

Adventures in Archives

By CHARLES UPSON CLARK

FORTUNE smiles on some favored persons. An Italian engineer once asked me on the train what I considered the most beautiful spot in Italy. "Taormina," I replied, "but my wife prefers Syracuse." "I agree with her," he said. "Though a Tuscan, I spent some time in my youth in Italy, and my great wish was always to go back to Syracuse. When the war broke out, I was a naval reserve officer; orders came for me to proceed to Syracuse; and for that entire period, I was on duty among what I consider the loveliest views and most romantic associations my country has to offer."

Fortune has dealt kindly with me, and that often; but one dream looked impossible of fulfilment. From childhood I had been fascinated by that prince of adventurers, Christopher Columbus, and that long line of intrepid mariners who carried the banners of Portugal and Spain to Macao and Macassar, Acapulco and Aconcagua, before we unenterprising Nordics ventured even to rob them of their discoveries. I gathered a library of books on that brilliant era; I visited the rivulet in Porto Rico where Columbus landed to get water for his caravels, the pueblos in our southwest which must have witnessed the epic journeys of Coronado and of Cabeze de Vaca. In 1907, I gathered material in Spain for a book on ancient Spanish MSS, and made a pilgrimage to the Columbina, the library founded and endowed by Columbus's illegitimate son Ferdinand, where one can see Christopher's marginal notes in books which shared his wanderings.

But the dream of coming to know that period from the actual documents, remained a dream. Other interests, likewise fascinating, intervened. But suddenly, in April 1929, a long envelope with the frank of the Smithsonian Institution appeared, and within it a brief inquiry if I would be interested in a research project in Spain—and lo, the dream was in process of fulfilment! General Dawes had established a fund to be used in exploring Spanish archives, in the hope of finding reports and accounts of the early friars and conquistadores which might cast more light on the origin and the de-

tails of that strange civilization which they found in the New World.

Some weeks of preparation, and then the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Vatican, with their Mexican MSS. The first task of every investigator is to learn how to tell the true from the false. Of Maya MSS, only three are preserved—in Dresden, Paris, and Madrid—but I studied two clever "fakes." One, done with great care on the same agave fibre paper the ancients used, reproduced their hieroglyphics and deities admirably; but the forger had given his fancy rein, and depicted a war chariot. Now that astonishing Maya civilization had never divined the principle of the wheel; nowhere in America did the Spaniards find even a wheelbarrow. The other MS was charmingly done on deerskin, which also the Mayas used; but the artist got into trouble with the hieroglyphics, of which we can read many of those connected with dating; and one glance from an expert detected the imposture. A few weeks of study and imitation of genuine Aztec and Maya MSS in London, Paris, and Rome, and I was ready for the plunge.

I chose the Vatican with which to begin, knowing it well from years of work there, and hoping that the Americanists had not exploited it as thoroughly as they have the Spanish archives. The Vatican has catalogues and inventories of its various collections (now being revised with American aid); I commenced with those of the Barberini MSS, which have been in the Vatican only twenty-five years, and under "Indies" found at once two intriguing titles—a "Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis" (booklet on the medicinal plants of the Indians), and a "Compéndio y Descripción de las Indias Occidentales." When I opened the little "Libellus," I had my first thrill. Here were 185 charming aquarelles of medicinal plants in bloom, each with its Aztec name above and below an account, in Latin; the introduction stated that the book was the work of a Mexican Indian, Badianus, in 1552; he had been educated by the Franciscans in Mexico.

