

THE DEAD ALIVE.

SINCE the publication of "Tolla," Edmond About has made marked progress in the art of the novelist—even greater progress, perhaps, than he has made in the political field. In spite of the extraordinary amount of wit contained in his two works about Rome, the reader cannot refrain from noticing a certain hollowness in them, and a tacit acknowledgment on the part of the writer that he does not care the slightest for the cause which he is defending. Judging from his books, we should be inclined to regard About as a thorough man of the world, showy, witty, and superficial, but incapable of feeling any strong emotion; and even when his feelings are more than usually aroused, as, for instance, in the controversy about his pictures and the hissing off the stage of "Gaëtana," the main object of his retorts seems to be not so much to convince his readers as to display his own cleverness in repartee. We can convey our meaning best, perhaps, by offering our readers an exact counterpart of About's controversial powers in Mr. Thackeray's "Essay on Thunder and Small Beer," prefixed to the second edition of the "Kickleburies up the Rhine," in which the author shows himself to be remarkably witty, but does not satisfactorily disprove one of the charges which the reviewer has brought against him. But a defect of this nature becomes a quality in the novelist, and as such About is inferior to but few of his countrymen in the present day.

The last of his tales which we reviewed at some length in these pages was "Rouge-et-Noir:" that story was wild enough in all conscience, but is utterly surpassed by the one which we have now under consideration,* for About has here selected an utterly impossible subject, but has treated it with such art, that the reader does not say till he reaches the last page, "Why, how utterly absurd it all is!" In fact, the anecdote will not bear a moment's consideration; but it is a masterpiece of conception, and cannot be better described off-hand than as a comic Frankenstein. A young civil engineer, of the name of Léon Renault, returns home from Russia to Fontainebleau, and as his father desired to have some relic of the great Humboldt, who had just died, his son purchased a mummy of a Jew, falsely stated to have belonged to the naturalist. When he reaches his penates he is welcomed by his betrothed, a wealthy young lady of the name of Clementine, and, to amuse her, shows her the mummy, the sight of which produced an extraordinary effect on the young lady. The story which Léon tells of the body is certainly of a very surprising nature. Professor Meisen, a celebrated German naturalist, had an idea that life could be held in a state of suspense in human bodies for an indefinite number of years by a system which he had invented. In 1813 he had the opportunity of trying the experiment on a French colonel, and we will record the facts from his own narrative.

The professor, when near the point of death, drew up a will, in which he left the sum of 375,000 francs to Colonel Pierre Victor Fougas, at present in a desiccated state, but still living, and marked in his catalogue as No. 3712. The professor met this unhappy young man for the first

* *L'Homme à l'Oreille Cassée.* Par Edmond About. Paris: Hachette.

time in 1813, when he was captured by the Prussians, while bearing important despatches for Napoleon, and sentenced to death as a spy. While waiting for execution in a cell he was frozen and supposed to be dead, and the professor found an opportunity for attempting his long meditated scheme. The details are of too professional a nature for these pages: suffice it to say that the professor succeeded in removing every drop of water out of the colonel's body, and thus reduced him to a weight of about forty pounds. He had intended to restore him to life after the peace of 1815, but he had deferred the matter from week to week, until death surprised him. He, therefore, left detailed instructions that his heir should call in the first ten physicians in Prussia, read to them his plan for recalling the colonel to life, and at once make the experiment. The heir, however, pooh-poohed the whole affair, as did the faculty; indeed, sold the mummy for a trifle, and seized the whole fortune left by his uncle. Thus it was that Léon was enabled to buy the body of the dried colonel at Berlin, under the impression that it had once belonged to Humboldt. We must add, that while he was exhibiting the body to Clementine, he accidentally broke off a piece of the ear, which gives the title to the book.

