

Literary News and Criticism

The Travels of a Clever Naturalist in Mexico.

THROUGH SOUTHERN MEXICO. Being an Account of the Travels of a Naturalist. By Hans Gadow. Illustrated. 12mo, pp. 327. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons.

This is an admirable book, not only a sprightly narrative of incidents of travel but a valuable account of a country which we know comparatively little. We need hardly tell those who, several years ago, made delighted acquaintance with Mr. Gadow's story of a journey in Northern Spain. With his wife as a companion, and carrying the official recommendations of President Diaz, he has spent eight months in exploring the various states of Southern Mexico. While accomplishing the scientific objects of his travels in the study of animals and plants and the accumulation of rich collections, he has had an eye to human character and the unfamiliar conditions encountered on the way. He has an enthusiasm, humor, a keen relish for the loveliness of nature, and the intelligent apprehension of a trained observer; and bringing all these qualities to the use of his pen he has given to us a volume for which his reader should be sincerely grateful.

The greater part of these travels in regions remote from the railroad was necessarily undertaken on horseback or muleback, with the assistance of Indian guides—and sometimes, in bandit infested places, with the company of "rurales" or mounted police. But this guard was not often invoked; the book as a whole, is a testimony to the statement once made by its author: "You do not need any arms whilst travelling in Mexico, but when you do, you want them badly." It is fear, the absolute certainty of being caught, he tells us, that keeps the people on their good behavior. When, after the final establishment of the republic, soldiering as a profession failed the free lances and disbanded troops often found the most profitable occupation that of robbery—and thus Mexico acquired a very unpleasant reputation. Diaz, that man of ideas, hit upon a capital one; he summoned the leaders of the bandit bands and naively inquired whether they had any objection to gaining a good living in an honest way. If they had not he would guarantee them a congenial occupation, namely, that of hunting down other robbers and malcontents, and he promised to pay them regularly and better than any corps in any other country. They accepted; the rurales have become a proud organization of the picked men, under iron discipline, and in the capture of criminals they are said to be invariably successful. Mr. Gadow believes that most of the country is now safer than are other lands of older civilization. But, however safe it may be, it was not a particularly comfortable one for an energetic naturalist to travel in. The respective merits of horses and mules was the chief worry, for letters from governors of states and local prefects were not always effective. "The village authorities," says the author, "are bound to respect the governmental order to procure the head and beasts, but if he feels so inclined the head man tells you that there are none; or that some happen to be away on pasture; or anyhow, that they cannot be got together until the day after to-morrow, and if you insist upon having your half a dozen mules ready by to-morrow, they will be ready, but one of them will be a broken down horse, another will be a similar beast, with sores too terrible to behold, and a third will be a donkey. This assortment will be sent to your camp, but without any pack saddles, without which they are useless, and if then you walk into the village and at last find the chief, to storm and to threaten, he calmly says that he told you yesterday that they would not be ready before to-morrow. These men were not all like this; some few were good, others a great deal worse." The mules when procured were generally exceedingly beautiful. "Every mule has a temper," says Mr. Gadow, "and this is rather bad."

AN AMAZING CRIMINAL.

A New Novel by the French Conan Doyle.

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK. By Gaston Leroux. 12mo, pp. 371. Dutton & Co.

When M. Gaston Leroux created the character of Roulettable, a young French newspaper reporter gifted, like Sherlock Holmes, in the detection of crime, he added a fairly original figure to contemporary fiction. He put the reporter and Joseph through his paces in a story well above the average of stories of crime. "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" was indubitably a book of mystery. The reader had before him a plan of the room in question, and with it he could check every episode in the narrative. All the actors in the drama were accounted for, and, of course, the villain—and it was quite possible to see how the tragic attempt made at the outset could ever have been carried through. M. Leroux proved himself an adept in the art of holding the reader in suspense and he showed, too, that he knew how to heighten the excitement as he went along. Altogether he made an absorbing tale out of "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" and assured himself of eager readers for his next book.

