

TOPICS OF THE DAY.

A writer in the London *Globe* remarks that the result of recent Irish harvests have produced a general feeling of distrust in the potato, and the question of the future food of the Irish people has consequently become one of the utmost importance.

King Theebaw, of Burmah, has the reputation of being even a jollier monarch than old King Cole, but his humor is sometimes grim. He recently killed his mother-in-law because his wife bore him a daughter when he longed for a son and heir, and then celebrated the child's birth by liberating all the prisoners in the kingdom.

Drunkenness has been investigated by Prof. Verga of Milan. He claims that men or women given to intoxication, are, strange to say, seldom given to kleptomania or suicide. A woman is less apt to take to liquor than a man, but when she does she can hardly be reclaimed. She becomes shameless and abominable, but seldom dangerous. Cold weather seems to cause men to take to strong drink, and mild weather has the same influence upon women.

Gloversville, N. Y., has a rival of the Maine girl who can spell words backward with such remarkable facility. The *Intelligencer* says that she is the daughter of the Rev. H. Graham and is between six and seven years of age. Any word which she can spell in its proper form she can spell with equal rapidity backward. Without any previous notice she spelled backward the words advocate, notwithstanding, February; Tuesday, satisfaction, synagogue, Constantinople and temperance, calling the letters so rapidly that the eye could scarcely follow her. How she does it she cannot explain.

The star-fish likes the oysters that grow in the Sound along the Connecticut coast, and has eaten up several valuable deposits. One firm has lost \$100,000 worth from the beds at Charles island; another lost \$20,000 this year, and the havoc in that vicinity is terrible. The star-fish can be dredged up if his presence is known, and the oystermen now watch for him so as to destroy him as soon as he puts in an appearance. One planter raised seventy-five bushels of star-fish from his beds in a single day. If he had not detected and captured them, they would have eaten \$10,000 worth of oysters during the next four weeks.

A few years ago, associations known as "Bands of Mercy" were formed in England, the object of which was to inculcate and promote kindness to animals. They have achieved great success, especially in teaching children to show kindness to the dumb creation. The Earl of Shaftesbury is at the head of the organization. More recently, organizations of the same character have been formed in this country, especially in Massachusetts, and some of the most prominent men in the state are interested in the movement. The Rev. Thomas Timmins, who has been identified with the movement in England, has come to this country where he will remain to labor in the cause.

King Humbert, of Italy, drives himself about in a T-cart, like any other quiet gentleman in Rome. When his carriage gets blocked, as it frequently does in the narrower streets, he takes it more patiently than the foreigners do, who admire the way in which he sits and nods and laughs to acquaintances in the crowd. Both the king and queen of Italy are extremely simple in their appearance in public. When the now czar of Russia and his wife were last in Rome they were surrounded by guards. Humbert and Marguerite went to call upon the Russian royalties, driven in a Victoria, and such was the simplicity of their equipage that they were able to get through the guards.

An illustration of the advance made in the healing of the eye is shown in a young lad who, with his mother in a close embrace, was struck through the eye by a cross street, and by one of the accidents which are so common in the city, to verify the adage "stranger than fiction," the boy's eye was doing him any good. One tooth hung from the gum; the other dislodged and drove to the

nearest doctor's, who sent its occupants to a dentist's; and he put back the tooth in its place, fastened it in with splints, nature received it, and it is now in as sound and good a condition as any other tooth in the boy's head. A great search was made for the missing tooth, which the dentist would have restored in like manner, but it was not to be found.

Leigh Hunt, superintendent of schools in Des Moines, Iowa, has adopted a plan of giving practical instruction in earning and saving money. In the first place he encouraged all the children to open bank accounts, and learn how to do business at a bank. Boys with rich fathers, boys with poor fathers, and boys without fathers or mothers were inclined to earn money in honest and manly ways. They black boots, deliver papers, shovel snow from side-walks, and carry in coal. Not a few are learning trades during odd hours, and many have tools which they work with at home. Those who are doing mechanical work that requires considerable skill, meet and compare the articles they have made. There is a friendly rivalry to see who will have the largest bank account and furnish the best specimens of handiwork. The work out of school is said to have a good effect on the work done in school. The boys are getting a reputation for thrift and economy as well as for scholarship.

