

# News, Notes and Notions.

## Hereditary.

**P**ROBLEMS of heredity are with difficulty studied in man, because in the first place experiment is impossible, and in the second place accurate examination is difficult, and the student in consequence has to depend on the imperfect observations and imperfect memories of unscientific people. An idea of the difficulties may be easily gathered if any reader will suppose himself to be asked by a physiologist to tell him what peculiarities in the way of eye colour or hair distribution existed in the reader's family past and present, and how and to what extent these peculiarities appeared to be inherited. In short, nearly the only valuable studies of heredity in human beings (if we except those made on a very large scale by the biometricians) are those which have been made by doctors who have been able to make out family histories of cretinism or skin affections, or other abnormalities among their patients. Some of these instances have shown a decided tendency to group themselves under the laws of inheritance as stated by Mendel. An inquiry of a rather different kind has been made by MM. Anteaume and Vurpas into the hereditary tendencies and distribution of a noted Danish family of gymnasts. The members of this family—men, women and children—have been noted acrobats for over three hundred years, performing in all countries of Europe and before many crowned heads. They begin to learn their art in infancy, and acquire it rapidly and with great skill. They also show great pride in the attainments of the family, and no member of it, no matter what his apparent physical limitations, would think of adopting another occupation. These physical and mental qualifications the writers believe to have been transmitted, without doubt, by heredity, and they think that the effect has been cumulative from generation to generation. This family of gymnasts appears to present a case of the hereditary transmission not only of acquired characters, but of a peculiar aptitude of mind and exceptional constitution and longevity. The instance might be found one suitable to the theory again put forward by Professor Francis Darwin, that heredity is racial memory, each generation of these gymnasts handing down to its successor greater and greater aptitudes under the form, so to speak, of pre-established muscular associations. Thus the young subject is able to execute almost without effort movements impossible to those who have not inherited the "motor predisposition."

## Petrified Dream.

The strangest looking building ever put up by man is probably the palace which a French mail carrier is said to have erected for his own pleasure. "For ten long years," the owner of this house is reputed to have said, "I treasured in my mind a dream which took the form of a fantastic palace, with grottoes, towers, sculpture, etc., and it was my dream to build it myself." Twenty-six years ago he began building his dream palace, and he has been at it ever since, until recently, when he stopped, only because he had finished the palace. Every stone that went into it was picked up by himself; every stone was laid by him. The design was conceived in his own mind as he went on, and was carried out according to the extraordinary plan that he had imagined. Now that the palace is finished, it looks like a petrified dream in which the nightmare played a certain part. It is a fantastic nondescript, combining all architectural styles, and adorned with stone creatures which would defy the classification of a naturalist. In putting this stone phantasmagoria together the builder used no fewer than 3500 sacks of cement. The palace has subterranean passages in which rudely sculptured elephants and imaginary monsters stand guard. In the very centre of the palace is a tomb, where the owner expects some day to lie. This is the most elaborately carved bit of the whole house.

## Suicides in Vienna.

Statistics just published show that there were 430 suicides in Vienna last year out of a population of under 2,000,000. This is the highest number yet recorded. The ages of the victims varied from that of a seven-year-old boy, who threw himself out of a window owing to a bad mark received at school, to that of an octogenarian, who chose the same method of putting an end to himself from "weariness of life." More than three times as many men as women killed themselves, but nearly three times as many women as men made unsuccessful attempts at suicide. The men favoured mostly hanging and the revolver; the women, a leap from a height, drowning and poison. The differences in the motives of the two sexes are also interesting. The causes for the suicides of males were, first, sickness, then poverty, insanity and family troubles, unhappy love taking the last place. Among the female suicides love was the motive in the largest number of cases; then came family troubles and poverty.