Now came the puzzle which every inves-

tigator meets: was the "Libellus" known? Kindly and learned Monsignor Mercati, Prefect of the Vatican Library, thought it might have been utilized in Hernández's great work on Mexican plants and animals, the first important natural history of our continent; but the pictures proved to be wholly different. Further search showed that a MS in the Royal Library at Windsor, demonstrably a copy of this Roman one, was just being published as new to science. Not till weeks later did I learn that the "Libellus" had been examined by that omnipresent Mexican scholar, del Paso y Troncoso, years ago, and that there is a brief description of it in one of his notebooks in Mexico City; and that Professor Lynn Thorndike of Columbia had listed it (but without mention of its Aztec pictures) in an article on Vatican medieval medical MSS, published while I was on the ocean coming over. But that the Vatican possesses the earliest illustrated work on the history of American botany and American medicine—that, no Americans scholar knew.

The "Compéndio y Descripción" was described in the catalogue as anonymous; but, it said, there will be no trouble in identifying it, for part of it is printed. It proved to be a huge volume, handsomely bound in red morocco with the Barberini coat of arms in gold; there were two parts, each beginning with some printed pages, and then turning into carefully written manuscript, of which it has over five hundred large pages. It is an exhaustive description of the New World, from Florida and California to Patagonia, largely from personal inspection; dates given made it clear that the author had been over here about 1620. But how to identify him?

For months my own efforts and those of my friends and foreign colleagues in the field were unavailing. I had written the Smithsonian that the MS made the impression of printer's copy, part already in page proof; that it was a book which they had begun to print, but never finished. If so, it was obviously a prize; and in any case, fuller investigation was necessary; so when I returned to Rome in the spring, I spent several days noting every personal reference in the MS—and there were many. The author celebrated mass in 1618 in several Indian pueblos near Arica, and "burned down one, called Isquiliza, because they were mostly idolaters there." He went through the great earthquake of 1619 in Peru, which devastated Trujillo. At Lima he witnessed the conferring of degrees at the University, with solemn academic procession, some seventy doctors in their brilliant robes—a ceremony as imposing, he thought, as at Salamanca. He begs the King to appoint a Bishop of Florida, for the heretic corsairs make the trip dangerous from Cuba or Porto Rico, and the good Christians of St. Augustine often go for years without a pastoral visit. On one macabre occasion he was staying in a little Nicaraguan village when an Indian woman, who had gone down to the lake to draw water, was seized by an alligator. Her husband rushed down just in time to see a group of the monsters fighting over her body. He called together the neighbors; they tied some meat to a cross-stick at the end of a rope; throwing this bait out to the alligators, they hauled up one after another; cutting them open, from one they took a leg, from another an arm, from another the head, until they had assembled the whole body of the unfortunate woman, which they buried in the church; and, said he, since I was in the village, I said mass over her. He referred to a memorial he had presented to the King about the route to be followed by the treasure fleet; and once he remarks: "As I stated in the 'Light and Guide to Heaven' which I published in 1623."

These quotations filled several typewritten pages, which were sent to Washington and to various European friends; and soon one of them, the learned German scholar, Professor Schäfer of Seville, wrote exultingly that he had identified the man without a shadow of a doubt; that the author of the "Light and Guide to Heaven" was the famous Carmelite friar Vázquez de Espinosa, friend of León Pinelo, who had been filled with admiration of this description of the New World, Vázquez's life work, and later lamented his death (in 1630) as "depriving us of what would have been our most valuable book on that subject." Professor Rivet found that Vázquez received his permission to print in November 1629; he had doubtless had the satisfaction of seeing the first few proofs when he suddenly died and his MS disappeared—to come to light in the Vatican in this romantic fashion, at the hands of one whose ancestors came to Massachusetts Bay just as Vázquez de Espinosa was dying in Spain. The Smithsonian is now hoping to secure funds with

which to publish this masterpiece of our early New World history.

