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A PERTINENT QUESTION.

It is generally understood that the main object of Congress in authorizing the President to appoint a new canal commission was to secure an impartial investigation of the relative advantages of the Nicaragua and Panama routes. The many commissions which have examined and reported on the feasibility of these two locations include the names of four Americans of more or less professional reputation, two of whom, Admiral Walker and Prof. Haupt, have pronounced themselves as being heartily in favor of the construction of the Nicaragua Canal, while the other two, General Abbot and Mr. Fteley, have indorsed the Panama route. In making up the new and presumably non-partisan commission, the President has included Admiral Walker and Prof. Haupt and ignored General Abbot and Mr. Fteley, who are, by the way, two of the most distinguished hydraulic engineers in America, and pre-eminently qualified to serve on a purely technical commission such as this. Why has this partisan selection been made?

If the Executive is desirous of learning the exact truth regarding the Panama scheme, why has there been omitted from the Commission the very experts who alone are able to give the fullest and most reliable information? The work of General Abbot in connection with the army engineers has won for him a world-wide reputation, and Mr. Fteley, who is a past president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, is now engaged in the construction of the great Croton dam, the most formidable undertaking of its kind in the world. These two gentlemen are so obviously fitted to take a prominent part in the work of the new Commission that their exclusion is liable to arouse serious doubts and misgivings in the minds of that portion of the public which is familiar with the isthmian canal situation, as to the bona fide nature of the investigation.

SPEED AND AIR RESISTANCE IN CYCLING.

It is pretty well understood among those wheelmen who have given any thought to the subject that the chief element of resistance in riding the bicycle on level roads is due to the atmosphere. The simplest proof of this is to be found on a windy day, when the difference between riding against and riding before the wind has only to be felt to be appreciated. The remarkable feat of the professional cyclist Murphy, who on June 21 rode a mile behind a locomotive in one minute and five seconds, proves what an extraordinarily large proportion of the effort of the rider is expended in overcoming air resistance. The shortest time in which a mile has ever been covered with a flying start, unpaced, is one minute, fifty-five and four-fifths seconds. This was done by the rider Hamilton at Denver, June 18, 1898. With human pacing, where the rider is partially protected from the rush of air, the fastest time has been made by Taylor, who covered the mile in one minute and thirty-one and four-fifths seconds. In the recent trial provision was made for inclosing the rider in front, above, and on both sides by a wind shield, and making this protection so complete that he was riding practically in still air. The result shows that complete protection from the wind enables a rider to increase his speed by about 100 per cent. Comparing their records, it is questionable whether Murphy could ride a mile unpaced in as short a time as Hamilton; or to put it in other words, it is probable that Hamilton could ride a mile under the Murphy conditions in less than one minute.

From a scientific standpoint this extraordinary feat will have a value as attracting further attention to the serious nature of air resistance, for it raises the question as to whether the form of all vehicles that move at high speed should not be modified so as to present the least possible resistance to the wind. This is particularly true of locomotives and cars, and it is conceivable that some light form of sheathing extending from the cars nearly to the rails, and from car to car, might materially aid in reducing the air resistance.

A FALSE ALARM.

Several of the New York dailies recently published a rather lurid description of the danger which attends our recently purchased cruiser, the "New Orleans," whenever she goes to sea. The public was gravely informed that this vessel and her sister ship, the "Albany," which is now completing at the Elswick Works, England, have so little natural stability that under certain conditions of loading they are liable to "turn turtle" and disappear from the active list of the United States navy. As a matter of fact, there is not a word of truth in the rumor, and the "New Orleans" merits all the words of commendation which have been bestowed upon her by the officers who were in charge of this crack vessel during the operations of the Spanish war. The origin of the rumor is to be traced to the misunderstanding of a report which was recently made by Naval Constructor Bowles on the inclining experiments lately carried out upon this vessel. Every ship that is built for the United States navy, or acquired by purchase, is put through a series of tests to determine her stability under widely varying conditions of loading. Although the elements of stability are carefully calculated when a ship is designed, there is always a possibility of subsequent changes in the armament or construction of the vessel causing slight variations from the intended stability, and hence it is the practice in our navy to ascertain the actual stability by inclining tests made after the ship is afloat. In the case of the "New Orleans" this was done at the earliest convenient opportunity after the war, and the results were tabulated and forwarded in a report to Washington. It was a misconception of the meaning of the report which led to the ridiculous statements which have been referred to above.

To determine the stability when she is absolutely light, the "New Orleans" was emptied of all coal, ammunition and stores, a condition, of course, in which she would never be found when in commission. It was discovered that when absolutely empty, she has what is known as a negative metacentric height, and in this condition she inclines to port or starboard a few degrees until she assumes a position of stability. There is in this nothing unexpected or unprovided for in her design. Indeed, it is a fact that all the great transatlantic liners have a negative metacentric height when empty of coal and stores, and provision is made in them, as it is in the "New Orleans," for taking a sufficient amount of water as ballast into the double bottom to restore the vessel to an even keel.