The London *Times'* Paris correspondent contributes some very interesting information upon the subject of the instruction of women in the industrial arts as it has been developed in France. The first school for such instruction was started in a very small way in 1862, and now they are in operation all over France, teaching special trades to young women. It is stated that in one of these which has been in existence but eleven years no less than 2000 women have received thorough instruction in trades, such as millinery, dress-making, needlework, wood-engraving, porcelain painting, designing, etc. There are four general classes that the pupil can attend—the first for a general education, the second for commercial training, the third for industrial art education, and the fourth for teaching trades, and work-shops are attached to all the schools in which the scholars may learn many of the branches of industry hitherto pursued by men alone. Notwithstanding her many political and financial mistakes in some departments of social economy, France is making astonishing progress; in none more so than in the technical instruction of women.

The Massachusetts reformatory prison for women is not simply a penal institution for punishment, but is meant to reclaim the women sent there. The discipline is peculiar to itself. The prisoner is informed on her entrance that upon her own behavior depends advancement. The first four weeks she passes by herself, seeing only such officers of the institution as have occasion to visit her. At the end of that time she is regularly entered as a first division prisoner, unless she has been in the prison before, in which case her probationary term is doubled. She is promoted when she has gained a certain number of credit marks. For each week of perfect conduct in labor and study ten marks are allowed, and for each offense a mark is lost. As soon as she is entered in this division she is set to work in the laundry, the sewing-room, the kitchen or at brush making, these occupations being frequently changed, so that they may not grow monotonous, and she is obliged to attend school one hour each day. When the requisite number of marks is gained the prisoner is advanced to the second division, where another record card is given her, and she is informed that upon gaining the requisite number of credits she will be promoted to the third division. Her work and study continue through all the divisions, but she has a room that is a trifle larger, and is allowed a short recreation daily, unless by some misconduct she forfeits the right. Upon reaching the third division her room is still larger, and the time for reaching the fourth is less than that required for reaching any of the others. When she is in this final division she has a room a little better furnished, with a few ornamental trifles allowed. She eats from a table on which is a cloth, and is occasionally allowed something besides the usual prison fare, a cup of tea being considered the greatest luxury.

Comets are not unfrequently credited with the possession of infinite capacities for working good or evil to the

human race, and few men are prepared to declare upon affidavit that a comet is unable either to produce a fine vintage or to consume a world. But in few instances only a celestial body of this class has been known to bring about the peremptory dismissal of a couple of cabinet ministers, yet the Shanghai *Celestial Empire* gives publicity to the following strange story. It would appear that the first person in Pekin who caught sight of the great comet that became visible in the Chinese capital last October was the minister of foreign affairs, Li-hong-tsang. As his excellency, towards midnight, was strolling homeward from the palace, where he had been received in late audience by his imperial master, the comet suddenly met his eye. He at once hurried back to inform the emperor that a divine envoy, the bearer of evil tidings, had just appeared in the heavens. This alarming announcement caused his majesty to quiver visibly from head to foot, and to send for the court astrologers without an instant's loss of time. These sagacious functionaries, upon being asked by their sovereign, "What this luminous apparition in the sky might portend?" replied that it was unquestionably intended to convey to his majesty a strong sense of the disapproval with which the gods regarded the ministers of justice and public worship. This explanation of the celestial phenomenon recommending itself to the emperor, he forthwith gave orders that two decrees, sentencing the obnoxious ministers to be dismissed from their offices and banished to remote provinces, should be prepared for his signature. By dawn of the day the comet's mission had been fulfilled, and the object of divine displeasure were on their way to exile, little dreaming to whom, or rather to what, they were indebted for so sudden a reverse of fortune.

A Man in Stays.

Mr. Richard A. Procter, a well-known lecturer on astronomy, once tried the experiment of wearing a corset, and thus describes the result: "When the subject of corset wearing was under discussion in the pages of *The English Mechanic*, I was struck," he says, "with the apparent weight of evidence in favor of tight lacing. I was in particular struck by the evidence of some as to its use in reducing corpulence. I was corpulent. I also was disposed, as I am still, to take an interest in scientific experiment. I thought I would give it a fair trial. I read all the instructions, carefully followed them, and varied the time of applying pressure with that 'perfectly stiff busk' about which correspondents were so enthusiastic. I was foolish enough to try the thing for a matter of four weeks. Then I laughed at myself as a hopeless idiot, and determined to give up the attempt to reduce by artificial means that superabundance of fat on which only starvation and much exercise, or the air of America, has ever had any real reducing influence. But I was reckoning without my host. As the Chinese lady suffers, I am told, when her feet-bindings are taken off, and as the flat-headed baby howls when his head boards are removed, so for a little while was it with me. I found myself manifestly better in stays. I laughed at myself no longer. I was too angry with myself to laugh. I would as soon have condemned myself to using crutches all the time, as to wearing always a busk. But for my one month of folly I had to endure three months of discontent. At the end of about that time I was my own man again."

