

Science Siftings

BY VOLT

The Panama Canal.

Colonel Gothals has promised Mr. Taft that ships shall be passing through the canal on January 1, 1915. Mr. Taft, after his trip through the Culebra cut with the engineers, expressed himself as delighted with the progress that has been made. He was particularly interested in the rock cut, 350 feet deep, through the mountain, only 95 feet remaining to be done. Mr. Taft went the entire nine miles and received a great ovation from the laborers.

The Magnetic Pole.

The South Magnetic Pole located by the Shackleton exploration party (says an exchange) is just about a thousand miles from the South Geographical Pole. The earth is a magnet, and like every magnet it has two 'poles.' But it is not uniformly magnetised. If it were a uniformly magnetised globe, its magnetic poles would correspond with its geographical poles. If a number of people were to start from different places on the earth and move north by the compass, they would eventually assemble in a land called Boothia. This is where the North Magnetic Pole is situated. Sir James Ross located the North Magnetic Pole in 1831, and in the winter of 1903-4 Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, spent some months in Boothia studying the Magnetic Pole. There is a similar Pole in the southern hemisphere. We adopt the geographical terms to describe these two Poles. But as a matter of fact, if a freely moving magnet is suspended, its south pole dips towards the South Pole of the earth, and as the north pole of one magnet attracts the south pole of another, it follows that the Magnetic Pole of the southern hemisphere of the earth must be, strictly speaking, its north magnetic pole.

A Mystery of Nature.

The work done by Mr. J. Murray, biologist to the Antarctic expedition, is of an intensely valuable and interesting character, states the *Lyttelton Times*. Mr. Murray was stationed at the Cape Royds base and his time was spent in observing, collecting, and photographing the animal life of the region. Most wonderful of the many mysteries of Nature which Mr. Murray unravelled was the life history of a marvellous rotifer. These creatures, which are of a family of microscopic water insects, were found fifteen feet deep in ice. The lake in which the rotifera lived had not thawed for two summers, so that the little creatures had been at least three years in ice when they were discovered. Half an hour after it had been thawed out, the rotifera commenced to feed voraciously, and made a hearty meal of minute vegetable matter. They were then frozen and thawed again each week and seemed to accept the process with unvarying equanimity. Mr. Murray has obtained vast numbers of rotifera, which he will distribute amongst scientists in New Zealand, Australia, and Great Britain.

A Monster Spider.

Travellers in the mountains of Ceylon and India speak of a gigantic spider that is to be found there. It measures about six inches across and is quite handsome—if a spider can be that. The under part of the body is either bright gold or scarlet, and the upper part is covered with a delicate slate-colored fur. The web spun by it is like yellow silk, with a central net five feet in length. The web is strong enough to catch and hold a good-sized bird. Sometimes a man rides into one of them without seeing it, and the threads wrap about his face like the silk cords of a real net. Having spun its web the spider sits motionless, waiting for its victim. Presently some large insect or perhaps a bird comes flying against it, and is at once caught in the meshes. Then the monster runs fast across the net and begins throwing the coils around the captive. It works rapidly and soon has the head completely wrapped up, so that the captive is first blinded and then choked. The bite of this spider is not poisonous, like that of the tarantula, but a man who ran into one of these webs and got nipped in the nose by the watchful owner says its jaws are as strong as the beak of a bird. Here and there in the forest may be found skeletons of birds hanging in the webs, the threads of which are strong enough to retain the bones after the weather has destroyed the flesh and blown away the feathers.

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Intercolonial

The Marist Fathers some time ago made arrangements to build a suitable vessel for missionary work among the Islands. The work is now being proceeded with, and it is expected the vessel will be ready for service about the end of May.

A magnificent demonstration of national patriotism (says the *Freeman's Journal*) marked the close of St. Patrick's Day celebrations on Saturday, March 20, at the Royal Agricultural Society's Grounds, Sydney. More than 20,000 people thronged the enclosure, each content to share in the general rejoicings, and all equally proud of the possession of the green emblem so dear to the Irish heart.

The Melbourne correspondent of the *Sydney Freeman's Journal* writes:—The Very Rev. Dean Phelan, V.G., has received a cable message from his Grace the Archbishop congratulating him on the success of the St. Patrick's Day demonstrations. The Most Rev. prelate was particularly pleased with the account he received of Lord Dudley's speech and the presence of their Excellencies at the Irish national gathering. The receipts from the exhibition fete show that £230 was taken in excess of last year, which was considered a record result; while the concert in the Town Hall returned £232 4s, the largest sum ever received from this event. When the Archbishop will return to Melbourne is still uncertain, as in a letter from him received on St. Patrick's Day he said he had not even then decided with regard to his return.

His Eminence Cardinal Moran opened the twenty-ninth annual District Meeting of the H.A.C.B. Society in Sydney on March 23, and delivered an important address. The report of the District Officers disclosed a most fruitful year's work. It stated in part:—During the year 11 branches were opened, while another branch is about to be opened at Ballina, Richmond River. The total membership at the close of the year was 7639. The net increase in district funds for the year amounted to £3319 17s 9d, and in branch funds £2043 18s 1d, or the splendid total net increase (district and branch) of £5363 15s 10d. The total funds of the society now amount to £50,444 18s 4d, made up as follows: District funeral fund, £20,487 18s 2d; women's consolidated sick fund, £990 4s 11d; other district funds, £443 18s; branch sick funds, £27,053 8s 11d; other branch funds, £1467 8s 4d.

One of the last private acts of Sir Harry Rawson, Governor of New South Wales, before leaving for England was the sending of the following letter of congratulation to his Eminence Cardinal Moran, in which he expressed his appreciation of the St. Patrick's Day celebrations: 'Your Eminence,—Will you please convey to the children my best congratulations on the magnificent spectacle I had the privilege of witnessing at the Agricultural Grounds this afternoon. The display of drill was a sight long to be remembered, and can only have been the result of a good organisation by the committee, of tireless and patient effort on the part of the teachers, and of a willing response by well-disciplined pupils. Such exhibitions promote grand training for both mind and body, besides being an opportunity for display by the children of loyalty to their King, devotion to the mother country, and pride in the flourishing portion of the Empire which is their inheritance.'

His Eminence Cardinal Moran speaking at the Hibernian Society's annual breakfast in Sydney, said:—Every citizen in this free land of Australia must use his vote, which is his rifle for the maintenance of the spirit and integrity of the country, and to enable it to attain its destiny. I am sorry to say, judging from public reports in the press, that it is really astounding to find sometimes in an electorate of say 10,000 voters, only 2000 or 3000 avail themselves of their votes. They cannot complain if their representative does not employ his influence and position in Parliament to carry out the mandate the electors gave him. Every man and woman—now that the womanhood of Australia is entitled to the franchise—should vote according to conscience for the person whom they believe best suited to carry out their wishes, to maintain the integrity of the State, its freedom, and assert its rights, and who will, moreover, make that due progress in promoting the happiness and welfare of the country which the representatives of the people should make. I cannot too strongly impress this matter upon you, especially as we Catholic voters are identified in this connection with our Protestant fellow-citizens. Sometimes people say, 'We should vote for a Catholic,' but I say any man who offers himself to you for election on the sole ground of being a Catholic should be laid aside. Do not vote for him.

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