It is true that as compared with the majority of our home-built warships the "New Orleans" has, when light, less stability. This results from the fact that more attention is paid in our ships to certain elements which are neglected in the Armstrong vessels in favor of coal capacity, speed, stores and armament. In our own ships, and in those of the British navy, liberal provision is made for the comfortable berthing of the crew. More space is given up to their accommodation than is allowed in the ships of foreign navies. The Armstrong Company, which built the "New Orleans," has a reputation for turning out warships of high speed, great coal capacity and unusually heavy armament, and there is no denying the fact that their ships are particularly showy in this respect. In the elements which do not appear upon paper, however, but which are of equal importance, their vessels will be found in many cases to be lamentably lacking. As a rule, the crew and officers are the chief sufferers, as, for instance, on the "New Orleans," where a large part of the space on the berth deck, which in American ships would be utilized completely as living and sleeping quarters for the crew, is taken up by coal bunkers, something which would never be allowed for a moment by our Bureau of Construction and Repair. Then, again, the number of rounds of ammunition carried per gun is small in these ships; there is a scarcity of small boats; ventilation is not so thoroughly worked out, and in various respects weight is saved in order that it may be put into guns and motive power. Now, when a vessel of this type begins to be emptied of her coal, stores and ammunition—weights which are carried low down in the hull of a ship—it will be seen that she quickly loses her stability and the metacentric height is liable to change from the positive to the negative.

The "New Orleans" incident is of considerable interest as showing how easily we may fall into error in judging of the value of one particular warship as against another. There has been a continual outcry raised in England against the latest ships designed for the British navy by Dr. White, Chief Naval Constructor, because these vessels as compared with the Armstrong vessels have shown ton for ton of displacement a great inferiority in certain elements of fighting power. They are not nearly so heavily armed; they are not so fast; they are not even so well protected; yet, as a matter of fact, we have no doubt that Dr. White, who is responsible for their design, could show that they have compensating advantages in the way of roominess, sea-worthiness, large supplies of ammunition and ample stores which make them fully the equal of the Armstrong ships.

Without saying anything derogatory of the splendid

vessels which are turned out from the Elswick yards, the matter may be expressed in a nutshell by saying that Armstrong builds for the trade and with an eye to the grandstand, and while such phenomenal vessels as the "O'Higgins" and "Esmeralda" are vastly more powerful in armament and speed than other vessels of a like displacement, it is not likely that in the test of actual warfare they would be found to be either better or worse than the best of other navies.

SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALISM.

We have recently been entertained by the daily press with accounts of a spiritualistic investigation of the immortality of the soul, which is remarkable, not so much for the novelty of the results obtained, as for the prominent position occupied by the chief inquisitor as a professor in one of our foremost institutions of learning.

That Prof. Hyslop believes that he has found in spiritualism additional and complete proofs of the soul's immortality can hardly be questioned. He states that he has arrived at his conclusions only after a most thorough and painstaking examination, in which all possibility of fraud was carefully excluded. Indeed, it is the very method of investigation employed which Prof. Hyslop so strongly emphasizes; for he lays great stress upon the scientific methods, the care, and exhaustiveness which characterize his inquiry and distinguish it from previous work in this direction.

Prof. Hyslop has asked the public to withhold its judgment until he has published a full account of his experiments and submitted the facts which he has gathered to the scientific world. As a matter of mere courtesy and justice we should wait. But in the meantime we cannot help remarking how puerile and fruitless have been the results of previous attempts, how disproportionate the time and effort expended. Such men as Marsh, Keble, Dr. Hodgson and Prof. James have also attempted a scientific investigation of spiritualistic phenomena. Mr. Marsh, we are told, talked with Adam and Eve, with Methuselah and other biblical personages. Mr. Keble conversed with Washington, Bonaparte, Byron and a host of equally distinguished men, and both Hodgson and James have brought all the undoubted critical acumen of their minds to bear upon the case of Mrs. Piper. The actual results, judged from a dispassionate, scientific standpoint, are very disappointing. Even in the case of Hodgson and James, they are vague, trivial and inconclusive.

The many newspaper articles which have appeared on Prof. Hyslop's experiments give us (chiefly because of his reticence) no coherent account of what he has actually accomplished. From the little that can be gleaned, however, we are not very sanguine that anything new has been added to what is already known of spiritualism.

In his spiritualistic experiments, Prof. Hyslop has been associated with some of the most distinguished psychologists and alienists, men who have become well known through the value of their contributions to mental science. For this reason we have a right to expect something more than the vagueness and ambiguity which have ever been characteristic of spiritualism, something which will at least prove amenable to the ordinary laws of evidence, and afford us that sensible proof of immortality, the desire for which is coeval with the existence of the human race. Although the publication of the results of his examination into spiritualism may not be accompanied by "such a wave of excitement as the world has never seen before," we trust Prof. Hyslop will keep his promise, and if he presents us with results in the way of spirit communication, we hope they will be marked by that dignity and practical utility which have been so invariably and conspicuously wanting in all previous communications.

THE TRANSPLANTATION OF NERVES.

In a certain proportion of injuries to nerves, the ends cannot be brought together, and a portion of the nerve obtained from one of the lower animals or from an amputated limb can be implanted. Dr. R. Peterson has contributed an important article to The American Journal of Medical Sciences on the transplantation of nerves. It gives some interesting instances. In one case a man was severely injured in the right wrist by a circular saw; he lost sensibility in the hand. Five months after the injury the transplantation of a nerve was decided upon. Four centimeters of the sciatic nerve of a young bloodhound was sutured between the ends of the median nerve with kangaroo tendon. A similar operation was performed on the ulnar nerve. On the following day a distinct return of sensibility in the thumb was found; three months after the operation, sensibility was almost complete. There are twenty recorded cases of transplantation of nerves. There were eight primary and twelve secondary operations. The time from the injury to the operation varied from forty-eight hours to one and a quarter years. Eight out of twelve cases of the secondary operation showed improvement in sensibility or motion, while only four out of eight cases of primary operation im-