SOME NEW BOOKS.

The Byzantine Empire.

Of the many volumes included in the "Stories of the Nations" series (Putnams), the most important is the latest, entitled *The Byzantine Empire*, by C. W. C. OMAN. This is the first attempt to popularize the right conception of the part played by Constantinople in the history of European civilization—a conception which materially differs from the picture of unbroken corruption and decay presented in the "Decline and Fall." With the facts, and with the true deductions from them, students have been made familiar by Finlay's history, published nearly forty years ago, and by the more recent work of Mr. Dury which appeared in 1889. Hitherto, however, all the handbooks on the subject have continued to circulate a commodity which Mr. Oman aptly describes as "Gibbon and water." It is, on the contrary, the matter and the spirit of Finlay and of Dury which are reproduced in the present volume. Its readers will be enabled to understand how it came to pass that the eastern Roman empire survived by nearly a thousand years the disruption of the empire in the West—a phenomenon inexplicable upon the theory countenanced by Gibbon that the rulers of Constantinople were a succession of weaklings and that its subject-peoples were destitute of all the virile virtues and had sunk to the lowest depths of social and moral decadence. The truth is that the Goths, Huns, Avars, Slavs, and Northmen, who wrought such havoc in central or western Europe, made no fatal impression on the Byzantine realm, which, also, repulsed from the Bosporus the same Saracens who conquered Spain and penetrated to Poitiers in France—which, moreover, blocked the westward advance of the Seljuk Turks, and would have kept the Ottoman Turks out of Europe had not the Latin Christians committed the blunder of shattering their strongest bulwark against Islam by seizing Constantinople and dealing a blow to the Greek empire from which it was unable to recover.

I.

Mr. Oman begins his narrative with an account of the foundation of Byzantium by a colony from Megara in the seventh century B. C., and outlines the history of the Greek city during the ensuing thousand years up to A. D. 328, when the Emperor Constantine began to erect a New Rome on the incomparable site. We need not dwell upon the well-known acts recited in this introduction, nor on the four succeeding chapters, which set forth the fortunes of the New Rome in the two centuries which elapsed between its foundation and the accession of Justinian, A. D. 527. So far as regards this part of Mr. Oman's book, we shall only note his explanation of the fact that, while the Western Roman Empire came to an end with the deposition of Augustulus, A. D. 476, the Eastern realm, of which Justinian became the ruler half a century later, had withstood external assault and internal disintegration and was actually stronger than it had been a hundred years before. Mr. Oman shows that the main secret of the success of the Eastern emperors of the fifth century in holding their own, lay in the fact that they had disposed with foreign auxiliaries to a large extent, had reorganized their armies and filled them up with native troops. Leo I., who ascended the throne A. D. 457, was the first ruler who turned to account the military virtues of the Isaurians, or mountain populations of southern Asia Minor. He added several regiments of them to the army of the East, but it was his son-in-law and successor, Zeno (474-491) himself an Isaurian born, who developed the scheme. Zeno raised an imperial guard from his countrymen and enlisted as many corps of them as could be raised; moreover, he formed regiments of Armenians and other inhabitants of the highland frontier of the East, and handed over to his successor, Anastasius, an army in which the barbarian auxiliaries—now composed of Teutons and Huns in about equal numbers—were decidedly dominated by the native elements. It was due to these salutary reforms, which restored the legions to something like their old trustworthiness, that the Eastern empire, in spite of rebellions, was never in serious danger of sinking into disorder or breaking up as the Western realm had done into new un-Roman kingdoms. So far was it from encountering this fate that Anastasius, when he died in A. D. 518, left his successor (Justin, the uncle of Justinian) a loyal army of 150,000 men, a treasure of 320,000 pounds of gold, and an unbroken frontier to east and west.

In the history of the Byzantine empire, which covers upward of a thousand years, there are certain epochs which should be distinguished even in the most cursory review. These are associated with the names of Justinian, of Heraclius, of Leo the Isaurian, of the Macedonian dynasty, and of Alexius Comnenus. Then one must glance at the abortive attempt of the Latin nations to found an empire at Constantinople and at the restoration of a Greek dynasty which, although it managed to maintain the semblance of dominion, was during nearly half of that period only a vassal of the Ottoman Turks. So far as its defensive services to Christendom were concerned, Constantinople might as well have fallen in 1361 as in 1453. It is true, however, that western Europe was less prepared for the renaissance at the former period than at the latter.

II.

At the present time Justinian is remembered for the Institutes and Pandects, that codification of the Roman law which bears his name and was executed at his order. But there had been revisions of the law before and his contemporaries were justified by the event in supposing there would be others in the future. In his own day Justinian was most widely and honorably known as a builder and a conqueror. The Mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople and the church of San Vitale at Ravenna are only two of the many hundred specimens of his achievements in ecclesiastical architecture. Procopius devoted a considerable treatise to the description of Justinian's buildings, and numbers of them survive to testify to the accuracy of the historian. Not merely great centres like Constantinople or Jerusalem are full of edifices erected by this Emperor, but even in the more secluded or outlying portions of his dominions any fine building extant is in two cases out of three referable to his reign. It is also to be noted that the era of Justinian forms a landmark in the style of Oriental church architecture. Up to his time Christian architects had been following two patterns copied from old Roman models: to wit, the round dome church, whose origin can be traced to the Temple of Vesta, and the rectangular church with apses, which was simply an adaptation to ecclesiastical purposes of the basilica or Old Roman law-court. Justinian brought into use for the first time on a large scale the combination of a cruciform ground plan and a very large dome. A type of this style is the famous church, now Mosque, of St. Sophia, which is a Greek cross, 240 feet long and 224 broad, having in its midst a vast dome pierced by no less than forty windows, and soaring 180 feet above the floor.