The Vatican holds other treasures. In 1662, a historian of Piacenza, Campi, published a book to prove that Columbus was born in Pradello, near Piacenza. A patriotic and learned Genoese Dominican, Bolzino, at once set to work and haunted the archives of Genoa and Savona, copying documents relating to Columbus and his family. His essays are preserved in two volumes among the Vatican Latin MSS. Two earlier investigators, Cocchia and De Lollis, have utilized one of these; but the other, and fuller, seems to have escaped them. Bolzino tells us, for instance, why Christopher and his brother Bartholomew wrote "of Terrarossa" after their signatures, as young men; how Christopher may have studied in "Pavia," without going outside of Genoa, for there was a section of Genoa called Pavia, in which Bolzino himself had his early lessons; why the mortgage on their father Domenico's property in Savona was foreclosed in 1501—some facts new, and the old ones often with new and picturesque detail.

Nor is the work without its diverting side. In working through the South American documents in the Propaganda Fide Library in Rome—the great missionary collection of the Roman Church—I ran across a little volume of printed broadsides from Lima. Among them were two edicts of the Archdean of Lima Cathedral, which form a chapter in the ever-hopeful campaign of the Church to make women dress modestly—a campaign beginning with St. Paul, in which St. Jerome played his part in the fourth century, and to which that admirable scholar the present Pope, friend of all earnest searchers, has made his contribution. It appears to have been specially needed in Lima in 1734, for according to the Archdean, Dr. Andres de Munive,

since women's immodesty and impropriety in dress has always been a source of scandal in Christian communities, on account of the perdition of souls which it causes, being incitement, occasion, and source of many mortal sins, and offensive to the eyes of persons who are duly modest, for which reason the Prelates of the Church have at all times thundered their censures against it, with the zealous purpose of correcting such a detestable abuse, unworthy of tolerance among those who make profession of religion; and since it is well known that years ago this lamentable evil made its way into this city and its environs, the women wearing dresses so short that their legs are visible, while their arms are bare, or else the sleeves and collars are so arranged that one's eyes strike the bare skin, and the bosom is evident, and though some women wear long skirts, they give them a cut or arrangement such that when they walk or sit down, their extremities are just as visible, and others, in raising what is called the "tail" (train), to keep it from dragging on the ground, expose themselves indecently. And since, although the preachers of the Gospel have endeavored in their exhortations from the pulpit to cure this scandalous abuse, and the apostolic missionaries, realizing its grave character, and the reproach to Christianity caused by such styles, have decried against them, yet no reform has been observed, and in fact it rather seems that custom tends to strengthen such irregular and improper fashions; accordingly, making use of the authority vested in us for similar emergencies, and desirous of restraining such dangerous evils, we command that henceforward none of the ladies or women, whatever may be their social rank, quality, or position, wear on the street (and far less in church) clothes or dresses such that they show the legs, leave the arms bare, or uncover the bosom, but that they clothe themselves in such decent and modest wise as to cover those parts of their persons which may serve as incitement or stumbling block to the eyes; nor are they to make use of skirts cut in such affected style as to produce the indecent fashion which is observed; nor are they to lift their trains with their hands so as to show what lies underneath, but are to keep them down, or not use them at all. . . .

One could multiply examples indefinitely; the great prizes still elude us; the key to the Maya hieroglyphics, the full accounts of their traditions still await discovery—if they exist; but any competent and well-financed scholar (for such exploration needs money just as much as one to uncover a ruined city) is sure to bring to light many an interesting document to add to our knowledge of our stone-age predecessors on these continents and isles. And what glimpses they give! In a few hours of work one may come across a Lord's Prayer and Ave Maria in the language of a Brazilian tribe down by the Chaco; a letter of the Bishop of Popayan describing his trials in pastoral visits covering thousands of miles over rough tracks in the Andes of Colombia; a recipe for making wine out of sugar maple sap (in the National Library of Lisbon!); and scores of topics as interesting. Historic research may seem a dry and dusty subject; but nothing human is alien to it; and explorers in archives have also their exciting adventures.