A Submarine Army of Torpedoes.

A remarkable means of defense is known as the "Graydon-Leach system," and provides for the maneuvering of fleets or torpedoes under complete control, below the surface of the water, and admitting of entire or partial withdrawal at pleasure, to permit the passing of friendly vessels, or enticing hostile vessels within the limits and then surrounding them with torpedoes that will insure their destruction. The torpedoes can be massed, moved in various directions, and, in fact, maneuvered similarly to bodies of troops, and, being entirely submerged, give no signs of approach to the enemy. The system is comparatively inexpensive, and the plan simple. No hostile fleet could enter a harbor defended by it, and therefore its harbor is defended by it, and therefore its harbor is defended by it, and therefore its harbor is defended by it. Though we have at present no adequate means of defense for our coast and seaport cities, yet by this system of torpedo defense a hostile fleet could be kept beyond shelling distance of New York, Brooklyn, San Francisco or any of our seaport cities, and even the mouth of Chesapeake Bay can be easily rendered impassable.—*Our Continent*.

SCIENTIFIC SCRAPS.

French photographs of the transit in Algeria and spectroscopic observations indicate an atmosphere on the planet.

An apparatus for recording the exact speed of a train during its entire run, including stoppages and startings, has been invented by M. Pouzet.

There is a tree in Arizona which, when seasoned, is so hard as to turn the edge of an ax. It is known as the desert-ironwood tree, and makes magnificent charcoal.

Milk has the power to absorb obnoxious gases and effluvia from the air around it, and it should not be forgotten that the purest butter ever made may become tainted and poisoned in one short hour by objectionable surroundings.

If M. Kiser made correct observations, the wheat plant never grows upon any day when the temperature of the air does not for a period of several hours at least rise above forty-three degrees Fahrenheit.

A visitor to the St. Bernard morgue writes that in the wondrous air of the Alps, 8000 feet above the sea-level, putrefaction is unknown, and the bodies of those lost in the snow are perfectly preserved from change.

A non-conductor of electricity has yet to be found, for all substances hitherto discovered are conductors of the force under certain known conditions; but those which offer a great resistance to it serve the purpose of non-conductors in practice, although they may be all classed as good or bad conductors. The best conductor known at present is silver; the worst conductor is solid paraffine.

Dr. Merkel states that the height of an individual after a night's rest, measured before rising from the bed, is two inches greater than it is in the evening, measured standing. There is a gradual diminution in height, caused by the yielding of the plantar arches and of the intervertebral discs; and a sudden diminution, when the individual rises, occurring at the articulations of the lower extremities. The sinking at the ankle is one-third of an inch; at the knee, one-twelfth to one-eighth of an inch; at the hip two-fifths of an inch. The shortening at the ankle is probably due to the elasticity of the cartilages. At the top there is, in addition, a sinking of the head of the femur into the cotyloid cavity.

For Lovers of Fish.

