the operation of street railways. On the latter date the total investment of the cities in such enterprises was about \$600,000,000, the portion of this which was borrowed money being about five-sixths. The average annual net profit was close to \$2,000,000, after interest, sinking funds and depreciation had been provided for, or about one-third of 1 per cent on the entire amount of the investment.

**I**N THE REPORT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT board the undertakings are classified and the statement of the capital invested, debt and profit or loss for each class are presented as follows:

	Capital invested.	Capital outstanding.	Average annual profit.	Average annual loss.
Water-works	£ 56,943,016	£ 49,556,717	£ 90,128	.....
Gas works	24,028,116	18,497,587	394,825	.....
Electricity	12,508,997	11,192,779	.....	£ 11,707
Tramways	9,751,153	8,572,924	93,318	.....
Markets	6,181,080	3,926,671	83,782	.....
Baths & wash-houses	1,988,340	1,232,659	.....	124,952
Burial grounds	2,382,305	1,313,405	.....	63,784
Workmen's dwellings	1,253,592	1,090,340	.....	26,979
Harbors, docks, etc.	5,421,827	4,936,816	.....	77,724
Other undertakings	713,946	466,506	15,373	.....
	121,172,372	100,786,404	683,426	305,145
Net profit	.....	.....	.....	378,281

In its summary the Record-Herald says: "It will be noticed that with the exception of electric plants the only classes of enterprises that lost money were bath-houses, burial grounds and workmen's dwellings, all of a semi-benevolent character, and harbors and docks. The street railways, waterworks, gas works, markets and miscellaneous enterprises made profits sufficient to pay seven-tenths of 1 per cent on the entire amount of the investment, while improving the service and caring for the sinking funds. The loss in the electric plants is explained as being due largely to the fact that over half of the plants had been established within four years. A number of the large city plants made good profits."

**A**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN THE PERSON of Charles M. Pepper has been appointed by this government to take the initiative in developing inter-continental railway plans. This project was first inaugurated by the pan-American conference of 1890, at which conference closer co-operation between the United States and the Latin American republics was urged. At a conference held in Mexico one year ago resolutions were adopted for a permanent pan-American railway commission with headquarters at Washington, and this commission was duly appointed. The special representative, Mr. Pepper, is well known as a newspaper writer and has also served as a delegate from the United States to the pan-American conference held in Mexico. It is anticipated that greater interest will be aroused in trans-continental railroad building as up to this

time little has been known in this country concerning the development of this work.

**P**ROVISION HAS BEEN MADE BY THE EDUCATION board of the London county council for kitchen scholarships. Nearly three hundred of these scholarships have been offered by the board to girls nominated by the teachers of the various public elementary schools. The Associated press cablegram from London, referring to this plan, says that "these scholarships are tenable for a full school year of not less than forty working weeks, and the scholars will be given a full course of study, including cookery, laundry work, dressmaking and needlework, mending, housewifery (not including laying the tables for meals and washing up), hygiene and first aid and physical exercises, where possible. The tuition is provided free, as well as meals, and fares to those living more than three miles from school, while for the needlework and dressmaking classes materials will be provided free. Training scholarships for teachers of domestic economy are also offered by the board, and will be awarded on the result of a competitive examination in general subjects to be held in June next. They will be tenable at the Battersea Polytechnic Training School for about two and a quarter years. Candidates must be daughters of parents possessing an income of not more than \$2,000 a year, and must be resident in the administrative county of London. They must also be between 18 and 30 years of age."

**B**ECAUSE THE COST OF REPAIRS TO THE dynamite cruiser Vesuvius would be in excess of what would be justifiable under the circumstances, the navy department has decided to sell this noted vessel. It was long ago discovered that the plan of firing dynamite from pneumatic guns was not practicable and although there has been some talk in regard to taking out one gun of the Vesuvius and convert that vessel into a dispatch boat, the cost of such alterations has decided the secretary of the navy to try to dispose of the vessel altogether.

**A**NOTHER BOAT THAT IS LIKELY TO GO under the hammer because the cost of repairing the same would be more than the government thinks justifiable, is the old iron merchant craft Manila. This craft was one of the ships captured by Admiral Dewey in the battle of Manila and much sentiment has been attached to it. Owing to this sentiment the navy department decided to submit the matter of her disposal to congress, which could give effect to the sentiment by joint resolution or otherwise. This, congress neglected to do, however, and the secretary of the navy is now free to do as he thinks best for the service in the matter.