High above the Provencal village of Fantosque lies

PAN'S PARISH

"If ever you visit this rock-bound little community you will be sure to hear of the miracle of the Heaven-sent baby, although it happened a long time ago. It happened—and it is a very odd thing that no one has drawn any conclusions from the coincidence—in the days of the priest Boniface, and within one week of the event that brought Fantosque, for the first and last time, into the blaze of world-wide notice. I refer, of course, to the vanishing of the lovely Lady Amabel Perrish, in broad daylight, and from under her mother-in-law's nose."

PAN'S PARISH

By Louise Redfield Peattie

Saturday Review readers should see their bookseller now. \$2.00

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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received.

Fiction

FED UP. By GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM. Bobbs-Merrill. 1931. \$2.

In his dedication the author calls this book, his "very most foolish and flippant story." Flippant it is, but not too foolish, for under its pleasant irreverence for many English foibles, it has a keen appreciation of the vanity of human endeavor. Not that the "life is real, life is earnest" attitude creeps into the book for a moment. It doesn't. But one can guess that Mr. Birmingham knows his English.

Charles Beauchamp (Conservative) and Peter Boyd (Labor) are the two gentlemen that are "fed up." They have both been forced against their wishes to run for Parliament, Beauchamp by his charming wife, the Lady Edith, and Boyd by his political manager. The fun comes in the first place from the campaign maneuvers of Lady Edith. Dressing in elaborate evening clothes for outdoor speaking, kissing babies, and coyly threatening to kiss the voters, she stops at nothing in her attempts to win the people. (And this English fiction is not so far from American fact—some of the flowery speeches might have been taken from our daily papers.) After enough of this, the interest shifts; the two opposing candidates run happily away together leaving their sponsors in the lurch, with each side accusing the other's missing candidate of having murdered its own missing choice. Mr. Birmingham makes the most of his opportunities, and the result is a very amusing evening's reading.

THE OPENING OF A DOOR. By GEORGE DAVIS. Harpers. 1931. \$2.50.

This novel is a succession of bizarre characterizations, of people less types than oddities. It is plotless, and the sequence of events is as fortuitous as is every-day life—which is not necessarily high praise.

It is a study of a post-Victorian matriarchy. The MacDougall family of Chicago labors under the heavy sway of an old woman whom her children call Grandmother. Grandmother, though during the last years of her life she is failing mentally, was in her time a martinet of that vicious kind who rule by inertia. Through her influence on her children and her husband—whose final days and death compose the opening of the book—she succeeds in diverting the course of their lives; as a result, her now middle-aged children are drab eccentrics, who once possessed the elements of some sort of human achievement.

Much of the detail of the story is seen through the jejune eyes of Grandmother's morose young grandson, Edward. He is a compound of the utterly obvious, and the abruptly obscure. One feels that he alone may sometime amount to something. The style, much praised by two or three unimpeachable witnesses on the jacket of the book, is on the average competent, though it frequently becomes slightly turgid and dull. The author can permit such a simile as the following: "His mustache and brows were grey moths fluttering to rest." However, most of the writing is not so irritating, and there are passages of considerable power. Rarely is there any humor, and that usually of a supercilious sort.

The whole effect of the book is one of futility—not necessarily of the futility of life, though there is ample witness to that in the story—but rather one of artistic futility. It is one of those books that come into being without reason. A dozen caricatures do not make a novel. However, there is no doubt but that Mr. Davis knows how to say what he wants to. The thing for him to do is to find something to say.

THE SHORTEST NIGHT. By G. B. STERN. Knopf. 1931. \$2.50.

In her latest book, Miss Stern has turned to the field of the mystery story; she assembles a carefree Riviera house-party of young London bohemians, and has one of them murdered for us. Her book is a mystery story rather than a detective story; that is, it is not for the genuine connoisseur of detective stories, who likes to play the game against the author, and demands a strict adherence to the rule of fair play as laid down by Father Ronald Knox or Mr. Huntington Wright. Here there is no great detective to solve the case by the clues one could have seen oneself if one had been clever enough; there are no clues by which one could solve it oneself no matter how clever one is; as a matter of fact, the author secures her dénouement only by forcing a confession through force of circumstances. Nobody

could be expected to solve the crime, not because of any extraordinary cunning on the part of the murderer, but because, in the first place, the motive is not indicated in any way until it is revealed in the confession, and in the second place, several characters concerned act in an entirely unpredictable, because irrational, manner. The experienced reader may suspect from the first chapter that Miss Stern has made things too easy for herself, by the eccentricity of most of the actors.