It was, however, the outcome of Justinian's foreign policy which excited the astonishment of his contemporaries. When he came to the throne the eastern Roman empire possessed no remnant of land or of authority west of the Adriatic. It was his dream to reunite under his sceptre the German kingdoms in the western Mediterranean, which had been formed out of the broken fragments of the realm of Honorius, and to put an end to the pretence by which, while he was nominally acknowledged as Emperor by the German rulers in the west, all power was really lodged in the hands of the foreigners who posed as his vicegerents. He aimed at reconquering Italy, North Africa, and Spain, if not also the other provinces of the Old Empire. He never renounced his purpose until he had brought under his sway all the islands and all the border lands of the Mediterranean, with the exception of the seacoast of Gaul and of northeastern Spain. When he died it could be said with as much truth as in the days of Augustus, that, so far as the absolute security of commerce was concerned, the Mediterranean was a Roman lake.

It is the custom of school histories to underrate the magnitude and permanence of these achievements. Yet the enemies with whom the Generals of Justinian had to cope were the same Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Visigoths who had experienced but little difficulty in partitioning the West. The populous and opulent provinces which stretched along the seacoast of north Africa had been in the possession of the Vandals for more than a hundred years, when in 533 Belisarius restored them to the Roman empire. They remained Roman until the Saracens overran them in 697. In 554 the Roman Governor, Liberius, taking advantage of a civil war among the Visigoths, in Spain, landed in Andalusia and soon captured the great towns in the south of the peninsula—Cordova, Cartagena, Malaga, and Cadiz. It was about seventy years before the Visigothic Kings of Toledo recovered their lost territory. Down to A. D. 623 Justinian and his successors reigned over the greater part of the seacoast of southern Spain. Consider also the case of Sicily; conquered by Belisarius in 535, it did not entirely succumb to the Saracens of Africa until 878. Italy was definitely recovered for Justinian by Narses in 553. It is true that by 584 the Lombards established a kingdom in the valley of the Po and two independent duchies in central and southern Italy. But the rulers of Constantinople retained the exarchate of Ravenna and other possessions in central Italy until 750, and they kept certain territories in the south of the peninsula until 1055, when the Normans transformed them into the duchy of Apulia. In view of these facts it is preposterous to speak of the conquests of Justinian as fugitive.

III.

The worst enemies of the regenerated Roman empire at this epoch were the Sassanian Kings of Persia. But although one of them, Chosroes, captured and sacked Antioch, the second city of the Roman East, Justinian succeeded in restoring the previous eastern boundaries and transmitted them intact to his successor. It was during the reign of Heraclius, who was crowned in A. D. 610, that the decisive trial of strength took place between the East Romans and the Persians—a trial which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the former, but which left both combatants exhausted and at the mercy of the impending invasion of the Saracens. There is no doubt that as a soldier and a General, Heraclius, whose name is almost forgotten, deserves to figure among the greatest military heroes of Roman history. For the Persians, when he conquered them, were stronger than they or their Parthian predecessors had ever been in seven centuries. The expedition of Heraclius against the Sassanian monarch, who, like the opponent of Justinian, was called Chosroes, was in spirit the first of the Crusades. It was the first war that the Roman empire had ever undertaken under the promptings of religious enthusiasm. In 614 a Persian army had stormed the city of Jerusalem, had put 90,000 Christians to the sword, and had carried into captivity not only the patriarch Zaccharias, but what all Christians regarded as the most precious relic in the world, the wood of the True Cross. It was to recover this relic, to reconquer the holy places, and, in a word, to rescue Christendom, that the army of Heraclius went forth. At this juncture (622) not only Mesopotamia, Armenia, Syria, and Egypt, the granary of the empire, had been lost, but the Persians had overrun the whole of Asia Minor and were posted at Chalcedon, opposite Constantinople. It required six campaigns to save the Eastern Roman world and ruin the Sassanian monarchy. The first campaign of Heraclius cleared Asia Minor of the Persian hosts, not by a direct attack, but by skilful strategy. In the three following years he carried the war into Media, correctly judging that this move would compel Chosroes to recall his garrisons from Syria and Egypt. The crisis of the war came in 626, for while the main Persian army watched the Emperor in Armenia, a great body slipped south of him and marched to the Bosporus. At the same moment 30,000 Avars and Slavs burst over the Balkans and beset Constantinople on the European side. Heraclius showed a confidence, which the event justified, in the strength of Constantinople and the courage of its defenders. Sending only a few veteran troops to aid the garrison of his capital, he continued to attack the Persians at home, and laid waste Mesopotamia and Media. The Sassanian King was now desperate and in 627 put his last levies in the field. They were defeated by Heraclius, who seized the palace of Chosroes at Dastagerd and divided among his troops such plunder as had never been seen since Alexander the Great captured Susa. Flying to Ctesiphon, but hunted even from his capital by the Romans, Chosroes was ultimately seized by his own son and thrown into prison, where he died of despair or of starvation. Heraclius had accomplished what no other Roman Emperor or General had achieved; he had succeeded where Crassus and Valerian had met with overwhelming disaster; he had surpassed the exploits of Trajan and Severus; his troops had been led further eastward than any Roman soldiers had yet penetrated. In accordance with the terms of peace which followed every inch of Roman territory was evacuated, all Roman captives were freed, a war indemnity was paid, and the spoils of Jerusalem, including the True Cross, were restored. If we have dwelt at length upon this war, it is not only because it demonstrates the stuff of which some of the rulers and the soldiers of the Eastern Roman realm were made, but also because it had momentous consequences which neither of the combatants could have foreseen. Four years after the conclusion of a struggle which had drained both parties of their resources, the Caliph Abu Bekr, the successor of Mohammed, launched two armies of Moslems, the one against Palestine and the other against Persia. The result was the annihilation of the Persian kingdom and the loss of Syria and Egypt by the Byzantine empire.

IV.