## Spelling Reform.

The Simplified Spelling Board, rejoicing in Government support, on January 26 issued a third atrocious list of clipped words which will henceforth be used in American official documents and taught to young Americans. This list includes general rules covering four classes of words. (1) Omit the E in words having EA pronounced as short E, as in "hed," "sted," "heith," "reim." Omit the E in words having EA pronounced as A before R, such as "harken," "hart," "harth." (2) Omit the E in preterites and participles ending in ED, but pronounced D, with the E silent, as in "arnd," "burnd," "raind," "compeld," "repald." This simplification is parallel to that already adopted in forms like "dropt" and "dript." (3) In words ending in the unstressed suffix "ice," pronounced "is," the C is changed to S and

the E is omitted, as in "cornis," "crevis," "lattie," "notis," "servis," "artifis," etc. (4) In words ending in "ive" or "rve," with the E silent, the E should be omitted, as in "dely," "twelv," "solv," "resolv," "carv," "serv," "reserv," etc.

## Record Spenders.

Seventy-one million, two hundred thousand francs, or close on £3,000,000, spent in eleven years. Even Paris, accustomed as it has been to the spectacular extravagance of Count Boni de Castellane, gasped when it heard the figures read out in the Palais de Justice, where the divorced husband of the Princess de Sagan, who was formerly Anna Gould, was trying desperately to regain his grasp on some of the Gould millions. "It's the record of the world!" exclaimed one who knew the Castellanes before the transitory American dollars gilded the name. "No other spendthrift in history outside of Royalty spent so much money in such a short time. It's unbelievable!" But however unbelievable it might be, it was quite true. And when one takes into consideration that of all this money practically none was lost through bad investments or unwise business ventures, it is doubtful if history holds a record of a private individual squandering money so recklessly. It must be remembered, too, that only a negligible amount was lost in gambling. Those familiar with the rise and fall of the Castellanes say that nearly all of the Count's financial troubles can be accounted for on the theory that he overreached himself in trying to produce an effect, and that his judgment was destroyed by a sort of megalomania that led him on to incur expenses that even kings and queens of Europe could not have afforded. For nearly all of the £3,000,000 was spent in establishing the Castellanes in a supreme place in society, in building a palace worthy of Royalty, in lavish entertainments, and in the upkeep of two encumbered estates. The famous marble palace in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne is the largest single item in the long bill of extravagances. Probably more Americans have stared at its pink walls than have seen the Grand Trianon at Versailles from which it was

copied. It cost £400,000 to build, and as usual more, it is said, to furnish. There have been many lavish entertainments within the pink marble walls. Those whom Count Boni delighted to honour had all that the appetite of a Lucullus could desire. Keeping up the display in a manner befitting the palace where he lived cost sums that would stagger a small principality. Whenever the Count or the Countess de Castellane moved they went about in a manner befitting a prince and princess royal. Then there were two estates to be kept, one which the Countess, who was paying the interest on the mortgage that covered it, never saw. Seven hundred thousand francs went towards paying this interest.

## Dominic on Strike.

There is an unctuous flavour of "Sandford and Merton" about the notion of any overtures of sympathy between pupils and their master, as a rule, for the two classes (if masters may rank among the classes at all) have been foes from time immemorial. But it is due to the pupils of a certain school near Besancon, France, to say that they have a better cue than usual, for they are taking sides with their tutor in the best of all causes—a common holiday. It is not often, mark you, that a schoolmaster goes on strike as a protest against the obstinacy of the local authority, and when he does, the humour of the situation should certainly appeal to the youngsters among the first. The case admits of humour, for the cause of division is a garden wall, and as the dominie complains that its insecurity makes him feel uneasy, it was only natural of him to demand its repair. The municipality either shirked or temporised. The schoolmaster's demand was for present repairs, and as these hung fire, he has closed the school. Hence the tender sympathy of his pupils and the address they have just presented; hence also our rejoicing that the case is an infrequent one. If the disrepair of boundary walls were a motive for closing every school, we are afraid that in a week there would be few school walls left whole in the country.

# SHOTS AT TRUTH



"We have not the reverent feeling for a rainbow that a savage has, because we know how it is made." — Mark Twain.



"He who abuses others must not be particular about the answers he gets."



"The great are only great because we carry them on our shoulders; when we throw them off they sprawl upon the ground." — Montaigne.



"Have not thy cloak to make when it begins to rain."