

CURRENT TOPICS.

Rice is classed among the health foods, and we find it indorsed by the inventor of one of the strictest diets ever proposed for unhappy man. It gives a shock, therefore, when the London Lancet propounds the question, "Is beri-beri caused by rice?" and indicates in a long answer that it is. Beri-beri is a most objectionable disease that afflicts the people of oriental countries and that is said to be identical with the sleeping sickness of the west coast of Africa. The more one reads about it the more one wishes that it may remain a requisite of the Africans and the orientals. But here is rice travelling everywhere to be eaten, and the case against uncured rice is very strong. The Lancet, in speaking of the observation of Dr. Henry Fraser and Dr. A. T. Stantant, says: "These observers investigated the conditions under which two parties of coolies, carefully selected and examined, were working in the virgin forest, living in new huts and kept under the most hygienic conditions practicable, one party feeding on cured and the other on uncured rice. In the course of some weeks beri-beri developed among the latter, but was quickly cured when they were put on diet of cured rice. The party fed on cured rice remained in good health."

It is estimated that in the Malay peninsula and the East Indian archipelago nearly one-fifth of the population suffer from beri-beri, and always the disease is found to prevail most generally among the consumers of the uncured rice. This The Lancet says, is the ordinary white rice of commerce, which is decorated in mills by a process that scours away together with the husk all the surface layer of the seed. It becomes more dangerous as it goes stale. The cured rice is soaked, steamed and dried, when the husk is easily separated by light milling. The age and the treatment account for the presence or absence of beri-beri, and one of the experts believes that a poison developed in stale, uncured rice explains all the phenomena of the disease. This is interesting, when the uncured article gets into all the markets or not. It will surprise ultimate consumers—who, while not agreeing with Sir Robert Hart that rice is the best food in the world, are clearly of the opinion that it is insipid enough to be harmless. Perhaps they will entertain a greater respect for it now and clamor for it along with veal and fried pork.

Antarctica is the continent surrounding the south pole, which this year has been brilliantly explored by Ernest H. Shackleton. He has discovered the high plateau lying near the pole and traveled it at altitudes of from 8,000 to 10,000 feet to a point no more than 150 miles from the pole. The recent explorers have proved that in Jurassic, Cretaceous and Tertiary times this most southern land, as has long been suspected, had a temperate or even warmer climate. The evidence also points to the conclusion that there was once a land connection between Antarctica and more northern lands, at least with South America.

Nornenskiold in 1902 made a sledge journey of 400 miles along the eastern side of West Antarctica, where the bold King Oscar mountains rise high above the shore line. On the west side of the same long narrow stretch of mountain land Dr. Charcot surveyed new coast lands in 1905. It is thought that this land, which is the nearest approach of Antarctic soil to the northern continents, may be a great peninsula putting northward from the frozen continental mass. Almost straight across the polar area from West Antarctica Drygalski discovered, in 1902, south of the Indian ocean, the ice clad Kaiser Wilhelm II. Land in the same region where Lieut Wilkes of our navy found the long stretch of shores some seventy years ago that bear the name of Wilkes land.

In 1904 Bruce of the Scottish expedition discovered Coals land far south of the Atlantic, whose coast he was able to follow for seventy-five miles. This coast is believed to represent another segment of the continent of Antarctica. Scott discovered in 1902 King Edward VII. land, which is joined by the great ice barrier of Ross to South Victoria land. And in the same year he traced the coast of South Victoria land toward the pole for 380 miles and at his farthest point he saw the mountains still stretching southward at the eighty-third parallel. Within the last few months Shackleton has sledged hundreds of miles over the ice, south of Scott's farthest.

A Romance of Cross Purposes

In a more robust age, when the world was young and less polite, Barbara would have broken the hearts of Emperors, provoked wars between great nations, and altered the map of Europe. In the effete twentieth century she merely arrogates to herself the admiration that should, properly, be shared among half a country full of girls; is adored—more or less frankly—by most of the women. I have been an onlooker in many of her affairs of the heart, or rather her affairs of other people's hearts. As an onlooker perhaps I have seen most of the game; at any rate, I count it an excuse for my existence that she calls me her friend and asks my advice—not of course meaning to follow it.

I was sitting in my garden smoking, and not reading the paper, one morning when Barbara came in and sat down on the grass by the side of my chair. She sighed twice without speaking. Barbara always prefers other people to start the conversation. Afterwards, as a rule, she attends to it thoroughly. "Haven't you better tell me all about it?" I remarked.