The next striking figure in Byzantine history is Leo the Isaurian, who accepted the crown in 717, on the very eve of a great Saracenic invasion of Asia Minor which was to culminate in a siege of Constantinople. They who accept at second or third hand Gibbon's view of the inferiority of the Byzantines to the Teutonic conquerors of the West must be puzzled to account for the failure of the Ommeyad Caliph to take Constantinople, though he taxed all his resources to that end, while one of his lieutenants at the further end of Europe, and with only a handful of Arabs, wrenched Spain from the Visigoths and reached the heart of France, where it required the whole power of the Franks under Charles Martel to arrest his progress. But Constantinople, it may be said, was fortified; so were Merida, Toledo, Taragona, Narbonne, yet the Saracens took those fortresses. The truth is that even the rabble of Constantinople could fight, as was repeatedly demonstrated, and there were no Hebrew traitors among them, such as infested the Visigothic strongholds.

The Mohammedan power which fruitlessly assailed Constantinople in A. D. 717 was incomparably mightier than that to which the city succumbed in 1453, and it is interesting to consider what would have been the consequences to Europe had the earlier attack succeeded. The Caliph, once planted on the western side of the Bosporus, would have found before him in the confines of the old Roman empire only three considerable enemies, viz.: the Avars in Hungary, the Lombards in the valley of the Po, and the decrepit Merovingian monarchy which Pepin of Heristal and his descendants had not yet managed to regenerate. Under such circumstances we cannot doubt that the whole Mediterranean world would have become Moslem, and that Christianity would have ceased to exist, except, like Judaism, as the tolerated heresy of a vanquished people. That such was not the fate of Europe we owe to the Byzantines whom Gibbon taught us to despise, and our debt to Leo the Isaurian is incalculably greater than that which we owe to Charles Martel. Europe could never have been conquered by way of the Pyrenees, inasmuch as the Saracen assailants had to receive orders and draw supplies from the seat of Moslem power in Asia by the immensely long and circuitous route through Spain, northwestern Africa, and Egypt. On the other hand, what the Turks accomplished after 1453 shows that Europe could easily have been conquered by way of Constantinople in the first quarter of the eighth century.

At this time (A. D. 717) the reigning Caliph was Suleiman, the seventh of the house of the Ommeyades. He had strained, as we have said, all the resources of his empire to provide a fleet and army adequate to the enterprise which he had undertaken. The chief command of the expedition was given to his brother Moslemah, who led 80,000 men from Tarsus through Asia Minor to the Hellespont. Meanwhile, a fleet of 1,800 sail, under the Vizier Suleiman, namesake of the Caliph, sailed from Syria to the Ægean, carrying a force equal to that which had marched by land. In the month of August, Leo the Isaurian beheld the vessels of the Saracens sailing up the Propontis, while their land army had crossed into Thrace and was approaching the city from the western side. Moslemah caused his troops to build a line of circumvalation from the sea to the Golden Horn, cutting Constantinople off from all communication with Thrace, while Suleiman blocked the southern exit of the Bosporus, and tried, though ineffectually, to close its northern entrance also, so as to prevent any supplies coming by water from the Euxine. Throughout the ensuing autumn and winter the city was beleagured, and with the spring all hope of successful resistance seemed to be cut off by the arrival of a supplemental fleet from Egypt, and of a second large army which came up by land from Tarsus and occupied the Asiatic shores of the Bosporus. Yet even now Leo did not despair, and in the summer he took the offensive. His fire ships stole out and burnt the Egyptian squadron as it lay at anchor. A body of his troops, lying in Bithynia, surprised and cut to pieces the Saracen army which watched the Asiatic side of the strait. He prevailed upon the Bulgarians to pour down over the Balkans and rout the covering army which observed Adrianople and protected the siege on the west. The result of these operations was the retreat of Moslemah, who got back to Tarsus with only 30,000 out of the 100,000 men who had started with him or rejoined him as reënforcements. The fleet fared worse, for, having been caught by a tempest in the Ægean, it was so fearfully shattered that out of the whole armada only five vessels got back to Syria unharmed. Thus ended the last great endeavor of the Saracens to destroy Constantinople. By them the task was never again essayed, although for 350 years longer wars incessantly broke out between the Emperor and the Caliph. Yet so little have we been taught by the purveyors of Gibbon-and-water to appreciate the tremendous exploit of Leo the Isaurian, that he is remembered rather as the Iconoclast, or breaker of images, than as the deliverer of Christendom.

V.

The Macedonian dynasty began with Basil I., who became Emperor in A. D. 867. Basil himself is chiefly distinguished for his codification of the laws of the empire, known as the Basilika, which superseded the Ecloga of Leo the Isaurian, just as Leo's compilation had superseded the work of Justinian. The Basilika of Basil, with the additions made by his son, Leo VI., formed the code of the Byzantine empire down to its last days, no further rearrangement being ever made. The eighty years which followed the death of Basil the Macedonian were entirely taken up by the two long reigns of his son and grandson, Leo the Wise and Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the latter being so called because he was born in the Purple Chamber, the room in the palace set aside for the Empress. So far as foreign wars and dangers to the empire from without were concerned, these eighty years were the most uneventful and monotonous in Byzantine history. They witnessed, however, a remarkable intellectual revival, the two rulers themselves being professional men of letters, to whom we are indebted for some of the most useful and interesting works in Byzantine literature. In their reigns took place the culmination of the Byzantine renaissance, which had begun under the quickening influence of the political and social reforms of Leo the Isaurian. The darkest age in Byzantine literary history was from 600 to 750, a period from which we have hardly any contemporary annalists, no poetry, save the lost Heracliad of George of Pisidia, and very little even of theology. On the other hand, by the end of the eighth century writers became far more numerous, and in the ninth century we can trace the existence of a large literary class, including a few really first-rate authors, among whom should be particularly mentioned the patriarch Photius, whose breadth of culture was astonishing, and whose library catalogue is the envy of modern historians. A curious feature of the Byzantine literature of this epoch was the epics, or romances of chivalry, as they may properly be called. These were written toward the close of the times of the Macedonian dynasty, and a type of the class is the epic of Digenes Akritas, which celebrates the adventures of a hero who lived in the latter half of the tenth century. Digenes was a mighty hunter both of bears and Saracens, who eloped with the fair Eudocia Ducas, daughter of the General of the Cappadocian theme, whom he carried off in spite of her father and seven brethren. Pursued by the irate family, he rode them down one by one at vantage points in the passes, but spared their lives and was reconciled to them at the intercession of his bride. The story is evidently in the same vein as the tales of chivalry in western Europe, most of which, however, belong to a considerably later period.