Clementine, strange to say, felt an ever-growing interest in the colonel, who was but four-and-twenty years of age, although in reality seventy, and pressed her betrothed so eagerly to try and restore the mummy to life, that the piece of ear was sent to a most eminent physiologist in Paris, who declared positively that it belonged to a living man. The matter was hereupon laid before the Académie des Sciences, who appointed a committee to go and make the experiment at Fontainebleau. Again are the details too scientific for the general reader: we need only say that the water is forced again into the colonel's system, and he gradually swells into life. All at once, as a military band passed along the street, the colonel started up on the sofa, and shouted, in a thundering voice, "Long live the Emperor!" The description of his resurrection is in M. About's best style. We must premise that the room is filled with eager spectators:

"Sacrebleu!" Fougas said, springing as if moved by clockwork, "these scamps will stifle us if we do not smash them." His attitude, his flashing eyes, and, before all, the prestige of the marvellous, formed a space around him. It seemed as if the walls had moved away, or the spectators entered into one another. "Get out, all of you!" Fougas exclaimed, in his finest voice of command. A concert of cries, explanations, and arguments, arose around him. Fancying that he heard threats, he seized the first chair within his reach, brandished it like a weapon, pushed, struck, and knocked down citizens, soldiers, functionaries, savants, friends, the curious, and the police commissioner, and poured the human torrent into the street with a fearful uproar. This done, he closed and bolted the door, returned to the laboratory, saw three gentlemen standing round Madame Renault, and asked the old lady, as he lowered his voice, "Come, mother, shall I get rid of these three, like the rest?" "For Heaven's sake, no!" the lady exclaimed. "My husband and my son, sir. And this is Dr. Nibor, who restored your life." "In that case, honour to them, mother! Fougas was never false to the laws of gratitude or hospitality! As for you, my Æsculapius, here's my hand." At the same moment he noticed that ten or a dozen curious persons had raised themselves from the street to the windows of the laboratory. He walked straight up to them, and opened the window with a fury which made them leap down. "People," he said, "I

smashed a hundred Pandours, who respected neither sex nor weakness. If any of you are dissatisfied, my name is Colonel Fougas, of the 23rd. Long live the Emperor!"

It was a very difficult task to make the colonel understand the true state of affairs, for, even when they had worked hard to make him comprehend they were in the year of grace 1859, his ideas were upset again by hearing a barrel-organ play "*Partant pour la Syrie*." Then, when he was told that the imperial prince was a pretty lad, his natural reply was, "What! a pretty lad! and you have the face to tell me that we are in 1859!"

In truth, this young man must have possessed a strong and well-tempered soul, for he learned in forty minutes all the misfortunes which fate had spread over eighteen years, from the first abdication up to the death of the King of Rome. Less happy than his comrades in arms, there was not an interval of rest between these terrible and repeated blows, which all struck his heart at the same spot. Fears might have been entertained that poor Fougas would die in the first hour of his life, but this demon of a man bent and straightened again like a spring. He shouted with admiration on hearing of the glorious combats of the campaign in France, and he yelled with pain on hearing the farewell at Fontainebleau described. The return from Elba illumined his handsome, noble face, and his heart followed the last army of the Emperor to Waterloo, and broke there. Then he clenched his fists, and said, between his teeth, "If I had been there, at the head of the 23rd, Blucher and Wellington would have seen something." The invasion, the white flag, the martyr of St. Helena, the white terror in Europe, the murder of Murat—that god of cavalry—the death of Ney, of Brune, of Mouton Duvernet, and so many other men of heart, whom he had known, admired, and loved, threw him into a succession of outbursts of passion; but nothing crushed him. On listening to the death of Napoleon, he swore to eat the heart of England; and the slow death of the pale and charming heir of the Empire inspired him with a desire to rip up Austria. When the drama was ended, and the curtain fell upon Schönbrunn, he wiped his eyes, and said, "It is well; I have lived in one moment the whole life of a man." M. Renault tried to explain to Fougas the history of the Restoration, and of the monarchy of 1830, but his mind was elsewhere. "What do I care," he said, "that two hundred gossiping deputies placed one king in the room of another? Kings! I have seen so many on the ground. If the Empire had lasted ten years longer I could have had a king as my shoeblack."

