

# CURRENT TOPICS

**O**N NOVEMBER 29 THE PRESIDENT MADE public what is called "a brief of the report of Fourth Assistant Postmaster General Bristow," on the postal investigation. Accompanying the brief was a memorandum by the president. The portion of General Bristow's report made public relates largely to the disclosures with which newspaper readers are already familiar. It shows that in the postoffice department corruption ran riot. Mr. Bristow's report reflects seriously upon Perry S. Heath, although he says the evidence against Heath was submitted to the district attorney who decided that it was not sufficient to warrant his indictment. In his memorandum, the president did not spare Tyner, Machen, Beavers or their associates, but commented very severely upon their conduct. With respect to Mr. Heath, the president, however, simply said that his case was set forth in Mr. Bristow's report. The crimes committed in the postoffice department under the republican administration, according to General Bristow's report, include bribery, blackmail and carrying on the government payrolls in some instances of fictitious persons and in other instances of men who performed no service whatever.

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**F**IIFTY YEARS AGO ISAAC PITMAN, THE INVENTOR of phonetic shorthand, predicted that English was destined to be the universal language. A writer in the New York World says that at that time Mr. Pitman was laughed at and adds: "English is now spoken by about 125,000,000 people. A century ago it was spoken by 20,000,000 people only. During that period no other leading European language has made the slightest advance. German has held its own, it is spoken now by 80,000,000, but this is no higher percentage of the total number of people of European stocks than it had a century ago. Abraham Lincoln foresaw 200,000,000 English-speaking people in the United States alone, and later prophets have described it as the home of 300,000,000 when the twenty-first century dawns. As the learning of English is compulsory in India, 300,000,000 more people are being annexed to the English-speaking world. The leading languages of continental Europe at the beginning of the last century—French, German and Spanish—while declining or stationary in Europe itself, are making gains on other continents. There are only 18,000,000 Spaniards in Spain, but 35,000,000 Americans talk Spanish. Some 20,000,000 people speak German outside of Germany, and twice as many people talk Portuguese in Brazil as there are in Portugal itself, while French is the language of 14,000,000 people outside of France."

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**W**HILE IT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY ALARMING, it is at least interesting to read in Harper's Weekly the prediction that in 2,500 years hence the discharge of Niagara will have become intermittent passing the low stages of the lake and that finally Niagara river on the right edge of the basin will have its water turned back and southwards and no water will flow over the Niagara escarpment of that day. Harper's Weekly says that "through this agency alone Niagara falls will cease to exist long before the escarpment has been worn away to the river level at Goat Island, but as it is even now lessening the volume of water poured over the falls the erosive power of the stream is diminishing, and we must therefore increase the period necessary for the retreat of the Canadian falls to the south end of Goat island and the stealing of the waters of the American falls. Assuming the continuity of the forces named, we might outline the probable future life and the death of the falls thus: With progressive loss in water volume the Canadian falls will reach the south end of Goat island in from 1,000 to 1,500 years; the death of the American falls. The flow of the waters will now have become intermittent, and at first only at periods of mean and high water in Lake Erie, eventually at high water alone, will there be any discharge over the escarpment. This will continue for a period of from 1,500 to 2,000 years. The entire flow to the north will cease and the river will run back into Lake Erie, leaving the escarpment dry at a point not very far south of Goat Islands and with a

height of about 100 feet. This will be 3,500 years hence—the death of Niagara falls."

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**I**T IS ANNOUNCED FROM ATLANTIC CITY that when the association of piano manufacturers holds its annual convention at that place next summer, an interesting feature of the program will be a great bonfire. A correspondent for the Chicago Record-Herald explains: "Many old, wornout, discordant square pianos are to be piled high on the beach, spread with petroleum and set afire. It is expected that the fire will be so big that it will cause even Philadelphia to sit up and take notice. Many persons buy the old square pianos for their children to use while learning music. This has hurt the piano business, especially in the sale of new pianos. The old square pianos can be bought cheaply, and answer every purpose for the beginner. At a meeting of the executive committee each of the 200 or 300 members of the association was requested to send one or two or ten old pianos to Atlantic City next summer. The greater number of square pianos a member can secure and send to Atlantic City the better his standing will be with the association. The pianos are to be placed on the beach and a player put at every instrument. At a given signal all will start "Hiawatha," and if this is not enough to make the fish leave the water "Mr. Dooley" and "In the Good Old Summer Time" will follow. Then the bonfire will be lighted."