Between A. D. 600 and 900 art followed much the same course as literature in the Byzantine empire. It was in a state of decay for the first century and a half, and the surviving works of that time are often grotesquely rude. For sheer bad drawing and bad execution nothing can be worse than the coins of the seventh and eighth centuries—a Frankish or Visigothic piece could scarcely be more unsightly. The few manuscripts which survive from that period display a corresponding though not an equal decline in art. Mosaic work, perhaps, showed less decadence than other branches of decoration, but even in this field seventh and eighth century productions are very rare. In the ninth century everything underwent a wonderful improvement. The old classical traditions of painting live again in the best manuscript illumination of the period. Many of these illuminated manuscripts might have been executed in the fifth, or even in the fourth century, so closely do they reproduce the old Roman style. It seems that the iconoclastic controversy stimulated painting. Persecuted by the Isaurian Emperors, the art of sacred portraiture became supremely respected by the multitude. As early also as the middle of the ninth century the minor arts of mosaic, silver works, and jewelry were observed to be in a flourishing condition. There is one other point in the history of the Byzantines in the ninth century to which attention is directed by our author. This is the unique commercial importance of Constantinople at the epoch. All other commerce except that of the empire had been swept off the seas by the Saracen pirates in the preceding hundred years, the only communications between eastern and western Christendom being kept up under the protection of the Byzantine navy. The Oriental products which found their way to Europe all passed through the warehouses of the Bosporus. It was East Roman ships which transacted all the trade. Except the few Italian ports, such as Amalfi and the new city of Venice, no Christian town in the western Mediterranean seems to have possessed even merchant vessels. In Mr. Oman's opinion this monopoly of European commerce was one of the greatest elements in the strength of the Byzantine empire. He thinks that the subsequent concession of free trade to the Venetians dealt an irreparable blow to its financial resources.

VI.

It is beyond question that the notion of Alexius Comnenus entertained by most people who deem themselves well educated is derived from the portrait of that Emperor in Scott's "Count Robert of Paris." Curiously, too, although that novel is on the whole the feeblest and least trustworthy of the author's productions, the particular figure of Alexius is in the main outlines correctly drawn. Here is the picture of him by Mr. Oman, based on the studies of Finlay and Dury, who, as we have said, approached the investigation of Byzantine annals in a spirit very different from Gibbon's: "Alexius was a man of courage and ability, but he displayed one of the worst types of Byzantine character. Indeed, he was the first Emperor to whom the epithet 'Byzantine,' in its common and opprobrious sense could be applied. He was the most accomplished liar of his age, and while winning and defending the throne committed enough acts of mean treachery and swore enough false oaths to startle even the courtiers of Constantinople. He could fight when necessary, but he preferred to win by treason and perjury. Yet as a ruler he had many virtues, and it will always be remembered to his credit that he dragged the empire out of the deepest slough of degradation and ruin that it had ever sunk into. Though false, he was not cruel, and seven ex-Emperors and usurpers, living unharmed in Constantinople under his sceptre, bore witness to the mildness of his rule. The tale of his reign sufficiently bears witness to the strange mixture of moral obliquity and practical ability in his character."

The importance of the rôle of Alexius in history is recognized when we compare the situation in which he found the Byzantine empire with that in which he left it. When he usurped the throne in 1081 his position was as difficult and perilous as that in which Leo the Isaurian was placed in 717. He had to face at one and the same time the assaults of the Seljuks in Asia Minor and those of a new and formidable foe, the Normans, whose invasion of his western provinces was contemporaneous with their conquest of England. The dominions of the Seljuk Sultan, at this time, extended as far as the Propontis, and included the city of Nicæa, close to the Bithynian shore, and only seventy miles from Constantinople. As for the Normans, after wresting Sicily from the Saracens, they had stripped the Greek empire of Calabria and Apulia, and in June, 1081—fifteen years after the victory of William the Conqueror at Hastings—they crossed the Straits of Otranto, thirty thousand strong, and laid siege to Durazzo, on the Epirote coast. In the first twelvemonth they inflicted a crushing defeat on Alexius, took Durazzo, and descended into Thessaly, but by the close of 1083 the skilful strategy of the Emperor resulted in the dispersion of the invading army, and when Robert Guiscard died, in 1085, the danger from the Normans passed away. It was through the extraordinary sagacity evinced in his dealings with the Crusaders that Alexius was able not only to avert the fate which overtook Constantinople at the hands of the western nations a century later, but also to recover a large part of Asia Minor from the Seljuks. If ever diplomacy has won a triumph over brute force it was in the long and tedious negotiations by which the Byzantine emperor prevailed upon all the leaders of the Crusade, from Godfrey of Bouillon down to the smallest baron, to swear him allegiance. Characteristic also was the course which he pursued in the succeeding campaign. While the Crusaders were plunging through Asia Minor, dealing shattering blows at the Turks, Alexius followed in their rear at a safe distance, picking up the spoil which they had left. By the time the Franks had entered Syria the Byzantines had recovered so much territory that the Turkish frontier in Asia was rolled back 200 miles. Instead of the Seljuk lying at Nicæa he was now chased behind the Bithynian hills, and the empire had regained all Lydia and Caria with much of the Phrygian highlands. So hard hit were the Seljuks that for well nigh a hundred years they were reduced to fight on the defensive. Thus it came to pass that the end of the reign of Alexius was delivered from the dangers which had overshadowed its beginning. So much strengthened was his postion that when in 1107 the Normans under Bohemund of Tarentum tried to repeat the feats which Robert Guiscard had accomplished in 1082, they were beaten off with ease. The renewed vitality which he had imparted to the empire survived Alexius for at least a generation. Under his son, John the Good, the only Byzantine ruler of whom no detractor has ever said an evil word, the Greek frontier in Asia continued to advance at the expense of the Turks. John's son, Manuel, was also successful in defending the frontiers and maintaining the prestige of the Eastern empire. He overran Servia, invaded Hungary, to whose king he dictated terms of peace, and he beat off an invasion of Greece by the Sicilian Normans. In a naval engagement with the Venetians, he was victorious and drove the galleys of the Doge out of the Ægean. The one severe defeat which he experienced through carelessness at the hands of the Seljuks does not seem to have resulted in any loss of territory. When he died, however, in 1180, the good fortune of the house of Comnenus and of the Byzantine empire passed away.