This Frankenstein was a terrible fellow: and to see him at his first supper was a surprising sight; but then, remember, he had eaten nothing for forty-six years. All the while his jaws were at work he was picking up useful knowledge about the wars which France had waged since his desiccation. The Crimean affair and the alliance between England and France quite got over him, as he said, "I can understand giving the Russians a thrashing, for they made me eat my best horse; but the English are a thousand times worse. If that young man (the Emperor Napoleon III.) does not understand this, I will tell him. No quarter is possible after what they have just done at St. Helena. Had I been in the Crimea I would have begun by beating the Russians thoroughly, and after that I would have turned on the English and kicked them into the sea, which is their element." Equally puzzled was he with the Italian campaign, and the signature of peace at Villafranca, for, in his opinion, it was not possible to sign a peace anywhere except in the capital.

Truth compels me to confess that Fougas became intoxicated at dessert. He had eaten and drunk like a hero of Homer, and spoken more copiously than Cicero in his best days. The steam of wine, and meat, and eloquence rose to his brain; he became familiar: he tapped some on the back, and abused others, and poured forth a torrent of absurdities sufficient to turn forty mill-wheels. His intoxication, however, had nothing brutal or ignoble about it; it was merely the overflow of a young, loving, vain, and unregulated mind. He proposed five or six toasts: "Glory;" "The extension of our frontiers;" "The destruction of the last of the English;" "M^{de} Mars, the hope of the French stage;" and "Sensibility, that fragile but dear tie which unites the lover to the object of his love, the father to his son, and the colonel to his regiment."

Still, the colonel was not one of the degenerates of the present day, whom a bottle upsets: he conducted Madame Rénault to the drawing-room with perfect gravity, and, on being invited to do so, told the history of his life. It was that of most soldiers of the Empire, and we would call particular attention to the admirable way in which M. About reproduces the language of the epoch. Thus, the colonel talks of his Chiron and his Mentor, who fed him on the strong lion's marrow of Rome and Athens, while their lips distilled in his ears the perfumed honey of wisdom, of the pale olive-branch of peace, and the fields on which Mars cuts down heroes with his scythe. The most important thing to us is, however, that, while quartered at Nancy, he fell in love with a brewer's daughter, and became a father before he was a husband. It was a perplexing situation, for this son, were it a son, would be old enough to be his father. When on the point of marrying the young lady he was called away by Bellona, and, before he could return, he was desiccated in the way we have seen. He did not know what had become of his Clementine, or whether the child she had announced to him were alive or dead; but he would go and see. At this moment Léon's Clementine came into the room, and the colonel shouted, "Why, there is my Clementine! just as I left her. Come to my arms, upon my heart, beloved! Ah! what was it you fellows were telling me? Napoleon is not dead, and the world is not forty-six years older, since Clementine is still the same!"

Here was a pretty situation for Léon, who shouted in his fury, "The lady is not your betrothed, but mine; she never was the mother of your child, but I expect that she will be the mother of mine." It was all of no use; the colonel had taken the thing into his head, and insisted on becoming the husband of "his" Clementine. He declared that, if she married Léon, he would give her his malediction, and so strange were the girl's feelings towards this man who had just returned from the grave, as it were, that she solemnly promised not to espouse her lover without the colonel's sanction. He offered to lead her home, and on the way they met a colonel of cuirassiers, M. de Marnet, who made pretensions to Clementine. At the breakfast which the 23rd gave him, Fougas picked a quarrel with this colonel, and they had an Homeric contest with sabres on horseback, in which Fougas gained the day. After this, he had a disturbance with the Rénaults, borrowed five hundred francs of the colonel of the 23rd, and resolved to go to Paris and see the Emperor. We must not omit to state that Clementine, before he left Fontainebleau, sent him all her savings, which amounted to twelve hundred francs. In the train

he was horrified by finding himself among Englishmen, and hurriedly left the carriage, "to purge his eyes of an enemy of the Emperor," but in the carriage he entered he fell among Legitimists. Their conversation is worth an extract :

