

THE BRITISH SOLDIER.

Were Corbett to return to earth to-day he would be much pleased at many changes in his native country, and none would gratify him more than that which has taken place in the British Army. In his day the life of a soldier was always hard and oftentimes of terrible privation. Men actually sank gradually into the grave from inadequate food, they were subject to personal chastisement at the will of any strippling ensign, and to be flogged with hundreds of lashes for trivial breaches of discipline. All this is now completely changed. The soldier's allowance of to-day is three quarters of a pound of meat—uncooked and including bone—and one pound of bread. Vegetables and groceries must be supplied by the men. An officer attends at meal-times to hear complaints. Thirty years ago the barracks were for the most part destitute of lavatories or proper sanitary appliances. Now these are sedulously supplied, and careful attention to these points, due in the first instance to the untiring efforts of Sidney Herbert, have resulted in lessening the average mortality sixteen in the thousand. Aldershot, the Curragh, and other military centres abound with gymnasiums, reading-rooms, bowling-alleys, etc., for the soldiers' recreation. At this season of the year concerts and theatrical entertainments are greatly in vogue, and the officers—generally men of some, often of large, private means—contribute time and money to promote the pleasure of the men. Taking everything into account, the pay of a cavalry soldier amounts to four dollars and twenty-five cents a week; of a horse artilleryman to four dollars and fifty-five cents; royal engineer, four dollars and sixty-five cents; foot guards four dollars and ten cents; line-men three dollars and eighty cents. If a recruit selects the infantry, he enlists for seven years with the colors and for five with the Army reserve. If for the cavalry, he engages to serve eight years in the regular forces and then to pass for four years into the reserve, but he can, if he likes, enlist for twelve years' Army service. At the end of twelve years' service he can (whether foot or horse), if a non-commissioned officer, and his commanding officer considers his future services desirable, re-engage for an additional nine years with the colors, so as to make a total of twenty-one years' service, when he becomes entitled for life to a pension of from sixteen cents to one dollar and twelve cents a day.

AFRICA'S POPULATION.

From an address by Rev. Dr. R. S. Storrs, it appears that Africa contains a population of 200,000,000—more than twice the population of the Western Hemisphere. Its agricultural and mineral resources are inexhaustible. The interior of it is neither a sandy wilderness nor a series of marsh lands. The coast, which is noted everywhere for its malaria, presents no indication of the interior. Here is an almost unbroken succession of table lands rising everywhere from 2,000 to 2,500 feet high; here are mountains larger than any in this country or in Europe; a system of lakes surpassing even the magnitude of our own. Victoria lake is larger in area than the whole State of New York; mighty rivers flow through the country and the climate is healthful and delightful. This is the country which commerce is bound to develop within the next fifty years. It has been said that Africa is like Noah's Ark, which had few men but many beasts. The truth is that the human inhabitants are almost beyond count. There are races among them who are just as different from one another as the Turk from the Russian, and the Frenchman from the Chinaman. And many of them are highly susceptible to cultivation. Around this immense continent commerce has been hovering for many years. It is now on the point of making its way into it, and its progress will be attended by the grandest results. Just as great inventions burst upon the world and a dozen minds claim the first thought in the direction of their accomplishment, so the nations of the world seem to have turned their attention to this great "dark continent" as with one mind. England, Belgium, France, Italy and Russia, have sent out scientific parties there and commercial embassies to increase our knowledge of the country. There are new steamship lines to the coast of Africa from Italy, France, England and the United States. There are several steamship lines

on the rivers of Africa. Railway construction has been prosecuted vigorously. One road is to be built from the northern coast south through the desert of Sahara. This is the enterprise of an English company. There is already telegraphic communication from the Cape of Good Hope to England, and there will soon be connection from the former point to the northern coast of the continent. The country's wealth is almost boundless. There are gold and silver, diamonds from the South African mines, coal, iron, tin, copper, malachite, cotton and wool. One million pounds of coffee a year are exported from one district; ostrich feathers, tobacco, hard woods and paper stock and other sources of wealth. Commerce is certain soon to possess that great continent of Africa.—*Selected.*

BIRDS—THE NUTHATCH.

A small ashy-colored bird may often be seen creeping about the trunks of orchard and forest trees with a peculiar mouse-like progression, but never hopping, as woodpeckers do. It is the white-bellied nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) a bird about six inches long, white below, and ashy-blue above, wings and tail marked with ashy, black and white, crown and back of head black and the flanks and under tail coverts tinged with brown. The difference in the plumage of the sexes is scarcely perceptible.

