

AMERICAN LIFE INSURANCE.

From The Catholic World.

In no country is the business of life insurance on a sounder or more conservative basis than in the United States. There were some attempts made in the early years of the century to start life insurance companies, but life insurance was not popular in those days, it being regarded by many, as the quaint remark of a writer of the period puts it, as "wicked to insure their lives, or to travel in steamboats against wind and tide." The three largest companies at present doing business began in 1841, 1843 and 1859.

The remarkable development in the business began after the Civil War, and it has grown with an unexampled progress. The great conservative life insurance companies stood the shock of the financial convulsions of 1873 and 1893 better than other financial institutions, and the words of the famous mathematician, De Morgan, still remain true: "There is nothing in the commercial world which approaches, even remotely, the security of a well-established life office." The three large companies receive annually in premiums and other income about \$100,000,000, their assets aggregate about \$600,000,000, and they have outstanding assurance to the amount of about \$2,400,000,000. The natural presumption arising from a study of the development of such an enterprise is that to have maintained its place in the great field of competition it must have subserved a purpose of great benefit to society.

THE "GREAT EASTERN" TO BE ECLIPSED.

From The American Shipbuilder.

The "Great Eastern," that majestic failure in marine construction, is at last to be outdone in size. The White Star Line has contracted with Harland & Wolf for the construction of a mammoth passenger steamship which is to measure 704 feet in length, or twenty feet longer than the "Great Eastern." The new vessel is to be named "Oceanic," after the pioneer steamship of the company. Work on the "Oceanic" is to be commenced at once, and it is expected that she will be ready for launching in January next. A steamship of such gigantic proportions as the "Oceanic" will necessarily require a tremendous engine power. But while a record breaking pace would be easily possible from an engineering point of view, no such triumph in speed is being contemplated. Profiting by the experience gained from those comparatively slow yet highly economical vessels, the "Britannic" and "Germanic," the White Star Line in its new venture will not make any sacrifices to mere speed. In her internal arrangements the vessel will be an enlarged reproduction of the "Majestic," except in so far as improvements may have suggested themselves in the size and fittings of the rooms, and which may be rendered practicable by the increased dimensions of the ship itself. It is interesting to compare the length of this new giantess with that of other leviathans now in service or building. For many years the Anchor Line steamship "City of Rome" outclassed her 561 feet of length over all other vessels in the trans-Atlantic service, so far as dimensions went. She had to take second place when the Cunarder "Campania" came out with her 620 feet of length over all. The "Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse," now in construction for the North German Lloyds, has still greater length, measuring 649 6 feet. The big Hamburg-American "Pennsylvania," which recently arrived here on her maiden trip, has a deck measurement of 585 feet in length.

A REMARKABLE ENGINEERING FEAT.

From The Railway Review.

A great section of mountain was recently torn off by 10,000 lbs. of powder, lifted several feet straight up, and then pushed bodily forward 40 or 50 feet trembling over the gorge below the dam, and then falling with an awful roar 125 feet, to remain hereafter for all time as the bulwark of the great dam being built to impound water for the city of San Francisco. The dam is forty-three miles east of the city. For two months or more preparations had been made for the monster blast, in common with another blast that is nearly ready. The plan was to cut tunnels into the side of the mountain at various points above the bed of the creek,

and to place in these tunnels, first, great stores of black powder, which ignites slower than giant powder, and, therefore, has more pushing power and less shattering effect. On the surface and in places through the mountain side were placed big deposits of giant powder for the purpose of shattering the mass and lifting it up. According to plans the black powder when it exploded would hurl the mass straight forward, making a bridge of granite across the gorge and blocking the stream. The plans were carried out with the greatest care. Danger was constantly feared from the great mines of powder, but all went well and the blast was finally ready. A lot of insulated electric wires, connecting with each deposit of powder and attached to exploders, were gathered into one circuit in a tunnel across the gorge and above the blast. The signal was passed, the switch closed and a wonderful scene instantly followed. The side of the opposite hill, composed of great boulders and masses of granite in dikes, quivered, rose from its bed of centuries and shot out thousands of little squirming tongues of dust, that gave the whole hill a peculiar fuzzy appearance. This for a fraction of a second. A growl, like the angry diapason of the ocean, sounded deep down in the hill, and before the spectators recovered their equilibrium after the artificial earthquake the mass was falling. When the dust cleared away it was found that the blast had dislodged a mass of rock 400 feet up and down stream and an average of 60 feet in height, completely bridging the canyon. The engineers estimated that the amount dislodged weighed about 150,000 tons. The rock was thrown exactly as the engineers had planned.

FEEDING SILKWORM AND SHEEP.

From St. Nicholas.

