

GOSSIP ABOUT SOME CURRENT BOOKS

Never since the days when Dickens made his attack on America through Martin Chuzzlewit and American Notes, has there come from the English press such a wholly unwarranted representation of America and American customs as has just been produced by one Paul Fountain and published by Longmans, Green & Co. There is this difference, however. Dickens was correct from his point of view and sufficiently informed to avoid mistakes of geography and orthography, when describing things wholly American. He also refrained from traversing the fields of science in which he was unacquainted, while Mr. Fountain, in his book with the imposing title: "The Great Northwest and the Great Lake Region of North America," attempts to cover all the known sciences from Darwinism to the venacular of the cowboy, and is equally as absurd in all. If, however, one reads the book, for any thing but instruction, it may have its uses, for the very egotism of the writer gives a humor in the start which may be maintained throughout if the reader has a keen sense of the ridiculous. Of Darwin and most of the other naturalists, all of whom he disagrees with, he says:

"I do not say that I think that many of the theories and doctrines of the modern naturalists and scientists are wrong. I know it. That goes miles beyond thinking." Evidently that is the way the book was written—the author thinking he knew it all, which went miles beyond giving the subject any thought.

Snobbery, gluttony, boastfulness, lying and carelessness are the distinguishing characteristics he gives the typical American.

Evidently his conception of "The Great Northwest" is Ohio, Michigan and the country adjacent to Winnipeg on the east, for the great northwest, as every schoolboy knows it from north of the Missouri and west of the Red River, is never mentioned.

Of the points he covered is badly mixed, and although he has been a rover over some parts of the country, one is induced to believe many of his facts are from what he has heard rather than any attempt at accuracy, as for instance: He graphically describes a settlement of "Shakers" he visited in Lebanon, Mass., while as a matter of fact, there is no such town or post-office in the state, but in New York there is a Lebanon Springs and a New Lebanon, both of which are Shaker settlements.

His horror of the vulgarity of American slang is side-splitting, especially when he undertakes to translate it, and even at times the spelling displays grotesque ignorance.

"Imagine," he says, "when the American wishes to abandon a position he says 'vornish the ranch.'" He condemns, without even getting the spelling correct, a perfectly proper and legitimate Spanish phrase "vamos rancho," (leaving or letting go the home of the herdsmen). A "tenderfoot" he explains is "a vicious scoundrel," and says, "there is no such thing as a bull in the States; here it is a gentleman cow."

It seems almost a waste of time to have given so much space to such absurdities, were it not that we wish to show one English critic we are not lacking in appreciation of fine humor, even when it is dealt out to us in such huge chunks, and also to warn a "tenderfoot" against reading such a screed with any

other intention than to get the most fun possible out of it.

"Tolstoy, the Man"—Edward A. Steiner. It is refreshing to turn from a book of pretenses to one so genuine, so straightforward, so pure. It is discovering the crystal spring after sifting the depths of a muddy pool to slake the thirst.

Tolstoy is undoubtedly one of the unique figures of this age. Admirers and detractors alike give him this place in the literary and sociological world. Towering above all competitors in whatever field he entered, he has been the target for the shafts of most intense hatred and devoted admiration. To the masses, men in this position, even though like Tolstoy they delight in mingling and being a part of it, seem to be encased in an atmosphere that repels any close intimate knowledge of the man apart from his creations. To charge this atmosphere with a certain familiarity and enable the reader to contemplate the man apart from his books, and yet seeing the work as a logical result of the thinking, feeling, throbbing man, is just what Dr. Steiner has done in this book. It might be called "the primer to the works of Tolstoy" and be no misnomer, for conditions under which each book was written and incidents in the life and history of the author that led up to them are so clearly portrayed that the causative in effect explains many of the obscure and misunderstood portions of Tolstoy and his doctrines.

While writing from the vantage-ground of early acquaintance and friendship, which continued into mature years and renewed when the author, at the instance of the Outlook company, again visited the subject of his book, Dr. Steiner does not write as the personal friend, but as the searcher after truth, when he turns the limelight of personal criticism upon his subject. The beauties of Tolstoy's character were never painted with gentler hand, but the degradations and indulgences of earlier years were not left out or lightly touched.

Dr. Steiner shows a deep personal touch with the inner man, that many have felt whose souls have gone out to the writer while reading his books, and yet were unable to express so tenderly as he when he says: "In the portrayal of such men—a Moscow debauchee—one always feels that although he does not spare them in depicting their faults, their deeper inner decayed self, he does it with the thought, 'It might have been I.'" A striking paragraph in the book is a parallel he draws between Ruskin and Tolstoy, the first sentence of which is the keynote to a resemblance one must perceive at once while wondering why it was not thought of before. "Both were aristocrats to their finger-tips, and both were making the straight path for the coming of a democracy." But if one were to quote all the good things it would be to leave nothing out from cover to cover, and we can but briefly say that no collection of Tolstoy literature would be complete without Dr. Steiner's book, and no lover of Tolstoy's writing has gotten the best and all there is in them without having read it.

Outlook Publishing company, New York. Price \$1.50.

