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Bluebeards of To-Day and of the Past.

Bluebeards are as plentiful to-day as they were in the past, and the horrible deeds of these weird creatures continue to be chronicled in the newspapers.

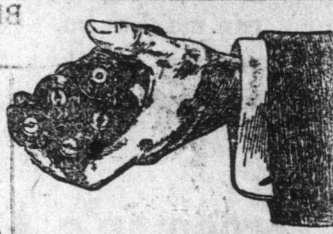
There is a Californian specimen, James R. Hunt, alias Walter Andrew Watson, alias Charles Newton Harvey, confessed bigamist, anywhere from fifteen to thirty times over, and slayer of at least nine bona fide (on their part) wives.

Then there is the Egyptian variety who the other day was reported as having murdered twenty women, burning their bodies and preserving their heads as souvenirs. The news have been found in a house at a little city north-west of Cairo noted for its Mohammedan festivities, and, according to the authorities, the women were enticed into the house on the pretext of meeting a wealthy admirer. Instead, they were killed and their heads preserved.

Besides this, the case of the celebrated Henri Landru, the Bluebeard of Gambais, is still pending in the French courts; and as if the French were not enough, Le Figaro of Paris discloses the fact that this is the centenary of the famous whole woman killer of Lyons, Lelievre, who, just a hundred years ago, operated under the nom de guerre of Cevalier and ended his life on the guillotine.

The Original Bluebeard.

Where does the term Bluebeard originate? The story has been frequently told. Tradition has it that he lived in north-western France, at the time of the Hundred Years' War between that country and England, and a nobleman called Gilles de Laval, Baron de Retz. He was a valiant fighter against the English, and his title to fame rests on the dis-



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bolical cruelty with which he exterminated a dozen or so of his successive wives. He might possibly have reached a higher total but for some trivial offence he committed against his overlord, the Duke of Brittany. Wife-killing, if done with discretion, was, if not condoned, at least overlooked in those days; but disloyalty to the ruler was unforgivable, and Gilles was burned at the stake near Nantes.

Doubt prevails whether Gilles de Laval was the historic prototype of the famous French novel of the seventeenth century, which made the term Bluebeard a byword in all languages. In the book, which is by Charles Perrault, the celebrated story-teller, the hero, the knight Raoul, surnamed Barbe-Bleue after his rich facial ornament of blue-black color, married seven wives in succession. Six of them disappeared without leaving a trace; the seventh became their avenger, in the following queer manner:

The Curiosity of Fatima.

Raoul, having to leave his castle on important business, entrusts his bundle of keys to Fatima, the seventh wife. Barbe-Bleue, with the injunction that, while she may go around freely, she must not enter one particular chamber in a turret. Needless to say, Fatima cannot resist the temptation, opens the door of the forbidden compartment, and beholds the grisly remnants of her six predecessors.

Raoul returns, discovers blood on

the keys and thus learns that Fatima, like the six previous women, failed in the supreme test of marital obedience. So he proceeds to slaughter her, just the way he slaughtered the others; but this time the brothers of the lady arrive just in the nick of time and "attacked him fiercely, and ran him through, and soon he was mortally wounded."

Perrault may have known the story of Gilles de Laval, but a much more familiar prototype of the professional wife-slayer exists in "The Arabian Nights," where, in fact, he occurs twice, first in the fictitious framework of the story itself. Scheherazade is induced to spin her yarn over 1,011 nights in order to escape execution on the morrow of the bridal night, an unpleasant formality to which her peevish husband usually subjected his bride; then she tells, in the course of her narrative, a tale very closely resembling that of Perrault's.

Bluebeards Are Plentiful.

In some form or other the Bluebeard occurs in the literature and folklore of many lands and peoples. Before Perrault the motif was worked into fiction by two sixteenth century Italians, Straparola and Gian Alezio Abbattuti; there exists a "German folk tale Bluebeard," too, recorded in Grimm's celebrated collection. A version surprisingly similar to the Perrault story survives in the popular legends of Estonia.

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But Brittany seems to be the favorite hunting ground of the woman-eater; the legend of Comorre, or Comomer, the Breton chief who murdered a series of wives and was at last killed by the relatives of a victim, reaches back to the sixth century. In fact, there is reason to believe that Comomer and not Gilles de Laval, Baron de Retz (or Rais, as it is spelled sometimes), is the historic Bluebeard of the Breton country, for, according to latest research, Gilles had only one wife, who survived him.

Russia From the Inside.

With the Russian hordes attempting to stamp Europe flat, one is reminded of Kipling's now almost forgotten poem, a line of which runs: "Make ye no truce with Adam-Zad, the Bear that walks like a Man." If the poet did not foresee the present crisis, he must have had in mind something very akin to it. He liked these half savage people little, and wrote of them as he thought. In a short story, "The Man Who Was," Kipling well described the Russian when he wrote (I quote from memory): "Russia, the most Western of Eastern nations, not the most Eastern of Western."

Looking at the Russian people through Kipling's eyes will perhaps give us a better understanding of the vast problems which now face the world. Little by little, a bit at a time, a goodly part of Continental Europe is being dragged back into the semi-savage state in which Peter the Great found it when as a boy of seventeen he began his personal rule. The Russians are not a race, but the descendants of many races. The Mongolians from the East, mixed with the hordes of barbarians from the Steppes, intermingled in turn with the savage Northmen, and mixed again with the Slavonic tribes and the Tartars. Such are the Russians. Add gross ignorance to this confusion of blood, and perhaps we have at least a partial explanation of why the Russian has run amuck.

In the latest issue of the London "Nation" is an article by Bertrand Russell. Mr. Russell is a scholar, and had previously written noteworthy articles on the Social Democracy of Germany and on philosophy. He accompanied the British Labor delegation to Germany, though not a member of that body, and while they were being feted and made much of by the Bolsheviks who wished to make the best impression possible, Mr. Russell went off "on his own" with a view of finding out the true condition of affairs. I quote a characteristic passage from his article:

"Friends of Russia here think of the dictatorship of the proletariat as merely a new form of representative government in which only working men

and women have votes. They think that the proletariat means dictatorship. This is the opposite of the truth. When a Russian Communist speaks of dictatorship he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat he uses the word in a Pickwickian sense. He means the class-conscious part of the proletariat—the Communist party."

Mr. Russell goes on to state that all opposition to the present regime is crushed without mercy and without shrinking, the methods being the same as used by the old time Czars. The best he can say for the present Russian Government is that it compares with the rule of Cromwell, while at its worst it parallels the Directory of France. Externally militant and internally autocratic.

"I went to Russia," he says "believing myself a Communist; but contact with those who have no doubts favorite resort of courtiers" in the "Nara period. It is still to-day a popular temple for pilgrims, who come in the spring, when the cherries are in full blossom, and all the lanterns are lighted, to transport themselves back to the days when the gods were young."

Fashions and Fads.

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