

## Odds and Ends.

It is generally believed amongst French people that there is a five-franc piece still in circulation which is worth 100,000 francs, which is equivalent to £4000. The story of this valuable coin is, that the Emperor Napoleon the First finding that a new issue of five-franc pieces, which he had ordered to be coined, was by no means popular with the people, made it known that in one of the coins of this issue he had caused an assignment for 100,000 francs to be hidden, and afterwards had had this particular piece re-minted so that it should be undistinguishable from the rest. The story was received by a large number of the French with the greatest incredulity, but those who believed it, pointed out that the five-franc pieces were sufficiently large to conceal a small paper, and that in order that the assignment should pass uninjured in the re-minting of the coin, it was written on asbestos paper. The consequence was that every year hundreds of five-franc pieces were split open, and those who believe that the coin is still in existence continue to destroy as many five-franc pieces as they can afford in the hope of lighting upon the assignment. It goes without saying that the search is an expensive one, as when split open the coins can only be sold for their silver worth. However, it has now been suggested that the Röntgen rays should be called into the service, as any difference in the density of a piece of metal could readily be discerned by their aid. In this way the 100,000 francs assignment could be quickly discovered, or its existence proved to be a myth, by the examination of all the five-franc pieces issued under the rule of Napoleon, and seeing the years that have elapsed since then, the number of these coins cannot possibly be very large.

To attempt to tame butterflies seems to attempt the impossible, but two ladies in Paris have succeeded wonderfully in this apparently impossible task. A friend of theirs on returning from Asia brought them nearly a hundred rare specimens, each lady taking fifty. By dint of much patience the ladies have tamed the insects to such an extent that now, when they enter the rooms in which each keeps her collection, the butterflies fly to greet her, perching upon her head and shoulders, but particularly upon her finger-tips. This is explained by the fact that they were originally tamed by smearing the finger-tips with honey. Both the ladies paint, and their unusual pets have proved of great service in their art, as they have been able to paint them on the wing and also in groups, and this is impossible under ordinary circumstances.

THE lovely *Maréchal Niel* rose owes its name to the Empress Eugénie. When General Niel returned from the scene of his triumphs over the Austrians in Italy after the battles of Solferino and Magenta a poor man gave him a basket filled with exquisite yellow roses. The general had a cutting struck from one of the blooms, and when the rose tree from it had grown he took it to the Empress Eugénie. She was charmed with the gift, but when she asked the name of the rose, she was told that it was unknown. "Ah!" she said. "I will give it a name; it shall be the *Maréchal Niel*." By this she conveyed to the gallant officer that he had been made a marshal of France for his services to the country, as well as naming the lovely blossom.

"Of all passions indolence is that which is least known to ourselves; it is the most powerful and the most baneful, though its powers be unfelt and the loss which it causes be unseen."

THE official history of the War of the Rebellion now being issued by the Government of the United States of America has the distinction of being the most expensive book ever published in the world. Already it has cost £446,000 and is by no means complete. One half of this sum has been paid for printing and binding, the rest going in rent, stationery, salaries and other miscellaneous expenses.

IN the little village of Hartley in Yorkshire there is a baby so small that it is called "The living doll." The name of this midget of a child is Margaret Saddaby, and she is only twelve inches high and a few ounces in weight. She is perfectly formed and perfectly normal for her age, and has a bright and intelligent expression. Since her birth the child has not grown either in size or weight and has never worn anything but doll's clothes, sleeping in a doll's cradle, which could easily be placed in a doll's house.

THE Argentine Republic has imposed a tax upon celibates of either sex. These are the first two clauses of the new law: "On and after January 1st, 1897, every male from the age of twenty to eighty shall pay a tax until he marries, and shall pay it once in every month." Clause 2: "Young celibates of either sex who shall, without legitimate motive, reject the addresses of him or her (ladies may propose in Argentine) who may aspire to her or his hand, and who continue contumaciously unmarried, shall pay the sum of 500 piastres for the benefit of the young person, man or woman, who has been so refused."

GRASS might be supposed to be the last material from which glass could be obtained. But an accident at a northern glass-factory proves that it is so. A large mass of esparto grass had been burnt by mischance in a furnace, and after it had been entirely consumed large masses of glass were found amongst the ashes. These pieces, on being treated in the usual manner in a kiln, produced glass which is described as "a good sample of bottle-glass." At first sight this seems most extraordinary, but as flint, which is the chief component of glass, is to be found in large quantities in all grasses, and particularly in the straw of wheat and oats, it is easily explained.

A GREAT portion of subterranean Paris is honeycombed with catacombs which were once used as burying-places. A novel use has now been made of these underground galleries that lie immediately beneath the *Jardin des Plantes*, for they have been converted into a laboratory and aquarium. A number of them have been filled with reservoirs and glass tanks, whilst in others the niches that once contained human bodies have been turned into cages, so that scientists may be able to study the effect upon animal life of total and partial darkness.

DAMASCUS is probably the oldest city in the world, and is estimated to be about 4200 years old. It is supposed to have been founded by a great-grandson of Noah, and for many centuries was famous for its manufacture of jewellery, silks and swords. In the Middle Ages a Damascus sword was more highly prized than any other; but the Damascene method of tempering steel is one of the vanished arts of the world, and the famous swords are no longer made. In point of age Jerusalem comes next to Damascus amongst the oldest cities in the world, it having been a Jebusite city in the days of Abraham 3900 years ago. Athens is the oldest city in Europe, being about 3453 years old. Rome is the next oldest, and after that comes Marseilles, founded by a colony of Greeks when Rome was still a small village. London and Paris have neither of them been in existence two thousand years.

FENCING is becoming quite a favourite exercise and pastime with women, it being claimed for it that it thoroughly develops all the muscles of the body. In Germany it is extremely popular, and there, the most fashionable young women receive half-a-dozen of their friends in their fencing-rooms in the afternoon and indulge in trials of skill and strength with the foils. It is said that a few months or even a few weeks' fencing will put muscles of steel into the slenderest of wrists, will train the eye and give a suppleness and grace to the figure, which must be seen to be believed. The devotees of the exercise declare that it develops the strength of the muscles without enlarging them, as is the case with most gymnastics.

ORANGE juice is an excellent cleanser of black boots and shoes. A slice of orange should be rubbed upon the shoe or boot, and as soon as it is dry should be brushed with a soft brush until it shines brightly. The inside of a banana skin will be found most effective for cleaning tan shoes, the skin being rubbed all over the shoe, which should be carefully wiped with a soft cloth, and then briskly polished with a flannel cloth. Patent leather boots or shoes should never be touched with blacking. They are the most difficult of all boots to keep in good order, and require constant care. A damp sponge rubbed over them, and an application of a little sweet oil or vaseline after they have been thoroughly dried will keep them soft and bright, and prevent them cracking.

"THOU knowest well how to excuse and colour thine own deeds, but thou art not willing to receive the excuses of others. It were more just that thou shouldst accuse thyself, and excuse thy brother. If thou wilt be borne withal, bear also with another. Behold, how far off thou art yet from true charity and humility, for that knows not how to be angry with any, or to be moved with indignation, but only against oneself. It is no great matter to associate with the good and gentle, for this is naturally pleasing to all, and every one willingly enjoyeth peace and loveth those best that agree with him. But to be able to live peaceably with hard and perverse persons, or with the disorderly, or with such as go contrary to us, is a great grace, and a most commendable and manly thing."—*Thomas à Kempis*.