He found himself alone with two young gentlemen who had not English faces, and who spoke French with the purest Tourangeau accent. They wore rings with their coats of arms on their fingers, so that no one might be ignorant of their quality as gentlemen. Fougas was too plebeian to enjoy the society of gentlemen much ; but, after leaving a compartment peopled with Islanders, he was glad to meet with Frenchmen. "My friends," he said to them, with a cordial smile, "we are children of the same mother ; health to you ; the sight of you does me good." The two young men opened their eyes widely, bowed slightly, and began their conversation again, without otherwise responding to Fougas's advances. "And so, my dear Astophe," said one, "you saw the king at Froshdorf?" "Yes, my dear Americ, and he received me with the most touching grace. 'Vicomte,' he said to me, 'you belong to a blood known for its fidelity. We will bear you in mind on the day when Heaven re-establishes us on the throne of our ancestors. Tell our brave nobility of Touraine that we recommend ourselves to their prayers, and will never forget them in ours.'" "Pitt and Coburg!" Fougas muttered, "here are two little scamps conspiring with Condé's army. But patience." He clenched his fists and listened. "He said nothing to you about his policy?" "Only a few unimportant words. Between ourselves, I believe that he does not trouble himself about it ; he is awaiting events." "He will not have to wait long ; the Empire will not last six months ; Monsigneur de Montereau said so last Sunday at my aunt's the canoness." "Well, I give him a year, because the Italian campaign has strengthened him with the lower classes. I did not hesitate to tell the king so." "Sacre-bleu ! gentlemen, that is too strong," Fougas interrupted. "Is it in France that Frenchmen talk thus of French institutions ? Return to your master, tell him that the Empire is eternal, because it is founded on the popular will, and cemented by the blood of heroes. And if the king asks you who told you so, you will reply, 'Colonel Fougas, decorated at Wagram by the Emperor's own hand.'" The two gentlemen looked at each other, and the vicomte said to the marquis, with a smile, "What is that?" "A madman." "No, dear, a mad dog." "Nothing else." "Very good, gentlemen," cried the colonel ; "speak English, you are worthy to do so." And he changed his carriage at the very next station.

On reaching Paris, Fougas asked for a directory, and selected the Emperor's tailor, hatter, &c., and ordered a new suit, but he found enormous difficulty in inducing the tradesmen to dress him in the style of 1813. Still he insisted, and the matter was settled, and he dined copiously. After dinner he went to the opera, and saw Charles VI. When the patriotic chorus struck up—

Guerre aux tyrans ! Jamais, jamais en France,
Jamais l'Anglais ne régnera—

he sprang up, and stretching out his arms towards the stage, cried, "No, never ! Let us swear it all together on the sacred altar of the country ! Perish perfidious Albion ! long live the Emperor !" To his great surprise a police commissary requested him to leave the theatre, and he did so indignantly. The next morning he dressed himself in his new suit, and went to call on "that young man," and of course was arrested as a maniac when he stated that he had served under the first Emperor. Luckily, on the road to Charenton, he met with an old comrade, who released him and procured him an interview with the Emperor. His

account of the audience, as described in a letter to Clementine, is wonderful :

I am intoxicated with joy, gratitude, and admiration. I have seen him, I have spoken to him ; he offered me his hand, and made me sit down. He is a great prince, and will be master of the world. He gave me the medal of St. Helena, and the officers' cross. I must not think of promotion yet ; as prisoner of war in Prussia, and in a triple coffin, I must re-enter the army with my rank : so decrees military law. But within three months I shall be brigadier-general, that is certain ; he deigned to promise it me himself. What a man ! a God on earth ! no prouder than he of Wagram and Moscow, and father of the soldier like him ! He wished to give me an order on his treasury to re-equip myself, but I replied, "No, sire ! I have money to recover at Dantzic ; if the debt be paid I shall be rich ; if not, I can live on my pay. Upon this—oh, goodness of princes, thou art not a vain thought !—he smiled cleverly, and said, as he curled his moustache, "You remained in Prussia from 1813 to 1859 ?" "Yes, sire." "Prisoner of war under exceptional circumstances ?" "Yes, sire." "The treaties stipulated the restoration of prisoners ?" "Yes, sire." "In that case they have been violated with you ?" "Yes, sire." "Well, then, Prussia owes you an indemnity, and I will have it claimed diplomatically." "Yes, sire. Oh, what kindness !" That is an idea which would never have occurred to me. To get back money from Prussia, who showed herself so greedy for our treasures in 1814 and 1815. Long live the Emperor ! beloved Clementine ! Oh, may our glorious and magnanimous sovereign live for ever ! Long live the Empress and the imperial prince ! I have seen them ! the Emperor presented me to his family. The prince is an admirable little soldier ! He deigned to play the drum on my new hat, and I wept with tenderness. Her majesty the Empress, with an angelic smile, told me that she had heard of my misfortunes. "Oh, madam," I answered, "a moment like this repays them a hundredfold." "You must come and dance at the Tuileries next winter." "Alas ! madam, I never danced save to the sound of cannon ; but I will spare no effort to please you ; I will study the art of Vestris." The Emperor deigned to tell me that he was happy to find again an officer like myself, who had gone through the most splendid campaigns of the age, and had preserved the traditions of the old war. This praise emboldened me, and I did not fear to remind him of the famous principle of the good times : to sign peace in capitals. "Take care," he said ; "it was in virtue of that principle that the allied armies twice came to sign peace in Paris." "They will not return," I exclaimed, "unless they pass over my body." I insisted on the inconveniences of excessive familiarity with England, and expressed a wish to begin shortly the conquest of the world. In the first place, our own frontiers ; next, the natural frontiers of Europe, for Europe is the suburb of France, and it could not be annexed too soon. The Emperor shook his head as if he were not of my opinion. Can he conceal pacific designs ? I do not wish to entertain that thought, for it would kill me.