The nuthatch has a wide range, being found throughout the United States from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains, and is everywhere a familiar bird, continually creeping about the trunks of trees, examining carefully the crevices of the bark in the search for its insect food.

Nuthatches are sociable birds, often going about in little companies, and there is an agreeable sort of curiosity about them, for they will gradually descend a tree-trunk to inspect a stranger more closely. What would be noise enough to frighten most other birds, is scarcely noticed by nuthatches. I remember firing a revolver several times, at a distance of twenty feet from a pair of them without frightening them from their tree.

These birds make a cavity in a decayed tree for their nest or deepen and renovate the deserted nest of a woodpecker. They cut very deep, sometimes twenty inches, it is said. Their eggs are white, with dark spots, and are usually five in number. In the Southern States, this species raises two broods in a season. It has a fashion of roosting in its own nest in winter. The young of tree creeping birds have one advantage over other young birds that first see the light from elevated nests, they can venture out by degrees and train their legs by a progressive course of lessons, not being compelled to launch at once upon the air with their feeble pinions.

Picus, the woodpecker, in his performances, always keeps his head over his heels, but not so Sitta, the nuthatch; he rambles all over the tree without any regard to the common notions of equilibrium; his tail is as likely to be upmost as his head, and his hold upon the bark is so secure that he is capable of creeping over all surfaces regardless of position. Picus has to prop himself with his tail, but Sitta carries his tail level. It is strange that Picus, with two of his toes turned backward, can not hang with his head down, while Sitta, with only one toe behind, roosts for hours with his body inverted. Often when the little body of Sitta is wounded with shot, his instinctive hold upon the bark remains firm and not till death relaxes his grasp does he tumble to the ground. Sometimes winter lays a coating of ice upon the promenades of forest bark and at such times his perplexity and uneasiness when unable to get a footing are amusing, indeed sometimes painful to one in sympathy with wild creatures during their hard times.

Birds at certain times, because of peculiar associations, impress themselves indelibly on one's memory. I always associate meadow larks with a certain morning when they seemed to have all left the meadow grass for the road fences to congratulate each other on the auspiciousness of the weather. Thus, any thought in connection with nuthatches recalls a wintry day when I watched several of them from a stable door, creeping about the trunks of some locust trees, uttering their monotonous note, a low nasal "hook-hook." Many ornithological writers have a weakness for representing in syllables the songs of birds. I have tried to compre-

hend many combinations of letters intended to convey an idea of the notes of familiar birds, but they are always unintelligible. I am impressed at such times with the idea that the author has arranged a couple of alphabets promiscuously after shaking them up in a hat.

The nuthatch is a wide-awake, active little bird, very useful in destroying insects which infest the bark of trees. Whether we see him among the orchard trees or the great trees of the forest, he is forever on the go. He does but little flying, but if his sinuous circumambulations of the trunks could be strung out in an upward line, it would rival the giant-killer's bean pole. The smaller woodpeckers and the nuthatches are indifferently known as "sap-suckers," which title is, in some places, indicative of insignificant birds in general. A sap-sucker is a bird which every idle gunner feels himself privileged to shoot when he finds nothing gamier to expend his ammunition upon.

I once interrogated two young miscreants who were prowling about the woods with an antiquated musket in regard to sundry wood-peckers and nuthatches, whose mutilated bodies they had arrayed upon a log; "Oh, them's only sap-suckers; they're no good."

It is unaccountable that agriculturists, who, above all others, should protect insectivorous birds, should be the very ones to entertain prejudices against them. "Sap-suckers" are thought to be hard on orchard trees, and king-birds are shot on sight, because they sometimes approach the beehives, while nobody can account for the persistent persecution of the crow. Many of our native species are becoming scarce, and the time is coming when a wiser public will discard those ancient notions about birds.—*Charles H. Townsend, in Public Ledger.*

AN AGED and respected New Yorker who was on a visit to his relatives in the interior the other week, was interviewed by a farmer who wanted advice as to how he should start his two sons in life. "Haven't you anything in mind yet?" "No, nothing." "Do you want them to be rich and respected?" "Of course I do." "Well, I should send one to West Point, and make a great general of him." "You would?" "Yes, and I should start the other in the live stock business." "What for?" "Why, to let one lead an army, and the other feed it. It is twenty years since the war closed, and yet we are still making up purses for generals and paying the claims of contractors. You might as well start right, and give your sons a first mortgage on the United States, as to turn out a pair of patriots who can't buy court plaster to hide their scars."—*Wall Street News.*

THE GOVERNMENT organ of the Mexican State of Chiapas publishes a long article on the cholera disease which has ravaged that State, and has not yet disappeared. The General Government is asked for assistance, want and misery being prevalent where the epidemic raged. Sanitary cordons confined the disease to the hot region. It is said that "whole families died in a single night. On some plantations there are only three or four people left alive. Many bodies have been devoured by the dogs, because those who were stricken were at once abandoned. The town of Tuxtla had eight thousand inhabitants, six hundred of whom are dead. Of the six thousand in Tonala, upward of one thousand are dead. The town of Chiapas suffered most severely, twenty to thirty persons dying daily."

THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT recently introduced the system of "postal notes," and is now about to imitate Mr. Fawcett's scheme of postal stamp savings. The French form, known as a "thrift card," will have twenty compartments, in which stamps of the value of a sou each may be set until they aggregate one franc, which is the lowest sum they received on deposit. In England, during the last year over one million five hundred thousand of these forms were used. The system is particularly adapted to a people so thrifty as the French.

IN FAIR WEATHER it was Martin Van Buren's custom to take a ride every morning until his final illness, sitting erect in his saddle and wearing a skull cap, under which his snow-white hair could be seen. One morning when riding past Stuyvesant Falls,

he was hailed by a barefooted urchin, who shouted out: "Hey, mister, is you the President of the United States?" "I used to be, my little man," was the prompt reply; "what can I do for you?" "Oh, nothin', sir, only I thought Jimmy lied to me; I didn't think such a little man as you could be President of the United States."

DURING some excavations a few weeks ago for a new system of drainage at Brentford, England, a large number of old horse-shoes were found some eight feet below the surface. Local antiquarians believe they are the shoes that were worn by cavalry horses at the battle of Brentford, fought in 1642 between King Charles I and the Parliamentary forces. Some of the shoes were completely eaten through with rust and surrounded with calcareous matter, which suggests the presence of decayed bones.

PRINCE BISMARCK, the German Chancellor, is subject to fits of dejection, when he declares that his life has been a failure; that he has never made any one happy, neither himself, his family nor the nation at large. "If it were not for me," he once said, when in a despondent mood, "the world would have seen three great wars less, and eighty thousand who died in their bloom might have lived, and how many parents, brothers, sisters, widows would have been spared their grief and tears!"

A COUNTRYMAN stepped into a Broad street store and invested in a nickel's worth of chestnuts. In half an hour he returned and handed the proprietor one of the nuts. "What does this mean?" asked the dealer. "Well," remarked the customer, "that is the only sound chestnut I found in the pint, and so thought you must have put it in by mistake. I am an honest man and don't want to take a mean advantage of a fellow."—*Athens (Ga.) Banner.*

MR. BLINKINSAP, a bachelor and a very wealthy sheep-raiser of California, recently returned to Burlington, Vermont, his native town, to visit his relatives. The only relative he found was a niece, a hard-working operative in a Burlington factory. The friendless girl so pleased her uncle that he adopted her and took her with him to the Pacific coast, that she might become his heiress.

LOUISVILLE has discovered that women are particularly fit to be drug clerks, and a number are already employed in the best stores. "They seem to learn by intuition," says an employer; "one look or word suffices where a man would require a hundred words of instruction. When my woman clerk has a matter in hand I am certain that my order will be carried out."

ONE OF THE ELEPHANTS sent as a tribute from Burmah to China killed several persons in Peking recently, having apparently become mad. The thickness of his skull and hide making it impossible to kill him, his keepers have disposed of him in an eminently Chinese fashion by digging a pit for him, in which he is to be allowed to starve to death.

THE CONTINUED INCREASE of mortality in St. Petersburg, Russia,—arising from zymotic diseases,—is creating considerable alarm. The municipality has expended fifty thousand roubles in sanitary measures, but nothing practically effective against the ever-growing death rate has been devised.

AN AUSTRALIAN TOM THUMB has been on exhibition in England. His real name is David John Armstrong. He was born in 1851. He is three feet two inches in height, and weighs seventy pounds. His limbs are in perfect proportion. He is very intelligent.

THE FASTEST RUN yet by a full railway train was made recently between Philadelphia and Jersey City, ninety miles in eighty minutes. The engine which drew the train is new, and has seven-foot drivers.

MR. BARR, the great brewer of Burton, England, paid more than eight hundred thousand dollars last year to the various railway companies for conveying ale to his customers.

AT THE INSTANCE of the Berlin Anti-Cruelty Society all public performances of tamers of lions and other dangerous animals will be henceforth prohibited.