Wherever a handful of earth can be made to rest upon a ledge in Lebanon there a mulberry plant grows. It is a picturesque and thrilling sight to see a boy lowered by a rope over the precipice, carrying a big basket of earth and cuttings of mulberry twigs to plant in his hanging garden. The crop of leaves, fodder for the worms, is gathered in the same way. By such patient and dangerous industry have these hardy mountaineers been able to make their wilderness of rock blossom into brightly colored silks. Not a single leaf is left on the trees by the time the voracious worms get ready to spin their cocoons, but a second crop comes on later, and a curious use is made of that. The tree-owner purchases one of those queer big-tailed Syrian sheep, the tail of which weighs twenty pounds when at the full maturity of its fatness; and then a strange stuffing process begins, not unlike the fattening of the Strasburg geese. When the sheep can eat no more, the women of the house feed it, and it is no uncommon sight to see a woman going out to make an afternoon call, leading her sheep by a string, and carrying a basket of mulberry leaves on her arm. Having arrived at her friend's house, she squats on the ground, rolls a ball of mulberry leaves in her right hand, and slips it into the sheep's mouth, then works the sheep's jaw up and down with the other hand till she thinks the mouthful has been chewed enough, when she thrusts it down the throat of the unfortunate animal. The funny part of the business is that probably half a dozen gossips of the village are seated around the yard, all engaged at the same operation. Of course the sheep get immensely fat, and that is the object; for at the killing time the fat is tried out and put into jars, as meat for the winter.

CHINESE RAILWAYS.

An English periodical notes that American manufacturers of railway rolling stock and appliances are at present keeping a sharp look out in China, where large railway undertakings are expected soon to be commenced. It is reported that there are representatives of at least two combinations of American capitalists offering to build and equip any line of railway which the Chinese Government may desire. There is also a Trans-Atlantic company tendering for the construction of an electric tramway in the foreign section of Shanghai. It is to be hoped, says the journal in question, that British contractors are keeping well *en rapport* with those who have to do with the placing of such contracts in the far east; for they may count upon having vigorous competition from Brother Jonathan.

EDUCATION IN RUSSIA.

From "In the Land of Tolstoi."

A few figures, taken from official sources, and referring to the first years of the present decade, will throw considerable light on the matter of popular education in Russia. About 200,000 recruits are yearly enlisted in the army, and of these only about 50,000 can read. Among the peasants proper the percentage of illiterates rises to 95 per cent. In some parts . . . there is only one school to each 200 villages. If Russia had the same proportion as her neighbor, Sweden, for example, she would have about 250,000 schools, while she actually has only 18,000. Again, take Russia's enormous budget of 1,000,000,000 rubles. Of this only 500,000 are devoted to popular education—that is, one-eleventh part of what is devoted to the maintenance of the imperial Court, one six-hundredth part of the cost of the army, and one two-thousandth part of the whole. At about same time Great Britain was spending about £9,000,000 for elementary education, etc., with a population little more than a third of that of Russia. Moreover, about two-thirds of this paltry sum of 500,000 rubles goes in salaries of inspectors.

THE ORIGINAL UNCLE SAM.

From St. Nicholas.

During the War of 1812 the United States Government entered into a contract with a man by the name of Elbert Anderson to furnish supplies to the army. When the United States buys anything from a contractor, an inspector is always appointed to see that the goods are what the contract calls for and that the Government gets full value. In this case the Government appointed a man by the name of Samuel Wilson, who was always called "Uncle Sam" by those who knew him. He inspected every package and cask that came from Elbert Anderson, the contractor, and if he found that the contents were all right the package or cask was marked with the letters "E. A. - U. S." the initials of the contractor and of the United States. The man whose duty it was to do this marking was a jovial sort of fellow, and when somebody asked him what these letters meant he said they stood for Elbert Anderson and Uncle Sam. Everybody, including "Uncle Sam" Wilson himself, thought this was a very good joke; and by and by it got into print, and before the end of the war it was known all over the country, and that is the way the United States received its name of "Uncle Sam." Mr. Wilson, the original "Uncle Sam," died at Troy, N.Y., in 1854, at the age of eighty-four.

MERCURY.

From The Atlantic Monthly.

Mercury is a body devoid, practically, if not absolutely, of air, water, and of vegetation, consequently incapable of supporting any of those higher organisms which we know as living beings. His surface is a vast desert. It is rough rather than smooth. Whether this roughness be due to mountains proper or to craters, we are too far away from him to have been able yet to say. The latter are the more probable. Over the greater part of his surface change either diurnal or seasonal is unknown. Three-eighths of his surface is steeped in perpetual glare, three-eighths shrouded in perpetual gloom, while the remaining quarter slowly turns between the two. The planet itself, as a world, is dead.

—An extraordinary story appeared in London *Truth* the other day, which sets forth a new cure for kleptomaniacs and shoplifters, as performed in a large drapery and fancy goods emporium, one of whose proprietors is given as authority for the facts as published. According to our contemporary, a lady detected in pocketing a valuable piece of lace was offered the alternative of exposure and imprisonment or a sound beating with well-seasoned birch rods, applied by a stalwart sister of the retail shopkeeper. The latter alternative being accepted, the proprietor retired, and ere long the private room rang with the howls and sobs of the shoplifter, who asseverated vehemently that she never would do it again. The *Drapers' Record* thinks some one has put up a job on *Truth*, and declines to swallow the story. But there may be truth in it, for Labouchere is a pretty old bird and not easily taken in.