

A Book of the Week.

"TRAVELS IN KOREA."

MRS. BISHOP has done a great service to the study of human nature in this sketch of the "Isolated People."

Until the other day, as it were, it was death to the stranger to enter the precincts of this fertile peninsula, and the bulk of the nation lived as though they were the sole inhabitants of the terrestrial globe.

They have changed all that, and, as Sir Walter Hillier, late Consul-General points out, in his interesting preface, it is the missionaries who have been the pioneers. One of the bits that most interested me was the account of the two Australian ladies who made the unheard-of experiment of going to live among the people in Fusan, a sea-port of Korea. They occupied a mud hovel, exposed to the full force of the southern sun, and so low that one of them could not stand upright in it. Privacy was impossible, for one feature of great prominence in the Korean character seems to be their insatiable curiosity, and these ladies made their *lever* and *coucher* with the publicity of a French Court. However they were well and happy.

"A certain number of women had been induced to become cleanly in their person and habits. All the neighbours were friendly, and rude remarks in the street had altogether ceased. Many of the women resorted to them for medical help, and the simple aid they gave brought them much goodwill. This friendly and civilized influence was the result of living for a year under very detestable circumstances. If they had dwelt in grand houses two and a half miles off upon the hill it is safe to say the result would have been nil. Without any fuss or blowing of trumpets, they quietly helped to solve one of the great problems as to 'Missionary Methods.' . . . The excitement among the Koreans consequent on the war had left them unmolested. A Japanese regiment had encamped close to them, and by permission had drawn water from the well in their compound, and had shown them nothing but courtesy."

Certainly there seems a field for women in Korea, if anywhere in this world! There is no country where the women are so rigidly secluded or so entirely a "*quantité négligeable*." In fact, love seems a trait not yet begun to develop in this race of people full of fine possibilities. And the influence of man extends downwards, as needs it must, among the lower parts of creation, so that even the ponies bite and fight like wild beasts, and seem insensible to kindness.

The climate of this country seems to be almost ideal, the flora and scenery in many parts exceedingly lovely. Mrs. Bishop was absolutely the first European woman ever seen in the interior of the country, and the amount of interest and curiosity she excited, makes extremely good reading, though it must have been well-nigh intolerable to go through. She is certainly a plucky woman, but we are used to pluck in our fellow countrywomen by now.

Her accounts of the Buddhist monasteries in the remote and exquisite Diamond Mountains is like a page of the "Arabian Nights." None of her descriptions are overdone, and she is always careful to minimize her own discomforts. Her description of the marriage customs of the country is intensely interesting, though too long to quote; so is the account of the barbaric splendour of the king's procession. Mixed with all this is much modern history of the most instructive kind.

* "Travels in Korea." Mrs. Bishop. (John Murray, London.)

Next week, I hope to notice—somewhat late in the day, I fear—Mark Twain's inimitable "More Tramps Abroad." In this he gives an account of the political status of women in New Zealand, which forms such a fitting corollary to the awful account of woman's bondage in Korea, that it seems as if the two books would make very instructive reading, taken successively. After all, there is something to be said for civilization!

G. M. R.

Dramatic Notes.

SIR SQUIRE BANCROFT read Dicken's famous "Christmas Carol" last Saturday night at St. Martin's Town Hall, on behalf of the "Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables." I say "read," because that was the word used in the programme, but, in reality, the story was not only given "without book," but was rendered with all the propriety of gesture and vitality of expression which could be derived solely from long professional experience on the stage. As though by the irony of Fate, the last and, indeed, only time that I have ever heard this justly celebrated work of fiction orally delivered before a public audience, was by the immortal author himself, some ten years previously to his lamented and comparatively premature decease, and, curious to relate, in that case also the so-called "Reading" partook rather of the character of a dramatic recital, but then, as it must be remembered, Charles Dickens was an actor of no mean order, and though not an intellectual elocutionist in the highest sense of the term, was still a very considerable master of vocal expression. Seeing then that the treatment employed in the delivery of the tale by its author and by its present exponent was essentially similar, I will not, even if a comparison were less invidious, and if, I felt myself justified in attempting to make one, venture to offer an opinion as to how far the one rendering or the other better conveyed to its hearers the beauty, the depth, and the force of that tale itself. Suffice it to say, what, I am sure, Sir Squire would be the first to acknowledge, and what every intelligent critic would naturally expect, it is scarcely to be supposed that any succeeding and, as it were, *ab extra* renderer could so completely throw himself into the various characters, or so absolutely identify himself with their thoughts and feelings, and express the same to an audience, as did their gifted creator. Still, it is no small achievement to have reached so high a standard of excellence as to be capable of being fairly measured in expression with that creator himself; and this I can safely affirm, that, after thirty years of critical observation of the widest kind, and of superadded practical study, I listened to Sir Squire's rendering of "The Christmas Carol" with quite as much pleasure, and with the same sense of freshness as when I heard it from the lips of Charles Dickens. The only exceptions, indeed, which I could take to some portions of Sir Squire's rendering were an occasional failure in articulate delivery, arising partly, no doubt, from the magnitude and difficulty of the task which he had set himself to accomplish—a want now and then of sufficient modulation in tone and inflection, and a few displays of exaggerated histrionic business, perhaps pardonable, however, in the case of a professed actor, such as when he illustrated the laughter of the "plump sister" of Scrooge's nephew's wife. Still, as these latter, if I may so call them, stage digressions,

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