VII.

Historians have agreed that the greatest crime ever perpetrated against civilization was the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by the leaders of the Fourth Crusade, and the partitioning of the Eastern empire among the representatives of Latin nations. It is true that in 1261 Michael Paleologus, who had made himself ruler of the small Greek State in Bithynia, grandiloquently called the Empire of Nicæa, recovered possession of Constantinople. Here his descendants reigned until 1453, and to an unobservant reader the record of the Paleologi looks like the natural continuation of older Byzantine history. But the truth is that in the interval the Byzantine realm had undergone a fatal transformation. As regards the external signs of change it is obvious that the lands subject to Michael Paleologus were much more limited in extent than those which had obeyed the Greek predecessors of the Latin usurpers. In Europe four great blocks of territory had been lost forever. First was a slip along the southern slope of the Balkans in northern Thrace and Macedonia, which had fallen into the hands of the Bulgarians and become completely Slavonized. This is the district now known to us as Eastern Roumelia. The second piece of dismembered territory is represented by Albania. Third in the list of old Byzantine lands which Michael never recovered must be placed Greece proper, now divided between the Frank princes of Achaia and the Frank Dukes of Athens. It is true that the Paleologi retained a considerable slice of Peloponnesus, and were destined to eventually encroach upon their Frankish neighbors. Lastly must be mentioned the islands of the Ægean, of which a large majority were held either by the Venetian Government or by the Venetian adventurers. The great difference in respect of territory, however, between the empire of 1204 and the empire of 1261 was only one of the causes which crippled the realm of the Paleologi. The whole fiscal and administrative machine of government had been thrown irreparably out of gear. Then, again, the commercial decline of the empire had become irretrievable. The Paleologi were never able to reassert the old dominion over the seas which had made their predecessors the arbiters of the trade of Christendom. The Latin conquests threw the control of the trade of the Bosporus into the hands of the Venetians, who had no desire to make Constantinople their one central mart, but were just as ready to trade through the Syrian and Egyptian ports. From 1204 onward, Italy, rather than Constantinople, became the centre and starting place for all European commerce, and the great Italian republics employed all their energies to prevent the Greek fleet from recovering its old strength. It should be added that the emperors who succeeded each other on the restored throne of Constantinople were without exception men more fitted to lose than to hold together an impoverished and exhausted empire. After the decisive battle gained by the Ottoman Sultan, Murad I., in front of Adrianople in 1362 the Byzantine empire became a mere head without a body, and there is no doubt that the death stroke might then have been dealt which was to be deferred for ninety years. As we have said, the last Paleologi sank into the humble vassals of the Ottoman ruler whose realm encircled them, and the duty of defending Christendom devolved on the Servians and Hungarians, who between them sturdily discharged it for 150 years. The sole service rendered to civilization by the Byzantine empire during its last ninety years of nominal existence—and no one, of course, would underrate the service—was that it acted as the custodian of ancient literature and art until Italy was ripe for the inheritance.

M. W. H.

Stevenson's New Novel.

In *The Wrecker*, by Mr. R. L. STEVENSON (Scribners), we have not only the latest, but the strongest of the writer's performances in the field of prose fiction. It is true that on the title page there figures the name of an American collaborator, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, and it is possible that the artist may have been indebted to him for some of the raw material, notably the account of an astonishing American commercial college and the transcript of San Francisco life in the speculative era. In the workmanship, however, we detect no traces of any other hand than Mr. Stevenson's, and even as regards the substance of the narrative it is plain that the chapters dealing with Edinburgh and student life in Paris, with divers modes of existence in New South Wales, and with the islands of the Pacific, are drawn from his personal observation. So remarkable, indeed, are the range and variety of the scenes and incidents that our credulity is somewhat strained by the assumption that we are reading the record of one man's experience. The hero of the narrative is scarcely old enough to have seen so much and studied it so thoroughly, though it may be that more than one middle-aged but much-travelled Ulysses may be met with among the anomalous characters encountered amid the strange, adventurous, sensuous existence that men lead in the South Seas.