"The Perfume of the Lady in Black" is really a sequel to the story mentioned above. All the old characters reappear and with them some new ones. The duel of wits to be described in a book of the sort remains a duel between Roulettable and Larsen, or Balmeyer, the prodigious rascal who in "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" so far demonstrated his versatility as to make himself, though a criminal, an officer of high authority in the French police. It will be remembered that this sinister personage had in earlier years contracted a secret marriage with M. Leroux's heroine, Mathilde Stangerson, and that his intervention had completely discouraged M. Robert Darzac, who wished to marry Mathilde. In the new book Larsen is reported dead, though the reader is a little suspicious over the manner of his supposed demise. A Transatlantic steamer goes to the bottom and for days thereafter the ocean casts up on the beach hundreds of corpses. Among these is a body on which papers belonging to Larsen are found. Obviously this would deceive nobody, but Darzac and his Mathilde are sanguine souls and so the wedding is arranged. Naturally Roulettable, who is now a friend of the family, is invited. He attends. What does he do? He hides himself in a corner to pray. It is observed that his eyes are filled with tears, and when the wedding is over it is found that he has incontinently vanished. Does the reader need to be told that Joseph has his doubts as to the deadness of the unpeepable Larsen? In a little while everybody's doubts are dissipated. Larsen comes to life again, and, what is worse, he gets straight upon the track of Darzac and his wife. Fortunately Roulettable is as quickly at work, and in short order we are privileged to witness another battle between an incarnation of evil and a detective as ingenious as he is courageous.

The scene of the conflict is an old chateau on the Mediterranean coast, a romantic old place already fortified and susceptible of being made as difficult of access as a safe deposit vault. Roulettable looks to every crevice and cranny, he disposes his forces at every point that might be so much as approached by the foe, and prepares to stand siege. He and his friends are to all intents and purposes absolutely sealed within the Fort of Hercules. Yet Larsen makes an entry. More than that, when Roulettable has counted noses and can prove that every one in the fort is a friend, he has nevertheless to reckon with the presence of the enemy, and that enemy is not invisible either. Does this sound fantastic? "The Perfume of the Lady in Black" is nothing if not fantastic. Young Roulettable is all for the cold light of reason and the world well lost, but he himself is the first to admit that, where Larsen is concerned, all things are possible. The reader who likes to be kept on tenterhooks will enjoy this story. He may grow a little impatient over the author's rather involved method of developing his narrative. M. Leroux, we fear, is inclined to be leisurely and long-winded. But he is a crafty novelist. He knows how to fit his pegs into the right holes, to tangle his threads and to gather them up at the psychological moment. He threatens, now and then, to be tedious, but in the long run he amply rewards the reader for his good nature.

The Young Turks and the forces behind them are dealt with in "Turkey in Revolution," a book by Mr. Roden Buxton. The author, who has been in Constantinople with his brother, the chairman of the Balkan committee, has a personal acquaintance with the men of whom he writes.

BOOKS AND AUTHORS.

Current Talk of Things Present and to Come.

The English translation of M. Anatole France's biography of Joan of Arc will not appear for some weeks to come. The translation was finished and was in type when M. France arrived at the conclusion that his work needed revision. It is stated that many of the revisions were the result of the translator's discovery of discrepancies and wrong references. We may add that perhaps the publication of Mr. Lang's book on the Maid had something to do with M. France's procedure.

"The Royal End," the novel which the late Henry Harland left unfinished, was completed by his wife. It comes to-day from the press of Dodd, Mead & Co.