Nevertheless, the reader who regards mystery novels as purely entertaining stories and not as puzzles will find "The Shortest Night" amusing. The characters are a welcome relief from the stereotyped cast of the ordinary murder story, and if they indulge in the usual pastime of sitting down comfortably to sift motives and check alibis and generally discuss the possibilities of their dearest friends' being murderers, they have humanity enough to recognize that they are being inhuman. The conversations are clever, the comic relief funny; the corpse was only an uninvited guest anyway, and it turns out in the end that everybody was quite right in instinctively disliking him; altogether, it is as comfortable a poisoning as one could well want. The book evidently aims only at being "summer fiction," and it succeeds in being acceptable pastime.

INDIAN SUMMER. By J. C. SNAITH. Appleton. 1931. \$2.50.

The remarkably uneven Mr. Snaith has written a story in his lighter manner, and about the middle of his range—a good way below the delicious "Araminta," and a good way above "Cousin Beryl." It is a leisurely story of a country town in eighteenth-century England; there are sharp-tongued "characters," and a French prisoner of war, the high-souled Marquis de Montremy, whose perfect courtesy and tact sets things right when they go too far wrong, and there is some young love, which does not run too smooth, or there would be no story, but which runs smoothly enough. The chief criticism to be made against the book is that the atmosphere of the time is laid on as thickly as in an Olde Gifte Shoppe. The idioms of the conversations are all sound eighteenth century locutions, but one cannot help recalling that the people in Fielding and Smollett do not confine themselves so exclusively to phrases peculiar to their time. The book is made up of this sort of thing: "They had shared a cubicle at the Misses Nightingale's Finishing Lyceum for the Christian Daughters of Gentlewomen at Brightelmstone in Sussex." How far one finds that quaint and amusing is a matter of taste; most readers will probably find it overdone, but no doubt there will be many to enjoy it.

BROTHER JOHN. A Tale of the First Franciscans. By VIDA D. SCUDDER. Dutton. 1931. \$2.50.

It sometimes happens to those delving in history that the people they are studying suddenly cease to be names upon a dusty record and to take form as veritable companions dealing with real problems very similar to our own. The student then begins to love these recreated people and to find great comfort in their struggles, their victories, and defeats, and wishes to share his new friends with others who may also care for them. Thus are born some of our best histories and biographies, and thus Miss Scudder, the editor and translator of some delightful letters of St. Catherine of Siena, would share with us her enthusiasm about another group of religious thinkers of the Middle Ages.

In this latest book the story of the struggles of the first Franciscans is told as through the memories of an English convert, John of Sanfort, who sided with the zealots in the split between the radical devotees of Lady Poverty and the more practical minded rulers of the growing order who wished to compromise with the ways of the world. The setting of the story, first in simple feudal England, then in light-flooded Umbria and Rome where the ancient columns dominate a more sophisticated society, is cleverly suggested, but the real concern of the book is with the mental and emotional struggles of these religious enthusiasts. No hint of modern skepticism is cast upon the reality of the visions and the unmixt motives of the brothers. The joys of the religious life are also taken for granted, but there is much questioning about the best way to avoid the evils of private property and the desire for power. The hero throws in his lot with those who give up

everything and ends his days in prison, but he greatly loves Roger Bacon and others who would save some worldly goods in the interest of learning and is never quite sure which is the better road.