As regards class, this novel is a story of crime and its detection; in respect of structure, it is an autobiography prefaced with a prologue and capped with an epilogue. About the choice of subject and form, the author tells us something in the concluding paragraphs. The genesis and growth of "The Wrecker" is, we are informed, that once on board the schooner Equator, the authors—it is not Mr. Stevenson's fault that we do not credit the alleged plurality of authorship—heard several stories about the sale of wrecks. The subject tempted them, and they sat down to discuss its possibilities. "What a tangle it would make," suggested one, "if the wrong crew were aboard. But how to get the wrong crew there?" "I have it!" cried the other, "the so-and-so affair." It seems that not many months before and not many hundred miles from where the schooner Equator was then sailing a proposition almost tantamount to that which forms the pivot of this narrative had been made by a British skipper to some British castaways. The central situation having been found, the plot, we are informed, was outlined before the authors turned in. The question of treatment required longer discussion, for the aim was to avoid the impression of elaborate unlifelike mechanism made by the ordinary form of police novel or mystery story. The conclusion was reached that the end might be attained if the tale were gradually approached, some of the characters introduced beforehand, and the book started in the tone of a novel of manners and experience. In this way the mystery might seem the outgrowth of real life. With this purpose in view, the two principal types, that of the American handy man of business and that of the Yankee merchant sailor, are dwelt upon at some length, and the same effect of realism is contemplated in the introduction of some secondary figures and incidents not directly connected with the plot. With delightful candor Mr. Stevenson acknowledges that after this method of approaching and fortifying the police novel had been laboriously planned, it occurred to the authors that it had been invented previously by some one else and was in fact the process adopted by Charles Dickens in his later work. There is, however, a marked difference between the mystery story of Dickens, or, for that matter, of Gaboriau, and that exemplified in "The Wrecker." In the majority of Dickens's novels, and in all of Gaboriau's, love plays a considerable rôle, whereas what has been called the master passion of the modern world might as well be non-existent as regards the part assigned to it in the book before us, or, indeed, in any of Mr. Stevenson's productions. Either Mr. Stevenson feels no impulse to depict the complex and romantic passion which is to the sexual instinct what the flower is to the root, or he wishes to demonstrate that the power of making a story interesting without an infusion of love making did not perish with Defoe and Godwin.

It is surprising in how many places Mr. Stevenson seems to be equally at home. We can vouch for the accuracy and vividness of the scenes in the Latin Quarter, as well as those in Frisco; Bret Harte has not more faithfully delineated the one nor Henri Mürger the other. When we find ourselves in the South Seas, or in New South Wales, or in Edinburgh, the narrative still bears the marks of thorough knowledge and keen insight. The whole book is permeated with the humor which is not only the most diverting but the deepest of interpreters, and which is Mr. Stevenson's most characteristic gift. It is indeed by humor that he is separated by the whole diameter of artistic nature from, for instance, Mr. Henry James. The highest emotion which the latter can elicit in the reader is that of calm satisfaction; seldom, if ever, does he provoke a smile. As you read Mr. Stevenson, on the other hand, when you are not held breathless by curiosity or alarm, you are almost always smiling and at times burst into a loud laugh. There are few things of Mark Twain's funnier than the description in this novel of Muskegon's Commercial College, where boys were trained to become stock brokers and produce brokers by gambling with counters in a mimic stock exchange. Then, again, there is nothing more side splitting in the *Scenes de la Vie de Bohème* than the experiences of Mr. Stevenson's hero in the Latin Quarter after his supplies were cut off through the failure of his father. Two of these incidents are so delicious that we must be allowed to reproduce them. Dodd, the hero, had been sent to Paris to learn to be a sculptor, and we are told that, after being thrown upon his own resources, he was still able for a time to get credit for a midday meal at a cabman's eating house on the outer boulevard. Dodd explains that "Supper I was supposed not to require, sitting down nightly to the delicate table of some rich acquaintances. This arrangement was extremely ill considered. My fable, credible enough at first, and so long as my clothes were in good order, must have seemed worse than doubtful after my coat became frayed about the edges and my boots began to squeak and pipe along the restaurant floors. The allowance of one meal a day besides, though suitable enough to the state of my finances, agreed poorly with my stomach. The restaurant was a place I had often visited experimentally, to taste the life of students then more unfortunate than myself; and I had never in those days entered it without disgust, or left it without nausea. It was strange to find myself sitting down with avidity, rising up with satisfaction, and counting the hours that divided me from my return to such a table. But hunger is a great magician; and so soon as I had spent my ready cash, and could no longer fill up on bowls of chocolate or hunks of bread, I must depend entirely on that cabman's eating house, and upon certain rare, long-expected, long-remembered windfalls," in the shape of Latin Quarter loans not meant to be repaid.

Of course, however, patience and trustfulness have their limits even in the keepers of a cabman's eating house. Mr. Dodd records that eventually a shade of change in his reception at this ordinary "marked the beginning of a new phase in my distress. The first day I told myself it was but fancy; the next, I made quite sure it was a fact; the third, in mere panic I stayed away, and went for forty-eight hours fasting. This was an act of great unreason; for the debtor who stays away is but the more remarked, and the boarder who misses a meal is sure to be accused of infidelity. On the fourth day, therefore, I returned, inwardly quaking. The proprietor looked askance upon my entrance; the waitresses (who were his daughters) neglected my wants and sniffed at the affected joviality of my salutations; last and most plain, when I called for *suisse* (such as was being served to all the other diners) I was bluntly told there were no more. It was obvious I was near the end of my tether; one plank divided me from want, and now I felt it tremble."

It was now evident that as a sculptor Dodd would starve in Paris, and he came to the sane conclusion that, swallowing his pride, he must become a sculptor's workman. He proceeded, therefore, to the atelier of his old master, a certain distinguished wielder of the chisel, by whose example and instruction he had been supposed to profit, and who had once done him the honor in the days of his opulence to partake of a déjeuner. Toward the end of this repast, which had been bountiful, the master had let drop some good-natured words of commendation touching his young host's masterpiece, a statue of the Genius of Muskegon, which through his father's influence had been ordered for the State House of a Western commonwealth. It was consequently without any misgivings as to his qualifications that Dodd reluctantly proceeded to doff the frock coat of a gentleman and approach art in the workman's tunic. His reception in the master's atelier is calculated to enlighten not only amateur artists, but also amateur men of letters who conceive that, because some of their unpaid contributions have found their way into print, they can easily earn a living with the pen. "*Tiens*, this little Dodd!" cried the master; and then, as his eye fell on my dilapidated clothing, I thought I could perceive his countenance to darken. I made my plea in English; for I knew, if he were vain of anything, it was of his achievement of the island tongue. "Master," said I, "will you take me in your studio again; but this time as a workman?" "I sought your fazér was immensely reech," said he. I explained to him that I was now an orphan and penniless. He shook his head. "I have better workmen waiting at my door," said he, "far better workmen." "You used to think something of my work, sir," I pleaded. "Somesing, somesing—yés!" he cried; "énough for a son of a reech man—not énough for an orphan. Besides, I sought you might learn to be an artist; I did not sink you might learn to be a workman."