Mr. Harry De Windt's volume of reminiscences, which has just appeared, tells the story of "a restless life." He was left a wealthy orphan at fourteen, and soon began to show signs of a taste for adventure. His first official position was that of aide-de-camp to his sister's husband, Sir Charles Brooks, Rajah of Sarawak. It was after that Mr. De Windt went to Cambridge. He tells many anecdotes—among them one of that evergreen officer, the late Admiral Sir Henry Keppel, in the days when he was a young lieutenant in Malta. It is said that the youth was driving a crowded coach to a picnic in the interior of the island. "A jovial young gunnery officer on the coach worried Keppel so much with facetiousness that he threw the reins over the horses' heads, took off the brake, and said: 'If you want to get killed, I'm your man.' Before it had gone far, the coach was overturned, but fortunately nobody was fatally hurt, and there were no ladies on it. As Mr. De Windt says, if there had been, the 'little Admiral' would certainly not have resorted to such extreme measures, being too gallant for that."

Eight volumes of the works of Victor Hugo in English translations have been added to the fourteen which Little, Brown & Co. have for some time offered to purchasers. These recent issues include the "History of a Crime," "Napoleon the Little," two volumes of his poems and three of his dramatic works. All are in uniform shape and are published in two different editions, the "Library Edition" and the "Handy Edition."

One of the curious features of the April number of "The Century" is to be the account by Robert Lincoln of how Edwin Booth, the brother of his father's murderer, once saved his life when the President's son was a boy.

Professor George E. Woodberry's revised and enlarged biography of Edgar Allan Poe will be published next week by the Houghton Mifflin Company. Many new letters have been added.

Miss Braddon (Mrs. Maxwell) appears to be returning to the literary industry of her youth. She is about to bring out another new story.

"Americans: A Criticism and an Appreciation" is the title of a book which is on the press in England. The author, Mr. Alexander Francis, has based the work on a series of letters which he contributed last year to the London "Times."

Sir Henry Brackenbury contributes another collection of interesting reminiscences to the current "Blackwood." Here is a passage on Marshal MacMahon: "He had a reputation for making blunders of speech, due to forgetfulness or confusion of mind. He rather mixed up the foreign officers, and I heard him ask Sir Charles Elliot if he had come from Petersburg expressly for those maneuvers. Many amusing stories were current illustrative of this peculiarity, two of which I remember. One was that when he was told that his government had been defeated in the Chamber by a majority of one, he said: 'If only I knew who he was, that is, the man who was defeated, I would inspect the Military College at St. Cyr, he was told that one of the students was a man of color, who was wearing an endorsement to him. The Marshal promised to do so, and, stopping opposite him in the ranks, said: 'Vous êtes un nègre? Ce n'est pas ça! Oui, Monsieur le Maréchal, très bien, très bien, continuez, continuez de l'être.'"

Mrs. Gertrude Atherton's new novel is to be published by the Macmillan Company this spring. Her heroine is an opera singer and the scene moves between America and Bavaria, Munich being the foreign city in which part of the drama is played.

The second and concluding volume of the new edition of the "Poetical Works" of Giles Fletcher and Phineas Fletcher is soon to be issued by the Cambridge University Press. Professor Boas, the editor of these volumes, has been investigating the question of the authorship of "Britannia's Ida," which has been ascribed to Spenser, and, in the light of the new knowledge he has acquired in preparing this edition, he declares that Fletcher was in truth the author of the work. He has therefore included it as an appendix in the second volume.

A very lovable side of the late Constant Coquelin is revealed in Mr. J. N. Raphael's charming article on the actor in "The Fortnightly Review." The writer went on a beautiful spring day to see the "Maison des Comédiens," the home at Font aux Dames which Coquelin had established. "Coquelin was playing country square that morning. He was so utterly in the part that I should not have been in the least surprised if he had produced samples of corn from his pocket or insisted on my propping pigs." The piece is a beautiful one, a great park with velvety green lawns, a little river and old trees. The home itself was split up into little private residences, and the old actors and actresses who lived there upon charity must often have forgotten it. I mentioned this, and Coquelin smiled whimsically. "Mais évidemment," he said, "when we come here we want to forget all the stupid, sordid troubles that have brought us here. We are artists, and must live the life of comfort."

Books and Publications.

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