"I am so unhappy," she began. "I have never been so unhappy before."

"Surely," I exclaimed in some concern, "you are not in love, Barbara?"

"No," indignantly. "I am unhappy for somebody else."

"Tell me," I commanded, and Barbara settled down to a full outpouring of her sorrows.

"It's Bobbie," she began. Now if there is one among my friends less unworthy than the rest to love and be loved by Barbara, Bobbie is the man.

Equally with her, he makes me the confidant of his troubles—so I listened eagerly for further revelations.

"I can tell you because you are a friend of his," said Barbara. "The silly boy has fallen in love with me." She paused dramatically.

"Quite right and proper," I observed judiciously. "That leaves only the policeman and the butcher boy in the village who haven't."

"It's nothing to be funny about," said Barbara, and I could see she was really serious. "You know I like him. He's the dearest boy and perfectly adorable. But I don't like him—in that way. And it's so ridiculous of him and inconsiderate."

I nodded sympathetically. "But what can I do? If I go to a dance, he's there. He turns up at every tennis party within twenty miles that I go to. If I go anywhere for a week-end, he travels by the same train."

"Perhaps he'll get over it," I suggested hopefully. "Other men have, you know."

Barbara shook her head. "He's going to propose," she said despondently. "And then when I've refused him, of course, things will never be the same again. He won't be able to forget and neither shall I. And we've had the very jolliest times together."

"Are you sure he'll propose?" "He's certain to. He tried the other night. It was at the Warrens'! I was very tired, and in a weak moment I sat out a dance with him in the conservatory. It was a lovely place—I'd found it three dances before—with Captain Jackson—and so long as Bobbie was content to sit and flirt quietly like an ordinary man, it was jolly. But he got serious, and said 'Barbara' two or three times as if he was speaking out of his boots. Then he got hold of my hand, and as I saw a proposal written all over his face (Barbara is thoroughly conversant with the symptoms) I got up quickly and said rather nervously: 'I think you had better take me back to my chaperone.'"

(Barbara rolled this out with indescribable relish. She so seldom uses one.)

"But, unless you can help me, it's only postponed," she went on dismally. "If he doesn't do it this afternoon after tea, he'll do it tomorrow after the tennis tournament."

"How can I help you?" I exclaimed in dismay. "I can't tell him."

"Not tell him," pursued Barbara insinuatingly. "Oh no, just give him a hint. I'm sure you can do it, Arthur, you are so diplomatic and so—so discreet."

"I won't," I declared flatly. And yet when half-an-hour later Barbara left me to my pleasantly disturbed smoke, such is the weakness of my nature, or the strength of hers, that I was pledged to administer in the shape of a gilded pill the information that my poor friend Bobbie's passion was a hopeless one.

It was that same day, I remember, that Bobbie dropped in unexpectedly to see me. It was after lunch, and I was in the garden again.

"Now for it," I groaned as I saw him coming down the path, and I grasped again as he settled himself not two inches from the spot

Barbara had occupied in the morning.

"You're looking rather cheap, Robert," I ventured.

"Feel it, old chap," he responded shortly. "Fact is, I'm worried."

"Perhaps I can help you," I remarked, feeling that things were being made easy for me.

"I believe you could if you would," he said slowly. "Have you noticed something—rather strange about Barbara lately?"

"No-o," I said doubtfully.

"I believe you have. Look here, old man, I'll tell you what I mean without any beating about the bush. You know I'm not a conceited sort of chap, or anything like that, but it's just this, I'm afraid the poor little girl is falling in love with me."

"I'm afraid so," Bobbie repeated. "Of course she's the jolliest little girl in the world, and I like her awfully, but the fact is she's not my style, and I can't—can't—"

he hesitated.

"Reciprocate," I suggested.

"That's it," he said. "And it's so horribly awkward. Wherever I go, she goes. I meet her at teas, tennis-parties, and week-ends. Then at the Warrens' the other night, we were sitting out in the conservatory. She knew the place evidently, and—well, old man, I suddenly found her hand in mine—mind, I don't say she actually put it there, I don't say that—but well, I think she expected me to propose to her—and I didn't. I felt an awful end when she stood up and said in a quaky little voice: 'I think you had better take me back to my chaperone.'"

"H'm," I said.

"Now, you know her so well," he pursued, "she talks to you so freely—I know she does for she's told me—that you might—"

"Give her a hint, eh?" I said rather snappishly.

"Well, why not? Think of all the pain it would save us both. I should hate to make the poor little girl miserable."