**A**MONG THE MANY INTERESTING RELICS of the civil war is one recently discovered by a United States dredgeboat near Jacksonville, Fla. This relic was in the shape of a 4-inch rifle shell, fully loaded and in good condition. The Florida Times-Union, which tells the story of this find, says that it has been recalled by a veteran of the civil war period that during the invasion of the St. Johns river by federal gunboats, a number of shells similar to the one found were sent at the boats from a battery below Jacksonville and that the shell found is doubtless one that fell short and went into the river. The Times-Union adds: "The shell is in a good state of preservation. It is four inches in diameter and wrapped with a leaden band, placed on it for the purpose of causing the shell to make numerous revolutions while going through the air, in order that it strike with great force and discharge. Aboard the Winyah Bay is a cannon ball that was sucked up at Key West while the boat was engaged in clearing the harbor there last year. This ball is loaded, and on account of having an iron plug, those familiar with such missiles have been afraid to venture to open it, fearing an explosion."

**A** WRITER IN THE BOSTON TRANSCRIPT gives an interesting account of a plan about to be put into execution by the Fairbanks

family in Dedham, Mass. This plan was made at a large reunion of the family held in Dedham last August and is to provide for articles of incorporation to be filed for the Fairbanks family in America. The writer in the Transcript says that "Hon. J. Wilder Fairbank, secretary of the association, has been working upon the idea, the purpose of the organization, as set forth in the articles of incorporation, being the collection and preservation of all matters pertaining to the history of the family in America; the study of the material and the education of the members in historical and antiquarian subjects relating to the family; the collection of books, pamphlets, manuscripts and articles referring to its history; the acquisition and the preservation of the homestead in Dedham, and the publication of articles and papers of interest or instruction. Thus incorporated as a society for historic purposes, with power to hold property, the place once purchased will be non-assessable and non-taxable. It is known that there will be no trouble in raising the \$4,500 asked for the old homestead, as one man has already said he would advance the money, but the society hopes to raise a much larger sum as a fund for its preservation. Hon. J. Wilder Fairbank has discovered more than 4,000 families descended from Jonathan Fairbanke, and he has prepared a circular to be sent to each, asking their assistance."

**I**F THE STORY TOLD BY THE ST. PAUL (Minn.) correspondent of the Chicago Tribune is correct, then there is important work to be done by missionaries right at our own doors. According to this correspondent, in five counties of that state "the word of God is comparatively unknown, young men take girls to wife without any ceremony whatever, and dead are buried without prayers being said over the rough casket." This correspondent adds: "In a haystack on a farm a few miles west of Brainard, in Crow Wing county, rests the frozen body of a two-year-old child and there it will remain until the father finds time to give it burial. In and near the little settlement of Sylvan Lake, Crow Wing county, are living several couples for whom no marriage ceremony ever was performed. In a hundred or more graves in various portions of the northern counties repose the bones of men, women, and children over whose bodies no prayers were said. Near the little town of Backus, forty miles from Brainard, lives a woman who married ten days after the death of her first husband, whose body she buried without religious ceremony at her kitchen door. There are no clergymen in these places. These are a few of the things that have impelled the Minnesota Sunday school association to put a force of missionary workers in the field."

**A** NEW AND INTERESTING DEVICE FOR the extermination of mosquitoes and gnats has been suggested by an electrical engineer employed by Thomas A. Edison. According to a writer in the Kansas City Journal, this engineer was recently engaged upon experimental work on harmonic telegraphy. He happened to notice that when the note given out by the instrument reached a certain pitch all the mosquitoes in the neighborhood came flying towards the apparatus. The workman produced a quantity of fly-paper, with which he covered the machine, and so succeeded in capturing thousands of the noxious insects. The cause of this queer musical attraction seems to be that the note produced by the machine was exactly similar to that caused by the rapid vibration of the wings of the mosquito when flying. Sir Hiram Maxim has since made experiments of a similar kind, and found that a tuning-fork giving a similar note was equally attractive to the gnats and mosquitoes in the neighborhood.

**I**F ONE WERE ASKED TO SAY WHETHER Shakespeare or Robert Burns had the larger number of devotees, the inclination would be to promptly decide in favor of Shakespeare, and yet a writer in the London Sphere asserts that more people pay an annual visit to the places associated with Robert Burns than pay an annual visit to the places associated with Shakespeare. In support of this claim figures showing the number of