A favorable turn in the tide having drifted Dodd to San Francisco, he became an ornamental sleeping partner for his friend Pinkerton, the type of an all-round man of business. Among the latter's countless devices for the abstraction of dollars was a scheme described in the advertisement as Pinkerton's Hebdomedary Picnics, soon shortened by popular consent to the Dromedary. Of these unique steamboat excursions Mr. H. Loudon Dodd, late of the École des Beaux Arts, was made manager and honorary steward. The following paragraphs give but a glimpse of his experience in this capacity: "By 8 o'clock any Sunday morning I was to be observed by an admiring public on the wharf. The garb and attributes of sacrifice consisted of a black frock coat, rosetted, its pockets bulging with sweetmeats and inferior cigars; trousers of a light blue, a silk hat like a reflector, and a varnished wand. A goodly steamer guarded my one flank, panting and throbbing, flags fluttering fore and aft of her, illustrative of the Dromedary and patriotism. My other flank was covered by the ticket office, strongly held by a trusty character of the Scots persuasion, rosetted like his superior, and smoking a cigar to mark the occasion festive. At half-past, having assured myself that all was well with the free luncheons, I lit a cigar myself, and awaited the strains of the 'Pioneer Band.' I had never to wait long. They were German and punctual, and by a few minutes after the half hour I would hear them booming down street with a long military roll of drums, some score of gratuitous asses prancing at the head in bearskin hats and buckskin aprons, and conspicuous with resplendent axes. The band, of course, we paid for; but so strong is the San Franciscan passion for public masquerade that the asses (as I say) were all gratuitous, pranced for the love of it, and cost us nothing but their luncheon. The musicians formed up in the bows of my steamer, and struck into a skittish polka; the asses mounted guard upon the gangway and the ticket office; and presently after, in family parties of father, mother, and children, in the form of duplicate lovers, or in that of solitary youth, the public began to descend upon us by the carful at a time; four to six hundred, perhaps, with a strong German flavor, and all merry as children. When these had been shepherded on board, and the inevitable belated two or three had gained the deck amid the cheering of the public, the hawser was cast off, and we plunged into the bay. And now behold the honorary steward in the hour of duty and glory; see me circulate amid the crowd, radiating affability and laughter, liberal with my sweetmeats and cigars. I say unblushing things to hobbledehoy girls, tell shy young persons this is the married people's boat, roguishly ask the abstracted if they are thinking of their sweethearts, offer paterfamilias a cigar, am struck with the beauty and grow curious about the age of mamma's youngest, who (I assure her gayly) will be a man before his mother; or perhaps it may occur to me, from the sensible expression of her face, that she is a person of good counsel, and I ask her earnestly if she knows any particularly pleasant place on the Saucelito or San Rafael coast, for the scene of our picnic is always supposed to be uncertain. The next moment I am back at my giddy badinage with the young ladies, wakening laughter as I go, and leaving in my wake applausive comments of 'Isn't Mr. Dodd a funny gentleman?' and 'Oh, I think he's just too nice!'"

Although the narrative starts in the heart of the Pacific, and although we twice return thither in the course of it, we find very little about the scenery and the characteristics of native life in Polynesia. This is a little disappointing, because, having chosen for himself a dwelling place in Samoa, the author is peculiarly qualified to tell us what we want to hear. But for the application to Oceanica of the faculty for landscape drawing, and for the study of character and manners, which was so signally demonstrated in the author's earliest writings, we shall have to wait for other books which, doubtless, will be presently forthcoming. In the present volume there is only the following brief description of the outward aspect on a winter's afternoon of Tai-o-hae, the French capital of the Marquesas archipelago: "The trades, we are told, blew strong and squally; the surf roared loud on the shingle beach; and the fifty-ton schooner-of-war that carries the flag and influence of France about the islands of the cannibal group rolled at her moorings under Prison Hill. The clouds hung low and black on the surrounding amphitheatre of mountains; rain had fallen earlier in the day, real tropic rain, a waterspout for violence, and the green and gloomy brow of the mountain was still seamed with many silver threads of torrent. In these hot and healthy islands winter is but a name. The rain had not refreshed, nor could the wind invigorate the dwellers of Tai-o-hae; away at one end, indeed, the commandant was directing some changes in the residency garden beyond Prison Hill; and the gardeners, being all convicts, had no choice but to continue to obey. All other folks slumbered and took their rest; Vaekehu, the native queen, in her trim house under the rustling palms; the Tahitian Commissary, in his beflagged official residence; the merchants, in their deserted stores; and even the club servant in the club, his head fallen forward on the bottle counter under the map of the world and the cards of navy officers. In the whole length of the shoreside street, with its scattered board houses looking to the sea, its grateful shade of palms and green jungle of puraos, no moving figure could be seen. Only at the end of a rickety pier that once (in the prosperous days of the American rebellion) was used to groan under the cotton of John Hart, there might have been spied upon a pile of lumber the famous tattooed white man, the living curiosity of Tai-o-hae. His eyes were open staring down the bay. He saw the mountains droop, as they approached the entrance, and break down in cliffs; the surf boil white round the two sentinel islets; and between, on the narrow bight of blue horizon, Ua-pu upraise the ghost of her pinnacled mountain tops. But his mind would take no account of these familiar features, as he dodged in and out along the frontier line of sleep, and waking memory would serve him with broken fragments of the past: brown faces and white, of skipper and shipmate, king and chief, would arise before his mind and vanish; he would recall old voyages, old landfalls in the hour of dawn; he would hear again the drums beat for a man-eating festival; perhaps he would summon up the form of that island princess for the love of whom he had submitted his body to the cruel hands of the tattooer, and now sat on the lumber at the pier end of Tai-o-hae, so strange a figure of a European."

