

A Book of the Week.

"THE CAPTIVE OF PEKIN."*

THIS book should be read as an antidote after the perusal of Mr. Le Gallienne's latest. It has one feature which makes it stand out from all the fiction of the present, or indeed, any other day. One curious fact makes it a note-worthy book, and marks it from its fellows—from beginning to the end there is no mention of a woman in its pages.

It is, indeed, casually stated that the reason the Captive of Pekin had for travelling in Asia, was a love disappointment; and I think I remember that on one page there is an allusion to some women, in the crowd of people noticed by Vanscombe in the streets of Pekin. "The occasional passing of a native farmer, or of his servants, male and female, the latter with their crushed feet half limping as they moved." But, except for those slight recognitions of the existence of another sex in the world, we might think that Mr. Hannan had never realized that women came into the plan of existence at all.

One would think, to judge by the way in which all the troubles of life are usually assigned by the male novelist to the feminine element that "The Captive of Pekin" would be a book with no troubles in it at all. But this is anything but the case. It is a record of suffering, tortures, murders, plots, utterly unrelieved from beginning to end by any lightness, any secondary interest, any glimpse of happiness.

The opening is distinctly good; the hero, if he may be so called, is sitting on the balcony of the hotel at Brussels, when a dying swallow falls at his feet. He picks it up, and discovers, tied to its leg, a little piece of paper, old, much torn and soiled, but bearing words in the English language, imploring the finder to come to the rescue of an unhappy captive of the Chinese. The young Englishman is so impressed by the curious nature of the message which has come to him from such a distance, that, having money and leisure, he embraces the quest, and repairs forthwith to China, to try and discover the whereabouts of the mysterious William Norris.

He is helped in his search by a curious and benevolent person, an Englishman brought up in China, and who conforms to Chinese habits and modes of life. Naturally such a man is a valuable ally, and the quest is eventually and after much bloodshed, brought to a satisfactory issue, and William Norris rescued, more dead than alive.

The descriptions of Pekin are evidently at second-hand as the writer in a preface practically acknowledges. The idea of the Chinese habits and character is odious in the extreme.

The writer depends entirely upon his plot for his interest; he attempts no characterization except in the case of Chin-chin-wa, and even there the sketch is certainly deficient in form and colour. The style of writing is elementary, bald narrative, which the writer seems to have some difficulty in working up into the requirements of the English grammar. Here is a short sample:—

"At this point it becomes advisable to place before the reader's mind something in the nature of a sketch,

* "The Captive of Pekin." By Charles Hannan. Jarrold & Sons.

however rough in outline and unfinished in detail, of the vast city of Pekin."

We are used nowadays to a style of fiction rather less suggestive of dry bones than this.

I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that Herbert Vanscombe and Chin-chin-wa made a great mistake in not applying immediately to the English Embassy at Pekin. Was not that the obvious thing to do? Numerically, the Embassy is doubtless not very powerful, but the name of England is surely enough to protect her subjects, in every country with which she has diplomatic relations, from such outrage as Norris suffered. Directly the Embassy knew that Norris had been traced to Pekin, and not since heard of, it seems that they would have made it their business to demand some account of him; at least, that is the view of the uninitiated person.

G. M. R.

Laus Deo.

LET praise devote thy work, and skill comply
Thy whole mind, and thy heart be lost in joy,
Well doing bringeth pride, this constant thought
Humility, that thy best done is nought.
Man doeth nothing well, be it great or small,
Save to praise God; but that hath saved all;
For God requires no more than thou hast done,
And takes thy work to bless it for His own.

I love all beauteous things,
I seek and adore them;
God hath no better praise,
And man in his hasty days
Is honoured for them.

I, too, will something make.
And joy in the making;
Altho' to-morrow it may seem
Like the empty words of a dream
Remembered on waking.

From the shorter Poems of Robert Bridges.

WHAT TO READ.

"Dante's Ten Heavens: a Study of the Paradiso." By Edmund G. Gardner, M.A.

"Dante at Ravenna." A Study by Catherine Mary Phillimore.

"Scientific Method in Biology." By Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell.

"Short Studies on Vital Subjects." By the Rev. P. W. de Quetteville, M.A.

"The Autobiography of Arthur Young." With Selections from his Correspondence. Edited by M. Betham Edwards.

"Lady Fry, of Darlington." By Eliza Orme.

"Social Pictorial Satire." By George Du Maurier.

"The Awakening of a Nation: Mexico of To-Day." By Charles F. Lummis.

"Her Ladyship's Elephant." By D. D. Wells.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)