Away up in the waters of the Northern Pacific there swims what might be called the olive of the sea. The Indians call it the oolachan. It is the fattest of all fish, and from it the oil absolutely drips, an oleaginous fluid as sweet and limpid as that which comes from the fruit of those ugly, dwarfed and rusty looking trees which give so little shade on the Mediterranean coasts. Perhaps some of these days oolachan oil will go to France and Italy and come back to us as the best salad-dressing. This fish is so flat that if a dried specimen is taken, as was shown at the United States national museum, all that has to be done is to light the head of the oolachan, holding the tail in the fingers, and it blazes away like a spermaceti candle, giving light without smoke or smell. But the oolachan might be cloying as a constant food, though Dr. T. H. Bean and other explorers of the northwest coast declare that when fresh it is the sweetest of all morsels, being the oolachan, the rice or reed bird fish of the sea. But the oolachan pales before something called the "geoduck." This name alone has an inviting sound. You find the geoduck principally in Puget sound and in San Diego bay, though it is scattered all along the coast from San Francisco to the north. It might be a pity to call it a clam, though it belongs to that humble family, and unpoetical naturalists call it *Glycimeras generosa*. "I think," writes a careful observer, "that its flesh is too rich to permit of regular stuffing or gormandizing, although I ate quite heartily of it for several successive meals, and experienced no bad or disagreeable sensations afterward." When the geoduck is served it delights the eye, for one of those happy ichthyophagists who had the good luck to eat one says it looked "like a particularly plump duck." Let us suppose a huge soft clam minus the grit, and we will have an idea of what the *Glycimeras generosa* is. The method of cooking is to cut off four pounds of the geoduck in slices, to roll it in meal, and to fry it. Then, says a gustatory critic, "You have something like scrambled eggs, but with a flavor of its own." Why should not the geoduck be sent to us? If we have given to the west coast our share they might return favors by sending us the geoduck for cultivation. We ought to try and propagate this prince of clams.—*New York Times*.

GAMBLER'S PARADISE.

Monte Carlo And Its Gambling Hells—A Vivid Description.

The injury sustained by Marseilles, Nice, Genoa and especially Mentone, from the neighborhood of Monte Carlo and its gaming tables, are the subject of an earnest article by Edmond Planchet, in the Paris *Revue des deux Mondes*. These cities, he says, will not cease their protests until France, for the sake of moral cleanliness, and Italy, for reputation's sake, exact that the last public gambling house in Europe be abolished. Petitions signed by a great number of persons were sent to the French Chambers last April. De Freycinet would not entertain the subject and the motion was laid on the table. In spite of the minister's opposition the Senate sent him the petitions a month later. In that short time the relations between France and Italy had changed.

"If it were true," Planchet goes on to say, "that gambling establishments have the power to enrich a people instead of making fortunes for industrial associations, the principality of Monaco would long ago have been white with marble palaces and have distanced the rest of the coast in luxury and prosperity. Not so. Sadness shows in the faces of the miserable inhabitants and more wretched soldiery. Saddest of all is the contrast between the beauty of nature and the ugliness of vice. The gambling fever has extended from Monaco to the 'Massena' and 'Mediterranean' clubs at Nice. All classes of society are affected by it. Small tradesmen ruin themselves at play and on gala day the roulette flourishes in the open air. Society is demoralized. Suicides are numerous. At Mentone the cottages built to accommodate the rich English and Russian invalids are empty. The doctors caution them against the excitement of gambling and the chill air of the Mediterranean that pierces their lungs when they leave the overheated rooms at night."

Of the many pictures that have been drawn of the beauties and horrors of Monte Carlo, there is none more touching than is given in a letter from George Sand. "Strange contrast," she writes. "We leave the magnificence of nature to find ourselves, of a sudden, amid the filth of modern civilization, from the pale rays of the new moon, the great rock sleeping in the shadow and the odor of the orange groves to the fetid odor of fever and the rattle of the roulette. Young married women gamble while nurses look after their children on the sofas. A pretty little girl of five drags herself to one of these and falls asleep, overcome with fatigue, heat and ennui. Does her unnatural mother hope to win her a marriage portion? An old foreign lady sits at the gaming table with a little lad who calls her mother. She seems indifferent about losing or winning. The child plays, too, with the manner of a grown person. He is used to it."

"Restless or frightened shadows wander round the cafe in the vast amphitheater formed by the mountain's steep sides. They look chilly; perhaps they only look and long for the slight refreshment they no longer have the means to purchase. Some go off with empty pockets. Others accost you and almost beg for a seat in your carriage back to Nice. Suicides are not rare. The waiters at the hotel seem to have a profound contempt for the unlucky. When one of these complains of being badly served the waiter answers by shrugging his shoulders and saying, 'So it would not work to-night?'"

"We dine as best as we can in a room full of little tables, the people scramble for, deafened by the chattering of adventuresses on the lookout for a dinner and a friend to pay for it. We return to the rooms to watch for something dramatic. The villainous smell drives us away. We rush to the beach and reach the town situated on a little headland deliciously carved amid the waters. The poor little place seems to shrink, as we did, from the bad air of the gambling-house, and to seek refuge among the beautiful trees that surround it."

