

The three great ivory markets of the world are Antwerp, London, and Liverpool. For the past six or seven years Antwerp has forged ahead of London, for it controls most of the great new fields of the Congo. Since 1895 its ivory receipts have invariably exceeded those of London, excepting in 1898. The receipts last year were 323 tons for Antwerp, 208 for London, and 40 for Liverpool—a total of 571 tons.

The total receipts of these markets from 1894 to 1902 ranged between 524 and 620 tons a year. The receipts of London are slowly declining, while those of Antwerp are rapidly increasing, although it is probable that the height of its trade will be reached before many years. Liverpool cuts a small figure in comparison with its rivals, its receipts having varied in the past nine years from 32 to 60 tons a year.

A telegram from Brisbane, published some days ago in the Melbourne papers, stated that a punitive expedition, led by the Acting Administrator of British New Guinea, had been despatched to some district in the interior of New Guinea, with the following, amongst other, objects: The recovery of the skull of Mr Tomkins, a Presbyterian missionary, who was murdered in 1901. The Secretary for External Affairs puts, however, a somewhat less romantic interpretation on the message than it appears to bear. Mr Hunt says that no punitive expedition has been authorised in New Guinea. In the course of one of his ordinary visitations to various parts of the territory, the Acting Administrator would visit a district in which it was hoped the skull of the deceased missionary might be recovered. It is the practice of some New Guinea tribes to keep skulls as fetiches.

The United States are making experiments with a view to growing their own opium.

Deadly nightshade, monkshood, henbane, foxglove, jimson weed, and wormwood are among the plants which are being cultivated by the American Government in an experimental garden patch, about two acres in extent, close by the city of Washington.

The plants selected for culture in this garden are those that yield the deadliest of known poisons, which are at the same time the most powerful and valuable drugs employed by medical science.

"We import," says an American journal, "something like 8,000,000 lbs. (£1,600,000) yearly of such drugs, including raw materials from which they are extracted, and it is believed that most of this money might be saved by producing the toxic weeds for ourselves." "Up to the present time no attention has been paid to this kind of gardening in the United States, but the Department of Agriculture is making a study of it in the manner described, and proposes to devote extensive areas to the purpose, with a view to ascertaining the commercial possibilities of the industry. A large tract in Texas will be planted with the opium poppy, and the juice obtained from the seed vessels will be prepared in the ordinary way, and manufactured into refined opium of first-class quality, for sale in the market."

The expulsion of clerical orders from France by the French Government has had an interesting sequel in one respect. A number of the expelled members of one order—that of the Holy Ghost—are about to settle in Southern Nigeria.

This order, which is almost exclusively one of missionary work, had seventeen houses in France. All but three of these have been closed, with the result that about 300 of the members have been driven to seek other places in the world in which to work.

The Government of Southern Nigeria has given notable aid to the scheme, the African Association has leased a valuable farm at the nominal rental of £24 a year, and Sir Alfred Jones has promised a subscription of £50 towards the expenses of the settlement.

The reason why all the West African authorities are so willing to aid the coming of the brethren of the Holy Ghost is that they form a community of workers.

The main ideal of these missionaries is that the natives must first be taught how to live in this world before teaching them how to live in the next.

The brethren are, therefore, a community of smiths, masons, and agriculturists, who train the natives in the arts of the husbandman without too great insistence on the dogmatic ideal which usually is the first object sought by less wise missionaries.

Orders for two new oil launches for Lakes Rotorua and Tarawera have been placed with Messrs Bailey and Lowe, Auckland, by Messrs Palmer and Co., of Wellington, who secured the contract from the Government Tourist Department. Delivery is to take place within seven weeks from date. The boats are to be built on the whale boat type. The measurements overall will be—length 40ft, beam 8ft and draught 2ft 6in. An open well for the accommodation of passengers will extend nearly the whole length of the boats, and about the middle of this will be the machinery, which will be covered in by a small house. The boats are to be fitted with 15 h.p. engines, and should develop a high rate of speed. Each boat is to have seating accommodation for at least 40 people.