"Bobbie, my boy," I said, "you ask no light thing. Yet such is my friendship for you—for you both, in fact—that I will see what can be done."

"You're a brick, old man," he muttered huskily as he wrung my hand. I think I noticed a tear in his eye as he turned away and hurried down the path.

I saw Barbara again a day or two later, and I told her I had spoken the word of wisdom to Bobbie, and that he had said she was not to worry; that he hoped time would heal even a heart lacerated as his.

"How splendid of him!" she said softly, and a tear fell into the middle of a pink geranium she was wearing. "I wish," she began.

"What do you wish?" I asked, and I couldn't help smiling a little.

"I wish," she repeated. "Oh never mind—and it's perfectly horrid of me to be amused."

"By the way, Bobbie," I said next time I found him alone. "I had a chat with Barbara the other day. She wants me to tell you not to worry—that she quite understands that it needn't make any difference. She wants you still to be friends with her."

"Poor little girl," he murmured sentimentally. "Poor little—" he broke off savagely. "Oh yes, it's very funny, I know," and threw himself violently out of the room.

I suppose I must have smiled.

I didn't see quite so much as usual of Barbara or Bobbie during the weeks that followed. Onr did they, so far as I could make out, see quite so much of each other.

But at last I came to see me looking quite unlike her usual radiance before—with Captain Jackson—and so long as Bobbie was content to sit and flirt quietly like an ordinary man, it was jolly. But he got serious, and said 'Barbara' two or three times as if he was speaking out of his boots. Then he got hold of my hand, and as I saw a proposal written all over his face (Barbara is thoroughly conversant with the symptoms) I got up quickly and said rather nervously: 'I think you had better take me back to my chaperone.'"

"He does," I said shortly.

"Is it—?" she began and paused.

"I'm afraid so," I replied. "He always seems so depressed and wretched nowadays."

"I wish I could do something," said Barbara earnestly.

"Do you think if I saw him and talked to him, it would cheer him up?"

"Wouldn't that be rather dangerous? Besides, the wound ought to be nearly healed by now. It would be cruel to open it again."

"I am not so sure," said Barbara with an entire lack of logic.

"And do you know I don't think you can have given him that hint very diplomatically—and I particularly asked you to be very kind and careful. . . . Did I hear you say anything?"

"Er—nothing particular," I said hastily.

"Well, I believe you were horrid to him, and I'm going to sit out two—or, three dances with him at the Warrens' to-night and be awfully nice to him just to make up. And I don't care . . . it opens the wound again or not. So there."

I made a point of seeing Bobbie quite casually that afternoon. After saying the usual things about the weather, I broached my subject. "Barbara isn't looking half the girl she was. Seen her lately?"

"Bobbie scowled.

"Yes. And I must say, old chap, it seems to me that you must have been beastly clumsy what I asked you to tell her. . . . Well, you needn't swear. Of course, I don't doubt you did your best."

"It was a jickish job."

"That's no excuse for being brut-

al, and I can't bear to think of her feeling wretched about it. I'm going to the Warrens' to-night, and if she's there I'm going to dance as many dances with her as she'll give me."

"An excellent idea," I observed. "And don't forget the conservatory."

I went to the Warrens' and I danced one dance with Barbara early in the evening, which was only half my usual allowance. I hardly saw her again, or Bobbie either, for the matter of that, till people were going home. Then he was arranging her in her carriage. Quite unaccountably he shook hands with me as if I were a long lost millionaire uncle. Barbara blushed, looked the other way, and quite refused to speak to me, but this I understood when Bobbie came round next morning to tell me that I was to be (by her special request) stage manager of a certain important function looming in the near future.

KEEPING THINGS DARK

TRADE SECRETS WHICH ARE WORTH MILLIONS.

Methods Adopted to Keep Them From Getting Out Are Quite Simple.

The death of Mr. Horatio G. Powell, the inventor of a secret process of enamelling, recalls the story of the extraordinary precautions taken to maintain the secrecy of the inventor's recipe. Until Mr. Powell's discovery, workers in the enamel trade ran the risk of catching several noxious diseases, and when the inventor produced what he proved to be a harmless, improved process, he knew that his secret was priceless, says London Answers.

Rival firms wished to get an inkling of the secret, but the specially selected workmen were incorruptible. As a result, Mr. Powell amassed a huge fortune. The invention was confined to Wolverhampton, and the Midland town became famous for its enamelling work.

THE LIQUEUR OF MYSTERY.