"We climb the rock to the gloomy and forbidding old castle. It looks tragic in the moonlight. The palace of the prince is charming. It reminds us of the fanciful home of the governor at Majorca. At 9 o'clock in the evening, the town is silent and deserted. We return by the beach where only the plash of the waves breaks the silence. The moon has sunk below the horizon. The gaslights enable us to see the base of the great rock and throw greenish streaks across the white marble balustrades. The roulette is still going, the nightingale sings, a child is weeping."

Peculiarities of Mexicans.

Among all classes there is too much of the idle "rest and be thankful" spirit. Nature has been bountiful; the necessities of life are easily secured; the need of exertion is minimized; a few beans or a handful of corn, a little fat, and some chillies will form the unvarying diet for weeks. But all are inveterate gamblers. Although sometimes too lazy or improvident to provide even comfortable food, they will sit for hours over cards or dice, and in their infatuation pawn everything on which they can raise money. In selling their chillies, their eggs, poultry, or other produce, they seldom have any fixed price; their demands are mainly graduated by the apparent capacity or generosity of the purchaser. Contracting to supply milk, for example, to the railroad construction gangs, after arranging for a very ample remuneration, and going on for one, perhaps two, weeks, they will complain that their cows are doing badly, get a few extra cents per gallon, and perhaps a week later make a similar stand for a further advance. The mercantile classes in the towns, although they seldom have much capital, are tolerably straightforward, endeavoring to meet their engagements, and have a wholesome horror of a protested bill. Every village celebrates, at least once a year, its first, where dancing, an extra amount of gambling, cock fighting, and sometimes bull-baiting are the entertainments, and where the liberal consumption of cheap intoxicants brings business into the Court of Alcalde or Justice of Peace. The Mexicans are generally more pusillanimous and superstitious than the Indians. Secret societies exercise a good deal of authority. Both in Old and New Mexico the Penitentes count their numbers by thousands, and enjoy among their votaries fasting and humiliation, from which, however, exemption is freely accorded on payment of certain dues. On occasions, self-flagellation and stripes inflicted by brother devotees are preceded with until the infatuated victims are covered with blood. For several hundred yards along a path thickly strewn with prickly cactus, others go on hands and knees to prostrate themselves before the cross. Bearing a cross weighing several hundred pounds, with arms outstretched and secured, others toil for miles, usually to some sacred chapel or almost inaccessible mountain top. When the poor enthusiast, fainting under his burden, is about to drop, attendants place their shoulders under the arms of the cross, and afford a temporary support. These performances shatter yearly the health of weakly devotees, and kill some.—*London Times*.

Diseases From Bad Teeth.

It appears not to be generally understood even among the cultivated people, although the fact has been dwelt upon with emphasis by the best medical authorities, that the presence of carious, crowded, or asymmetrical teeth in the human mouth is the progenitor of a long train of nervous diseases, comprising not only facial neuralgia and its concomitant troubles, but diseases of the ear, inflammatory as well as functional, eventuating often in partial loss of hearing, defects of vision, naso-pharyngeal catarrh, and other tormenting maladies. One of our acutest and most successful specialists in the treatment of nervous diseases has become so fully convinced by long experience of the part played by defective teeth in the development, not of neuralgia only, but even of the more obscure neuroses, that he always insists, as a condition precedent to the acceptance of the case, that a thorough examination of the cavity of the mouth shall be undertaken by a competent dentist, for, he says, not only may a single diseased tooth result in persistent nervous disturbance, but disease of the brain, decay or perversion of the mental faculties, even epilepsy and tetanic spasms often have their starting-point in dental irritations; and he has observed cases in which, while laying the foundation for a long train of nervous troubles, the irritated organ itself gave no sign, either by local pain or vague discontent, of the agency it was constantly exerting to produce serious disturbance at some distant point. In common with the most aural surgeons, a distinguished specialist, of this city, has long since adopted the practice of examining the teeth of every patient brought to him for treatment of ear trouble, particularly of partial deafness and general irritation of the organ; and, speaking the other day of the large number of pupils from the public schools who attended the public aural clinics at the hospital with which he is connected, "it is rare," he said, "to find a single patient in whose case dental irritation is not to be considered among the prominent causative factors."—*New York Times*.