In "Cornhill" Lady Broome contributes further Colonial memories, this time of old New Zealand, and tells of having been snowed up and reduced to famine rations by a terrible snowstorm. She recounts how the Governor brought down to Christchurch some Maori chiefs, and how one of them, "faullessly clad in correct evening dress, but with tattooed face," danced with her—"He never made a single mistake in any part which he had seen the top couples do first, and when I had to guide him he understood directly. It was a wonderful set of dances, and when it was over I told the interpreter that I was quite astonished to see how well Te Henare danced. This little compliment was duly repeated, and I could not imagine why the interpreter laughed at the answer. Te Henare seemed very anxious that it should be passed on to me and was most serious about it, so I insisted on being told. It seems the poor chief-tain had said with a deep sigh, "Ah, if I might only dance without my clothes! No one could really dance in these horrid things!"

It is astonishing how difficult it is to quote an author correctly if one trusts to memory alone. The more familiar the verse, the greater the danger, apparently. Sometimes the very books that profess to set matters straight only make confusion worse confounded. Recently Mr. Chamberlain quoted the words of Polonius:

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

But in some of the reports "hoops" gave place to "hooks." It was Pope, I believe (writes a correspondent in "Modern Society"), who first suggested "hooks," and a few editors have followed him. But "hoops" it is, all the same; and "hoops," it was, I was pleased to see, in your interesting "Christmas Supplement."

"Fresh fields and pastures new" still flourishes. In this instance the alliteration is so apt as to cause anyone in doubt as to whether it is "fields" or "woods" to make a wrong choice. One man I know fixed the right word in his memory by saying he "knew it was not the Bank of England solicitors!" (Fresh-fields).

Again, a famous line of Congreve's is remarkable for the many forms in which it may be found—even in books which are regarded as authorities. In one of these I find:

Music "huth" charms to soothe "the" savage breast,
To soften rocks, or bend "a" knotted oak.

In another:

Music "hoo" charms to soothe "a" savage breast,
To soften rocks, or bend "the" knotted oak.

While a third varies it still further. In the play in which the words occur, however, "The Mourning Bride"—they are the very first words spoken in the play proper—I find:

Music has charms to soothe a savage breast,
To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.

Many other instances might be given, but these will do for the present.

The fashion for Panama hats of the last two or three years has made people commonly acquainted with the fact that the hats are not made in Panama, that the term Panama hat is only a trade name, and that the best of these hats come from Jipijapa, in Ecuador (says the "New York Sun"). But there are other interesting things not generally known about Panama hats.

Thus Senor Franco, who was a candidate for the President at the last election in Ecuador, had presented to him not long ago by his friends a hat said to be the finest of its kind in the world. It is said to be on exhibition at the St. Louis world's fair, with other products of Ecuador. The other hat can be pressed so small that it can be hidden entirely in the closed hand. When the hand is opened the hat will spring back into perfect shape just as if it had never been touched save in the most careful manner.

All the work is done under water. From the time when the two first straws are jointed together to the time when the entire work is done, the hat never comes to the surface. Moreover, nobody but the half-breed Indians living near the west coast of Ecuador has the art down to the finest point. They have practically a monopoly in the manufacture of the very best hats. Ecuador is the only place where the proper kind of straw grows. Varieties much like it can be found elsewhere, but they all differ a little from the grass of Ecuador.

Residents of New Guinea whom Mr Philip met at Thursday Island, says the Brisbane "Courier" of 23rd inst., report that in the Possession things are very stagnant. The Federal Government has been sending round circulars to the white people to get their opinions as to whether land in New Guinea should be sold and whether the sale of liquor should be permitted. The consensus of opinion was that both land and liquor should be sold. It is understood that several industries would be started in the Possession if land could be purchased. The Federal Government is already spending about £20,000 a year in the government of the place, and very little seems to be done in the way of trade development or profitable occupation of the country. It is believed that cocoa and copra growing could be profitably carried out by native labour, while in the registration of native labour for the pearling fleets a good revenue could be derived.