The rest of Fougas's adventures may be rapidly passed over. First he went to Dantzic to recover the money left him by his desiccator : the money was paid him, he got intoxicated as usual, the wicked heir threw him down a well, and, of course, he got out again and touched his money. His next step was to find the child of his beloved Clementine, and sad trouble did he get into while doing so : following up the trail of the family name, he incessantly insulted respectable females by asking importunate questions, and many Homeric contests were the result. At length the poor colonel, who seemed only re-born to trouble, philosophically resolved that if he had a son, his son might find him, and went his way back to Fontainebleau and his betrothed. Of course we need not insult our readers' perspicuity by telling them that Léon's

Clementine was the colonel's granddaughter, and hence he consented to her marriage with her betrothed. He settled the million francs he had recovered from the Dantzig banker upon her, and intended to live quietly and dandle his great-grandchildren, but.

At the marriage festival the colonel was enjoying himself heartily, till a gendarme brought him in a letter from the minister of war. It was to the effect that, in making out his commission as brigadier-general, the minister met with an insurmountable difficulty. By law no brigadier-general could be appointed if older than sixty-two, while Fougas, by his baptismal certificate, was born in 1789, and was then seventy years of age. Hence the minister was compelled to the fatal necessity of placing him on the half-pay list as colonel. Fougas, in a word, was not able to accept any post, not even enter the army as private, owing to his age, but, added the minister, "though the law is inexorable, steps would be taken to modify it if resurrections occurred in any considerable number." The colonel went home to his hotel, sadly, and would not be comforted. Worst sign of all, he refused to drink. The next morning Léon received a telegraphic despatch addressed to Fougas, which he opened by mistake. It was from the colonel's old comrade, and contained these few laconic lines: "Left Emperor's cabinet. You, brigadier-general as foreigner for present. Later legislative corps modify law." Léon hurried with this happy news to the colonel, and found him dead in his bed. It was stated in Fontainebleau that M. Nibor opened him, and found grave disorders produced by desiccation. Some persons, however, declared that Fougas committed suicide, and it is certain that he left the following will: "I leave my heart to my country, my memory to Nature, my example to the army, my hatred to perfidious Albion, and 200,000 francs to the 23rd of the line. Long live the Emperor, still the same.—FOUGAS."

So ends this wild story, of the wit of which we are afraid that we have furnished but a poor idea. From the first page to the last the book is full of the most polished sarcasm, and M. About spares nobody. It is, in fact, a very clever political squib, in which the third Empire is glorified at the expense of the first; but apart from that, the character of Fougas is so thoroughly maintained, that the reader forgets the improbability, and really fancies that he has to deal with a hero of the great army. Throughout the story M. About is careful to avoid offending the prejudices of the French soldier, and though the "Dead Alive" may now and then appear absurd in our eyes, he is never ridiculous. Altogether, the book has produced us in the perusal an effect which cannot be represented in our scanty space, and the only thing we can do is to recommend our readers to turn to its pages for themselves, and judge whether our eulogium has been in the slightest degree exaggerated.