It is only natural that every precaution should be taken to guard costly trade secrets. There is a certain firm of sauce makers which guards night and day the recipe which has made it famous and wealthy. No workman knows the whole of it, for it is divided up between certain departments, and only the head of the firm can tell what makes up the whole. The secret remained inviolable for one hundred years.

The oldest trade secret in the world belongs to the famous monks of Chartreuse. They have specialized in wines, brandies, and liqueurs for more than six hundred years, and there are records proving that the famous liqueurs were made by them in the sixteenth century. Their history makes interesting reading. They have been attacked by robbers, anxious to get the secret, which is still with them. Rivals have publicly proclaimed that they have solved the mystery at last, but all such claims are false.

BANKNOTE PAPER.

The Government small-arm factories offer workmen temptations which are not realized by the public. Every year these factories test many pattern guns and rifles, the object being, of course, to find the perfect weapon. Foreign Governments are engaged in a similar task, and it behoves the British nation to keep its best secret. Telegraph officials are another class of Government servant who must not talk "shop," and more than one dismissal has resulted from failure to remember this.

The secrecy adopted in the matter of banknote making is fairly well known. Most of the great note forgeries of the last hundred years have been detected by means of the process of the paper used. No thief has yet succeeded in manufacturing similar paper to that used for Bank of England notes.

When the Dreadnought was in course of building numerous attempts were made by the emissaries of foreign powers to obtain particulars of the newest things in battleships. But the Admiralty had organized the dockworkers splendidly, and where common patriotism was found wanting a system of supervising the men was adopted that kept at bay all danger.

The other day the Professor of Metallurgy at Sheffield University announced the discovery of a process for making an improved steel that would be twice as good as that in use. This will, of course, further enhance the reputation of British steel, and we may be sure nothing will be left to chance in the guarding of the secret.

COUNTRY SHOPS' BOYCOTT

AN EXTRAORDINARY SITUATION IN ENGLAND.

Residents in Towns Who Buy in London Boycotted by Provincial Houses.

An extraordinary story of a boycott which, it is said, is being organized against all the squires, clergy and residents in country towns who buy their goods from London stores, is told in the Ironmonger's Weekly, of London, England.

According to that journal, the boycott is having the effect of causing many country houses to be kept empty, and many local functions supported by the classes affected to prove failures.

"In nearly every country place," the journal states, "the squire, the clergyman and the resident gentry obtain everything they want from the various large London stores, even down to the petty presents that are given to their stable hands at Christmas time, and on the occasion of the celebration of a coming of age."

PETTY TYRANNY.

"Certain London and provincial houses which supplied the shops have determined that something shall be done to check the wholesale purchase of requirements from the London stores, which inevitably means the utter destruction of their trade."

"Every particular that can be obtained against the clergyman, or the local squire, or retired man, is registered, and supplied to a person acting as local honorary secretary and the information is then distributed among all the trading class without distinction, the result being that the persons referred to are subjected to petty tyranny and all the little boycotts that can be inflicted upon those who are unpopular in their particular district."

"Although the clergy do not know it, this is emptying their churches and keeping the children away from Sunday school."

EMPTY CHURCHES.

"So marked has been the effect of this crusade that in many instances practically the whole of the church population have gone over to the dissenters, and the churches are left empty."

"The curious part about it is that the clergymen do not understand the meaning of it, and put it down to personal unpopularity. When they visit the local people they do not get asked in, and their bazaars and local concerts do not get patronized, while the residents of the large houses have to undergo all kinds of petty tyranny at the hands of their servants, who are necessarily of local extraction."

"People have left their houses and the districts altogether as a result of unpopularity, and clergymen, in a large number of instances, have contrived to change their livings, but they are followed up, and the same thing comes over again."

CALLS IT NONSENSE.

"The story of this organized boycott is to a great extent nonsense," said a London store manager, "and so is the reason given for it. The activities of the London stores are spreading through the country, it is true, and the numbers of customers who purchase by post is increasing, but by far the greater proportion of such things as country shops sell—and here it must be remembered that country shops do not sell many of the things which country residents require—are bought from local dealers."

"Their trade is, however, diminishing, and the reason is easy to see. Each local shopkeeper takes up a position of splendid isolation. Anything that is not to be found in his shop, he seems to say, is unnecessary to human life; and though what he has may fill a room or two, what he has not and ought to have would fill half a dozen. But this boycott story is gross moonshine."

TENTHS OF A SECOND.