Miss Scudder's audience will probably be limited to those who are interested in the religious thought of the Middle Ages or of our time. Such readers will find her style delightful and the simplicity of the lives and motives she depicts altogether charming, while the implied parallels with our own problems of wealth and power open new vistas to their thinking.

UNWEAVE A RAINBOW. A Sentimental Fantasy. By EDGAR JOHNSON. Doubleday, Doran. 1931. \$2.

SHATTER THE DREAM. By NORAH C. JAMES. Morrow. 1931. \$2.

The first of these books is a clever young novel by a clever young man. It is about people who talk like people in books. They say the things at the time that one usually thinks of only on the way home. They give short, not so short, dissertations on every known and almost known subject. They are hysterically aware of the surfaces of their times, and they are at great need to explain this verbally. They are members of that vain and perverse band of Dowson's who have never known laughter or tears, having known only surpassing vanity. The book is an ultra-modern what-not in which are carefully arranged, and with almost equal delight, neurotic and psychotic human beings, exotic *objets d'art*, and esthetic, biologic, etcetera theories.

Amid all the super-crackle and super-sparkle of the characters, who are as much anathema to the author as to the reader, there runs another *motif* altogether. This gives the book legitimate claim to its subtitle, "A Sentimental Fantasy." The main character, towards whom Mr. Johnson shows considerable partiality, is ever so expansively in love with —. But that is the mystery, and until one solves it, about half way through the book, the effect is highly puzzling. Throughout the book Mr. Johnson shows himself, brilliantly and easily, far above the demands of the type of work in hand. Authors of first novels must be frightfully bored by the expression, but one *does* await his next novel with interest.

"Shatter the Dream" also shows the fra-

gility of the stuff that dreams are made on, but otherwise has little in common with "Unweave a Rainbow." Miss James has run sharp barriers around the material of her novel, and there is no blurring of the outline in either action or conversation. And yet the final effect is not as clear as one would expect. That is because she has really written her tragic story from two angles. A very young man falls deeply and idealistically in love with a young matron who is pleasantly and shallowly attracted by his love. From his side the story is on the grand scale, from hers it is merely *divertissement*. Miss James moves from one side to the other in her narrative and loses thereby a necessary integrity of emotional reaction to the story. Even so, there are shattering moments in the life of the little bank clerk that communicate themselves to any reader. Perhaps it is the very fact that one has been so worked upon by the embroilments of Miss James's people that makes her ironic ending seem too light.

ALL ALONGSHORE. By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN. Coward-McCann. 1931. \$2.50.

This is a collection of eighteen characteristic short stories dealing with Lincoln's well-known Cape Cod which should be a popular book.

BREAD EATEN IN SECRET. By John A. Moroso. Macaulay. \$2.

SEXARIANS. By Isaac Goldberg. Panurge Press. RIALARO. By Godfrey Severn. Oxford University Press. \$3.

EXPENSIVE WOMEN. By Wilson Collison. McBride. \$2 net.

LIMANORA. By Godfrey Severn. Oxford University Press. \$3.

History

CIVIL WAR PRISONS. By WILLIAM BEST HESSELTINE. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 1930. \$3.

The long standing need of an impartial and scientific investigation into the provisions for and the handling of prisoners during the Civil War makes this monograph especially welcome. During the conflict and for more than a generation after its close so many angry charges and counter-charges of violations of the laws of war were made by the officials of the Union and Confederate Governments and so many grievances were aired by the prisoners themselves that

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Important and Successful Books

Third Large Printing

Three Pairs of Silk Stockings

by Panteleimon Romanof

With a foreword by Stephen Graham

America and England join in praising this novel of the educated classes under the Soviet. Alexander Nazaroff in the *New York Times* called it "the most interesting novel of contemporary Russia." Rebecca West declared it "a superbly told story with pages of glorious shattering comedy." As a novel it is "absorbingly interesting," and furthermore, says the *New York Sun*, it answers "all the questions one would like to ask about Russia." \$2.50

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