One glimpse now of a Scotchman manifestly drawn from life; the hero's maternal grandfather, a stonemason who made a fortune by erecting buildings which combined a minimum of outlay with a maximum of show. He had a notion that his grandson's experience at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* would qualify him to become an architect, a term synonymous in his vocabulary with housebuilder of the type with which he was himself familiar. It never occurred to the hero, being an American, to be ashamed of his grandfather, although the latter, as we have said, had been a working mason and had risen from the ranks rather by shrewdness than by merit. We are told that "in his appearance, speech, and manners he bore broad marks of his origin, which were gall and wormwood to my Uncle Adam. His nails, in spite of anxious supervision, were often in conspicuous mourning; his clothes hung about him in bags and wrinkles, like a ploughman's Sunday coat; his accent was rude, broad, and dragging; take him at his best, and even when he could be induced to hold his tongue, his mere presence in a corner of the drawing room, with his open-air wrinkles, his scanty hair, his battered hands, and the cheerful craftiness of his expression, advertised the whole gang for a self-made family. My aunt might mince and my cousins bridle, but there was no getting over the solid, physical fact of the stonemason in the chimney corner."

This worthy Scot took a great fancy to his American grandson, and liked to have the young man accompany him in his walks. The purpose of these excursions was "not to seek antiquities or to enjoy famous prospects, but to visit, one after another, a series of doleful suburbs, for which it was the old gentleman's chief claim to renown that he had been the sole contractor, and too often the architect besides. I have rarely seen a more shocking exhibition; the bricks seemed to be blushing in the walls, and the slates on the roof to have turned pale with shame; but I was careful not to communicate these impressions to the aged artificer at my side; and when he would direct my attention to some fresh monstrosity perhaps with the comment, 'There's an idee o' mine's; its cheap and tasty, and had a graand run; the idee was soon stole, and there's whole deestricts near Glesgie with the goathic adeetion and that plunth.' I would civilly make haste to admire, and (what I found particularly delighted him) to inquire into the cost of each adornment." It was after our hero's evacuation of Paris, which, as we have seen, he found untenable, that these excursions took place, and it was on one of these occasions that his grandfather made him a present of £2,000 and urged him with this capital to settle down in Scotland and pursue the business of a builder and contractor. Here is his bit of lowland Scotch in which the proposal is unfolded: "See here, then, Jeannie's yin! A'm going to give ye a set-off. Your mither was always my fav'rite, for A never could agree with Aadam. A like ye fine yoursel'; there's nae nonsense about ye; ye've a fine nayteral idee of builder's work; ye've been to France, where they tell me they're grand at the stuccy. A splendid thing for ceilin's, the stuccy! and it's a vailyable disguise, too; A don't believe there's a builder in Scotland has used more stuccy than me. But, as A was sayin', if ye'll follie that trade, with the capital that A'm goin' to give ye, ye may live yet to be as rich as mysel'. Ye see, ye would have always had a share of it when A was gone; it appears ye're needin' it now; well, ye'll get the less, as is only just and proper."

None of Poe's stories has a more skilfully constructed plot than that which is evolved in the book before us. It is questionable whether any reader will guess the secret of "The Wreck" before the author is ready to explain it. We have carefully avoided casting any light upon the mystery beyond the hint given in the passage quoted at the outset from the epilogue. When the veil is lifted it will uncover horrors enough to satiate the most bloodthirsty devourers of the police novel.

But although we are far from underrating the faculty of arousing and sustaining curiosity, this, as our extracts will demonstate, is the least of the author's merits, which have never been exhibited on so large a scale or so effectively as in the present novel.

The Mont Blanc Observatory.

From the London Times.

It may be remembered that M. Jansen, the well-known director of the Meudon Observatory and member of the French Institute, who last year made the ascent of Mont Blanc in order to examine the practicability of the scheme for establishing an observatory there, finding that at forty feet below the surface of the snow there was no solid bed of rock for foundations of a building, conceived the idea of constructing one which could be kept in its place by the snow itself. He accordingly formed an association, to which Prince Roland Bonaparte, M. Léon Say, M. Raphael Bischoffsheim, Count de Greffuihe, and Baron de Rothschild were liberal subscribers, and the funds thus obtained were spent in the construction of an observatory, which, after having been put up in the grounds of the Meudon establishment, has been taken to pieces again and sent off to Chamounix, from which place it will be taken up to the summit of the mountain and put together under the supervision of M. Capus, the well-known explorer who accompanied M. Bonvalot in his journey through Central Asia and over the Pamir into India.

The new observatory is of timber and is about 25 feet in height, being divided into two compartments or stories, surmounted by a square platform, with an iron balustrade and a wooden scaffolding for the reception of the various meteorological instruments. There are several rooms in each compartment or story, for the use, upon the one side, of the director and his staff, and, upon the other, of tourists and their guides. These rooms will be provided with barrack furniture and with small stoves for heating and cooking purposes, the fuel used at first being anthracite. The two stories communicate with each other by means of a spiral staircase, while there is a straight ladder with a trapdoor giving access to the room for the guides. Ventilation is provided for by means of tubes, while the windows of the upper story, with double framework and double panes of glass, afford views in various directions, among others toward Chamounix, with which it is intended to communicate by means of semaphorical signals when the atmosphere is sufficiently clear. All the timber has a thick coat of fireproof paint, and each piece of wood is numbered so as to facilitate the observatory's being easily put together, a work which will be completed by the end of September.

It remains, of course, to be seen whether the building will, as M. Janssen anticipates, remain in its place by the simple process of letting the planks which are to form the walls down some distance into the hardened snow.