It is not common to find a person who can correctly estimate the lapse of a single second. But as an English writer remarks, in these days of speeding automobiles, the exact time when each of two colliding vehicles must have occupied particular spots may be a matter of great importance. In a recent experiment a car took nearly two seconds to stop after brakes were applied, and in that time it moved 19 feet. So even fractions of a second are important. One can train oneself to estimate even tenths of a second. Try it with a watch, and it will be found that it is just possible to count 10 in the lapse of a single second. But one must count very fast to do it.

UNENTERPRISING.

A woman who visited the British museum at London, recently inquired of an attendant: "Have you no skull of Oliver Cromwell? I have been looking all around for a skull of Oliver Cromwell."

"No, madam," replied the attendant, "we've never had one."

"How very odd!" she exclaimed. "They have a fine one in the museum at Oxford."

ON ALTARS OF THE GOD

WIDOWS SACRIFICE WRETCHED SLAVES.

To Appease Spirits of Spouses Who Frowned on Their Attempts to Remarry.

From the far-away village of Talon, in Mindanao, in the Philippine Islands comes the terrible story of a wretched slave boy, deaf, dumb, crosseyed and afflicted with other defects of vision sacrificed to the god Bacalad by two women of the tribe Bagobo, that they might secure another husband.

SIGN OF SEVEN STARS.

Bacalad is by the Bagobos held to be the god of the spirits; Agapanmole Manobo is the god of good and Dewata is his wife; Mandarangan is the god of evil. To the latter all sacrifices must be made, in order that his wrath be averted. When a Bagobo dies and his widow is unable to secure another husband, she too must offer sacrifice. And these sacrifices are to be held not more than once a year, at such time when a collection of seven stars, three at right angle to the other four, can be seen in the heaven to the east at seven o'clock in the evening. This phenomenon is noted early in December; the constellation is called the Batic—the Sign of the Sacrifice.

TO APPEASE THE SHADOWS.

When the widows, Obby and Addy, placed their case trustfully before the great and good Datto Ansig, the latter called a meeting of the old men of the tribe—himself, Oling, Pandaya and Ausing. They decided that as they had not had a human sacrifice since the time of the great drought in 1905, and as many evils had since befallen them, a sacrifice should be made before Addy and Obby could resume a state of marital life.

Having decided on the sacrifice, Angoon, a Lechnan of Datto Ansig, purchased a Bilan slave boy, named Sacum, about eight years old, paying for him five agongs.

THE SACRIFICE.

Three days later some thirty members of the tribe met at Talon, on the River Inolia, not far from Ansig's house. Sacum was stripped naked. Upon a low bench of bamboo a small basket was placed, made of the bark of the Bonga tree; in this each person present placed a bit of betel nut; over this the men put their handkerchiefs, and over these the women laid strips of the bark of the palma tree. Thereupon the men placed their poles, and spears were stuck in the ground in a circle around the platform. Then Datto Ansig, chief of the sacrifice, delivered an oration. Thus he spake:

"Oh, Mandarangan, chief of evil spirits and all the other spirits, come to our feast and accept our sacrifice. Let this sacrifice appease your wrath and take from us our misfortunes, granting us better times."

SPEARED BY WIDOWS.

Sacum was led forward. They placed him against a small tree, tied his hands above his head and his body to the tree with bejucio strips. A spear was placed in his right side. The widows, Addy and Obby, grasped the lance and exerting all their strength, they drove it through the child's body. Then the body was cut in two at the waist. It was then chopped into bits, call pieces as a souvenir, and the remainder was buried. The slave boy, deaf and dumb and almost blind, did not realize what his fate was to be until the last moment. He cried out but once.

RELIGIOUS CUSTOM.

Rumors of this deed reached Allen Walker, the Governor of Davao. He made an investigation. He set out for Digos, not far from Talon, and after his arrival there sent for the Bagobos of Talon. They all came, some 150 of them, including the children. Datto Ansig made no secret whatever of the occurrence. He explained it all. He had committed no crime—simply followed out a religious custom practised by themselves and their ancestors from time immemorial. He, himself, in his life of sixty years, had attended altogether at fifty human sacrifices, more or less, both among the Bagobos and the Bilanes.

WEATHER HINTS.

A bright yellow sky at sunset means wind; a particularly full of stars, expect rain.

Three foggy mornings are usually followed by a heavy rainstorm.

A rainbow in the morning is a sign of more rain coming, but one in the evening indicates fine weather.

A morning fog usually clears away before noon; an afternoon fog has set in for the day.

A red sunrise indicates rain, and so does a grey, lowering sunset, or one where the sky is green or yellowish-green.

The twelve days immediately following Christmas are said to denote the weather for the coming year, one day for each month.