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**O**UT OF THE TRICKERY AND SCANDAL that were disclosed to the public in the investigation of the American Asphalt bubble, the New York World obtains a story of one man who was conspicuous for his honesty and business integrity. That man was Dr. Ludwig S. Filbert, one of the pioneers in the asphalt business and who accumulated a large fortune in it before the boom days. Dr. Filbert's interesting story is related by the New York World in this way: "Dr. Filbert was a descendant of one of the fine old Quaker families of Philadelphia, and as his fortune increased he found pleasure in turning a large increment of his income toward philanthropy. In this way he came to know many people who were in the lowly walks of life. He was wont to help them, not only materially, but hundreds of widows and orphan children profited by his good advice. Scores of them invested their savings in enterprises that were indorsed by their benefactor. Asphalt had made a large fortune for Dr. Filbert, and so, when the American company came to be organized, he advised all of his humble friends to 'get in on the ground floor' and invest their savings in the stock before it had time to reach the figures to which he confidently expected it to go. In this way hundreds of poor people were led to invest all of their savings in what was to prove one of the greatest financial fizzles of the century."

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**W**HEN THE COLLAPSE CAME, DR. FILBERT, according to the World's historian, realized that his loss of a million and a half dollars, great as it looked to him in his declining years, was not nearly as serious as was the loss of the entire savings of the hundreds of poor people who were wont to look upon him as their benefactor. He knew that many of them had been left penniless and felt that he was responsible for it. He called the members of his family together in council and laid the facts before them. He said that he felt that he was personally responsible for these losses of the poor, and that in consequence it was his duty to reimburse them all. "I am getting old," Dr. Filbert told his family, "and cannot live many years. I want to be prepared to meet my God without the cries of hungry women and children in my ears. It will cost me half a million dollars to repay all these poor people for the losses they have sustained in this miserable stock failure. My own losses are a million and a half, and this money will, of course, come out of your pockets, since you will be deprived of it after my death. But I think I can face death better with an honest name, and that is my reason for asking you to uphold me in the disbursement of money that was intended for you." The family of the aged philanthropist sanctioned his honest purpose, and he set about at

once to repay the persons who had bought Asphalt stock on his advice. He drove to the several banks where he kept his accounts, and notified them that he would want to draw \$100,000 from each of them on the following day. The next morning he drew the half million in currency, placed it in a bag and drove from one house to another where lived those who had lost their savings in the bubble. Within one day he paid out every dollar of the money and at night told his friends that his conscience was clear once more.

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**O**FFICIALS OF THE NAVAL OBSERVATORY are arranging to send New Year's greetings from Washington to all the countries of the civilized world by the employment of a series of signals to all points to mark the exact second of the beginning of the new year. The Washington correspondent for the Chicago Chronicle, referring to this scheme, says: "A similar plan was employed successfully last year in the case of the United States, and it is intended to extend the service this year to cover the continents of North and South America, the distant insular possessions of the United States and all points of the world having the necessary cable and telegraphic connections, in case the co-operation of foreign governments can be secured, of which there is scarcely a doubt. Last year the receipt of the midnight signal was accurately timed at the Lick observatory in California, and it was found that it took only six one-hundredths of a second in transmission from Washington."

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**E**VERYTHING PERTAINING TO CANALS these days seems to be of interest to the American citizen. The attention being given to the Panama canal project has prompted the Washington correspondent for the Chicago Record-Herald to present some interesting facts with respect to the world's ship canals. This correspondent says that there are nine of these canals now in operation, as follows: 1. The Suez canal, begun in 1859 and completed in 1869. 2. The Cronstadt and St. Petersburg canal, begun in 1877 and completed in 1890. 3. The Corinth canal, begun in 1884 and completed in 1893. 4. The Manchester ship canal, completed in 1894. 5. The Kaiser Wilhelm canal, connecting the Baltic and North seas, completed in 1895. 6. The Elbe and Trave canal, connecting the North Sea and Baltic, opened in 1900. 7. The Welland canal, connecting Lake Erie with Lake Ontario. 8 and 9. The two canals, United States and Canadian, respectively, connecting Lake Superior with Lake Huron.

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**W**HILE THE SUEZ CANAL IS USUALLY considered the most important example of the ship canals, the Record-Herald's correspondent points out that the number of vessels passing through the Suez canal annually does not equal those passing through the canals connecting Lake Superior with the chain of great lakes in the south. It is explained, however, that in length the Suez canal exceeds any of the other great ship canals, its total length being nearly ninety miles, of which about two-thirds is through shallow lakes. In 1895 the canal was so enlarged as to give a depth of 31 feet, a width at the bottom of 108 feet and at the surface of 420 feet. The original cost was \$95,000,000 and for the canal in its present form slightly in excess of \$100,000,000.

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**T**HE CANAL CONNECTING THE BAY OF Cronstadt with St. Petersburg is described as one of great strategic and commercial importance to Russia. The canal and sailing course are about sixteen miles long. The width ranges from 220 to 350 feet. The total cost is estimated at about \$10,000,000. The Corinth canal connects the Gulf of Corinth with the Gulf of Aegina. The canal reduces the distance from Adriatic ports about 175 miles and from Mediterranean ports about 100 miles. Its length is about four miles and its cost \$5,000,000.

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**R**EFFERRING TO THE CANALS, THE Record-Herald writer says the Manchester ship canal which connects Manchester, England, with the Mersey river at Liverpool and the Atlantic ocean, was opened for traffic January 1,