

badly as to reduce the population to starvation. Since then the women have taken the State in hand and made it prosperous."

#### ITEMS OF INTEREST.

At a meeting of the Liverpool District Needlework Guild, on Monday, a letter was read from the Duchess of Teck, commending the scheme of making special grants of garments to district nurses in commemoration of the Queen's Jubilee, and adding she is more anxious than ever that the needs of the sick should be ministered to, she herself being unwell, and feeling how many comforts the poor must lack when ill.

We learn from *London* that the City Guardians have at last been driven to taking some notice of the communications of the Local Government Board. At one meeting the letter received from the Board inquiring what observations the Guardians had to make on Mr. Lobb's indictment against their workhouse banquets, was disposed of by proceeding to the next business. Consequently, another letter was received from the Local Government Board, reminding the Guardians that no information had been received, and asking them to attend to the matter. The Guardians evidently felt that to snub the Board again would be to bring down an inspector, who would make a thorough and impartial investigation, which they seem anxious to avoid.

A motion was proposed that it be referred to a committee, consisting of the chairman, vice-chairman, and deputy-chairman of the Board, and the chairman of its Standing Committees. The object of this motion was evidently to keep the inquiry in the hands of the ring who participated most largely in the refreshments. An amendment which was proposed, that an inquiry be conducted by seven independent guardians, was lost by 18 votes to 10. We cannot imagine that the Local Government Board will be satisfied with an inquiry conducted by those whose conduct forms the subject of the inquiry.

The description given by Colonel Baden Powell in "The Matabele Campaign" of the fare which fell to his lot as one of a scouting party, is of interest as showing what our soldiers are called upon to undergo in the discharge of their duty. He says, "This was our menu: Weak tea (can't afford it strong), no sugar (we are out of it), a little bread (we have half a pound a day), Irish stew (consisting of a slab of horse boiled in muddy water, with a pinch of rice and half a pinch of pea flour), salt none. For a plate I use one of my gaiters."

He also gives the following recipe for bread-making: "To bake bread lay your coat on the ground, inside upwards, mix the flour in it (it doesn't show when you put the coat on again); for yeast or baking powder use the juice of the toddy palm or Eno's fruit salt, to make a light dough; scrape a circle in the ashes of the fire, flop your lump of dough down on to it, flour the dough, spread fine sand all round and all over it, then heap the embers of the fire on to it; in half an hour an excellent flat loaf of bread results. It requires scrubbing with a horse brush before you eat it."

#### A Book of the Week.

##### "UNCLE BERNAC."\*

THIS new novel of the ever popular Dr. Conan Doyle gives the idea that the author had carefully collected sufficient material for a well worked-out romance, and had then been compelled by the urgency of either publishers or public to hurriedly fling together his ingredients, and produce a curiously mixed piece of writing, which is hardly to be considered as a tale, yet can only be described as fiction.

Louis de Laval, the hero, is one of the *émigrés* of the Revolution. He is living in England, at Ashford, in Kent, when he receives a letter from his mother's brother, one Bernac, who, at the time of the Terror, succeeded in possessing himself of the estates whence the de Lavals had been ousted. The letter contains a most cordially worded invitation to let bygones be bygones, and to come to France to put his sword at the service of Buonaparte. Outside the letter, just over the seal, is scrawled, in English, in a different hand, "Don't come."

Here is a fine opening! It is worthy of Stanley Weyman—whom Dr. Doyle, by the way, seems to have taken very much as his model in this tale. But we miss here, as in all his writing, the magic touch which makes Mr. Weyman such a supreme artist—the power to make the reader love and sympathise entirely with his hero or heroine—the skilful infusion of a humanity which is real, though outlined with such apparent slightness. Mr. Weyman's are not merely stories of adventure, they are the adventures of a person whom we know, and of whom we are sincerely fond: therein lies the charm.

The hero of "Uncle Bernac" is simply a young man, of whom we know no more, and for whom we care rather less, on the last page than on the first. The interest of the tale is further unwisely curtailed by the fact that the hero tells us, almost on the first page, who it is that he is going to marry on the last. But for this foreknowledge, one's interest in Sybille would be far deeper, for one sees at a glance that she is far too good for the wretched poltroon, Lucien, and that another future will have to be devised for her. We are glad to meet again our old friend, Brigadier Gérard, who is Dr. Conan Doyle's best attempt at character-drawing.

The whole account of the camp at Boulogne, and of Napoleon and his court, is very clever, but much too long for the short tale which it completely dwarfs. The confidence of the French soldiers in the conquest of England is very amusingly described.

"Well, well," said he, "we shall know all about it soon, for we are going to conquer it. They say in the camp that we shall probably enter London either next Wednesday, or early on Thursday morning. We are to have a week for plundering the town, and then one army corps is to take possession of Scotland, and another of Ireland."

His serene confidence made me smile. "But how do you know that you can do all this?" I asked.

"O," said he, "The Emperor has arranged it."

"But they have an army, and they are well prepared: they are brave men, and will fight."

\* "Uncle Bernac," by Conan Doyle. (Smith, Elder & Co.)

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