

bare his most vulnerable point, showing how lean was his individual inspiration, reminding how shallow is much which he expressed so elegantly, how seldom he escaped from the academic attitude, being generally preoccupied, like Fromentin in painting, Scarlatti in music, more with the way he said a thing than with what he said.

And if to view Stevenson as a great instead of a merely charming writer, is to wrong him with indiscriminate eulogy, still more unjust is it to regard him as a hero simply because he loved his work, clinging to it loyally under adverse circumstances. Lafcadio Hearn was half blind, Delacroix was threatened all his life with a horrible throat complaint, Boucher died at his easel, Hector Berlioz with a symphony in hand. Yet their artistic ardor is never made a topic for sermons, while Whistler is never held up as a model for youth, by reason of the sixty sittings he demanded ere the portrait of Miss Alexander approximated his eternally exacting ideal. To the artist, remember, his work is everything; and to exalt him for gratifying his passion, perhaps immolating himself accordingly, is like exalting the belle who martyrs herself in the quest to add to her native beauty. Stevenson, one may be sure, would have resented greatly this endeavor to add his name to the catalogue of the saints; and it would please him far better to know that his memory is affectionately cherished, even now, in some of his well-loved Bohemian haunts in Edinburgh, his wit being still admiringly quoted in these places: that sparkling and abundant wit of his, which, unlike the least lovable of his books, was invariably anything but *virginibus puerisque*.

W. G. BLAIKIE MURDOCH.

## Mexican Myths

*History of Mexico*, by Hubert Howe Bancroft. New York: The Bancroft Publishing Co. \$2.00 net.

AS an historian Mr. Bancroft is to be classed with Herodotus rather than with more recent writers. Much of the "history" was written and printed in 1887 under the title, "A Popular History of the Mexican People"; "the term 'people,' in the absence of an intelligent middle class as the mainstay of the body politic essential in every properly ordained republican government, applying to the upper element rather than to the lower or menial order of society." Such was also the conception of the historian's proper field entertained by the Father of History (vulgo, the Father of Lies). The fidelity of Mr. Bancroft to the manner of Herodotus is most strikingly illustrated in the treatment of the early period of Mexican history:

"In the year 994 Huemac II ascended the throne of Tollam. But soon he gave himself up to evil practices, indulging in the pleasures of the wine cup, and dealing treacherously with his subjects. A sorcerer named Loveyo gathered a vast crowd near Tollam and kept them dancing to the beat of his drum until midnight, when, by reason of the darkness and their intoxication, they crowded each other over a precipice into a deep ravine, where they were turned into stone. In the hope of appeasing the angry gods a sacrifice of captives was ordered; but when a young boy, chosen by lot as the first victim, was placed upon the altar, and the knife plunged into his breast, there was found no heart in his body and his veins were without blood."

As one might anticipate, the extension of the narrative down to 1914 is characterized by the same romantic qual-

ity as the parts of the work written before 1887. Diaz is always able, pure, benevolent. Madero was a poor, weak theorist "weighing rather less than 137 pounds." "Better for the Maderos, the quiet enjoyment of their broad lands and numerous flocks and herds as heretofore; better for Mexico—perhaps, who can tell?—the beneficent rule of a mild dictatorship than anarchy under the domination of bandits and assassins." No doubt. But what the American reader, who just now may have responsibilities toward Mexico, really needs is not an account of Mexican conditions derived from historical skimmings and poetic imagination, but real information, including in its scope "the lower or menial order of society" as well as the chieftains. We are rather more in the dark about Mexico than we should have been had this book never been written.

## A Tragic Life

*The Story of Canada Blackie*, by Anne P. L. Field, with an introduction by Thomas Mott Osborne. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.00 net.

UNFORTUNATELY the story of Canada Blackie is not told in this book. It's there, but it is between the lines, discernible only by those who have explored the dark places of life. The author has collected letters written by this extraordinary prisoner during his last days, when, weakened by disease, the prison reform movement through the agency of Thomas Mott Osborne lifted the weight of stone and iron with which the state was slowly crushing the outlaw soul to death.

The book is a great deal more a story of Thomas Mott Osborne and his achievements in prison reform than it is a story of Canada Blackie. For the purpose of propaganda against the present prison system that may be pardonable. Yet the most powerful argument against the popular superstitions regarding crime and criminals would have been the real story of this man—the reactions of this strong spirit against those factors of its environment that turned unusual abilities to anti-social uses.

Blackie himself might have told the story some day had he lived. His letters show flashes of mental power which, turned upon the problem of his own career, might, with the healing influence of freedom, have given the world a story as big as his tragedy. As it is, one who reads between the lines gets a glimpse of that tragedy. It is a tragedy of a wrong social system, not merely a vicious prison system.

Blackie's letters do not indicate that he saw beyond the fact of the prison's savagery. But the writer knows that he had glimpses of the deeper causes. The long years of "solitary" and twenty months of total blackness in the dark cell would hardly make for clear vision. Few men would have survived it with unimpaired reason. Few in fact would have survived at all.

I met Blackie in the prison yard at Auburn the day he emerged from his five long years of solitary confinement and was permitted to mingle with his fellow prisoners. I had only to look at him to see that here was a powerful character unbroken by the worst that the prison system could inflict upon him. I saw the impress pain had made upon his strong face, and when I shook hands with him I saw the scars upon the wrists by which he had been hung in handcuffs at Joliet, twenty years before. I knew then that back of every line in that face and back of the deep fires in his eyes was a big story. It is too bad it was never told.

BENJAMIN J. LEGERE.