"Running the River"—George Cary Eggleston. From the time the haughty Spaniard paddled his pirogue till today, when the naphtha launch dances upon its bosom, the Mississippi river and its tributaries have held a wealth of material for the story-writer and the most delightful charm to the lover of the adventurous. A story that finds its plot "in the old steamboat days," or whose hero achieved distinction or wealth while "running the river," is sure of an audience and welcomed as eagerly as though it were an entirely new theme. Naturally, a book bearing the very title of this fascinating occupation has been received without question, and will continue to have a large sale. The story opens with three boys in their "teens" sitting on the forward boiler-deck guards of their father's steamer High-flyer, indulging in almost too mature a conversation regarding life and its possibilities as seen by the vanishing fur trade of St. Louis. The smokestacks of another of their father's steamers comes into sight, and in the space of about 15 minutes, if one is to judge from the rapidity with which things fly past, both steamers are sunk, the boys escape after various heroic adventures, and are tossed almost into eternity is discovered to be blind from scalding water, and the boys find themselves standing on the bank taking up the conversation almost where it was interrupted, though really the space of several days has elapsed. The boys who would have inherited the business and wealth of the two steamers find themselves penniless, with an afflicted father and young sister dependent upon them. Cheerfully they take up the burden, and do not resolve to rebuild their father's line of boats. The story is of how they kept their resolve. River adventures, the ups and downs of river traffic, quaint frontier characters and customs of the times go to make up a story of boyish America's perseverance that would delight the boys and interest the girls, as the sister shares in her brother's fortunes. It is not the vigorous book, however, that most parents delight to put in their children's hands nowadays, and we venture to say the up-to-date boy would know "it was too good to be true." It has too much the flavor of the ancient Sunday-school book. However, it is clean and pure, which cannot always be said of that class of river stories.

A. S. Barnes & Co., New York. Price \$1.50.

"An American Cruiser in the East"—By John D. Ford, engineer, United States navy, has been recommended by the navy department for addition to our ships' libraries. Mr. Ford, who was with Dewey at Manila, has written a full account of the present status of Japan, China, Korea and the Russian possessions in the far east, with a sketch of the war between China and Japan. In the account of Japan's military resources, A. S. Barnes & Co., the publishers of the volume, have included among the numerous illustrations some Japanese pictures of naval battles.

"The Viking's Skull"—Two editions of this new novel by John R. Carling, author of "The Shadow of the Czar," March 19, have already been printed. This stirring romance is said to contain at least three series of great dramatic interest. The plot which tells how Idris Marville, true Earl of Ormsby, recovered a treasure hidden by one of his progenitors—a Viking of the ninth century—and how he cleared the memory of his father, who had been wrongfully convicted of murder. "The Viking's Skull" has already been published in England, and it is said to be a worthy successor to the author's remarkably successful novel, "The Shadow of the Czar."

Popular Novels—A special dispatch to the New York Sun from London announces that the Pall Mall Gazette's popular vote as to the ten best novels issued in 1903, gives Richard Whiting's "The Yellow Van," fourth place in popularity, favor abroad. The Sun also announces this compilation or result received: Henry Seton Merriman's "Baruch of the Guards," a percentage

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WATER ON DESERT LAND.

From The Dalles Chronicle.

Yesterday J. H. Thomas, who has been sinking an artesian well on the Beardsley land, opposite Castle Rock, on the Washington side of the river, struck an immense flow at a depth of 160 feet. About a year ago, while prospecting for oil, a flow was struck at what is known as Botten springs, about a mile from Castle Rock, but it was on low ground, and as the casing was only put through the gravel and sand near the surface, it was impossible to determine how high the water would raise in a standpipe at this point, and owing to the difficulty of driving a casing in this hole, it was thought best to sink another well on higher ground. This has been done with the result that they can run over 2,000 to 3,000 acres of land and convert it from a barren sand waste into a garden spot.

About a week ago a number of Dalles citizens purchased over 1,000 acres, which land lies in the immediate vicinity of Castle Rock, and there have also been 40 or 50 desert claims taken by our citizens in the same section of country. From this we would judge that in the near future many of our citizens will be ready to retire and live on the interest of the money made in what they at first termed a rash gamble. Arrangements are at present under

way to sink a well south of Castle Rock, and the success of this will prove a thorough solution of the irrigating problem and make the settlers independent of the government aid in the reclamation of this land. This section has the mildest climate of any in Oregon; the soil, under irrigation, will produce any fruits or cereals that will grow anywhere else on the coast, and with the river and railroad within easy reach the settlers will have all they can desire in the way of transportation facilities.

IMPORTANT RULING IN SLANDER CASE

A complaint alleging slander must show that the person sued has accused the complainant of a crime. This in substance was the ruling of Presiding Judge Cleland in the state circuit court yesterday morning in disposing of a demurrer to the answer filed by J. Dechenbach to the damage suit of D. G. Rima.

The men had legal troubles before the suit for slander was instituted. Rima alleges that Dechenbach called him several bad names, one of them being prefaced by the title "Dago." He also charges Dechenbach with stating to different persons that he is a thief and had tried to influence a jury. The court held that the alleged statements in reference to the jury constitute an accusation of crime and overruled those paragraphs in the demurrer. He sustained the demurrer as regards the first three paragraphs of the complaint, declaring that calling a man a "Dago" does not accuse him of a crime.

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