Some of the most valuable triumphs of human effort and thought have either never seen the light or have failed to reach the practical stage in which they would have become an important factor in progress. So says a writer in "I.A.T." Many inventors have been too poor to perfect their ideas; others have given up in sheer despair at the want of practical encouragement from an incredulous world; others have died, taking their secrets with them. Thus, Dawson, the famous American inventor, was thrown into prison for killing his son-in-law, and refused to divulge the secret process for hardening copper and making it equal to Damascus steel. The late Colonel Ford, who died a few years ago in Denver, Colorado, furnishes a still more striking example of the tenacity with which inventors cling to their ideas, and also the strange fatality which appears to dog their footsteps. The head chemist of the great Carnegie steel plant remained night and day at Ford's bedside during his last illness, and stood ready to give him millions of dollars for his secrets, but the offer came too late.

Ford died without speaking. He had worked for twelve years on a process for treating ores of a smelting-grade without smelting it, and had achieved his object with brilliant success, being able, by the use of a few inexpensive chemicals, to extract gold from ore of any richness without the employment of the present expensive process of smelting it. He guarded his secret with the utmost care, conducting all of his experiments in his own room, and making a confidant of nobody. When certain he had perfected his process, Ford wrote to some of the great metal manufacturers, and, as a result, the head chemist of the Carnegie firm hurried westward, armed with full authority to pay a fabulous sum for the secret. Ford would not reveal the method of his process, but permitted the results to be watched. Hundreds of pounds of ore were taken to his roof, and he quickly extracted the gold from it at a comparatively trifling cost. The chemist gauged at once the marvellous value of the secret, and drew up a contract on the spot, which would have given Ford an annual income of £20,000. But Fate intervened. The day on which he was to divulge his secret Ford's brain gave way under the twelve years' strain, and a stroke of apoplexy, from which he never recovered, rendered the execution of the contract impossible, and his secret was buried with him in the grave.

Mr. Pierpont Morgan has just bought two precious manuscripts in England. One is the original MS. of Byron's "Corsair," given by the poet to the present owner's grandfather. The other is the MS. of Lytton's "The Last Days of Pompeii." The "Corsair" MS. is perfect in every respect, but that of "Pompeii" is bereft of four chapters. The price paid for the two is stated to be £2000.

Our supremacy as the shipbuilders of the world, although usually, is not as yet seriously impaired. According to an interesting article which appeared in a recent number of the "Shipping World," it costs 30 per cent. more to build steamships in the United States than it does in British yards. Mr Morgan's great International Mercantile Marine Company is building six ships of 64,200 tons in American yards. If the order had gone to Great Britain the company would have saved half a million sterling. The "Shipping World" says:—

A little sum will make this plainer. Here are the figures:—

	British Built.	American Built.
	£	£
Two 13,400 ton ships at £21 10/0 per ton	562,800	
Two 13,400 ton ships at £20 15/0 per ton		782,900
Four ships, in all 37,400 tons, at £12 10/0 per ton	447,500	
Four ships, in all 37,400 tons, at £18 15/0 per ton		701,250
Totals	£1,010,300	£1,485,200
	1,010,300	1,010,300
Difference in favour of British built ships		£474,900

But the extra expense to the owner does not end with the increased first cost of his ships. Interest, depreciation and insurance costs each fairly put at 5 per cent. per annum, or 15 per cent. for the three items, "in the case of the six ships dealt with will mean an increased yearly charge of 238,241, or say, £1 2/6 per ton. If we take the net revenue per ton of some of the fleets of representative British companies, as given in their last annual reports, as £1 10/8 per ton per annum, it will be seen how deeply these increased and unnecessary annual charges cut into the net revenue account.

The difference is 20 per cent. in favour of British builders. As long as that is the case they will not have much difficulty in holding their own.

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