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IN DEFENSE OF NATIVE BOOKS

Sherman Speaks a Good Word for Americans

STUART P. SHERMAN

I HEARD Samuel McChord Crothers talk interestingly a few evenings ago on Satan among the biographers. He explained that he did not mean that creature described as going about seeking whom he might devour, of whom even his best friends should not tell all they know, but an entirely different character. He revived my interest in a certain famous collection of biographical articles and I went to Leary's in search of it. I did not find what I was after, but I did buy an elegantly bound morocco volume entitled "Notable Personages of the Nineteenth Century," containing a lot of engraved portraits by John Sartain, including the youthful and beardless Tennyson with flowing locks and draped shoulders. The frontispiece is a Sartain engraving of Winterhalter's painting of the royal family of England, a reproduction of which in another medium adorns Strachey's "Queen Victoria."

The book was written by Dr. Henry D. Tappan, described on the title page as "professor in the University of New York," and it was published in 1853. Dr. Tappan, however, was not then connected with the University of New York and had not been for several years. He had just been elected as the first president of the University of Michigan. I turned the broad, gilt-edged pages of the volume, idly curious to discover who, in the opinion of this distinguished college official, were the notable personages of the nineteenth century. To my surprise they were all Europeans. Among them were the Honorable Mrs. Norton, Joanna Baillie, Thomas Campbell, Miss Pardoe, Douglas Jerrold, Thomas Noon Talfourd, along with Tennyson, Wordsworth, Macaulay and Victor Hugo and some others.

The first essay was about the beautiful domestic life of Queen Victoria in a manner quite different from that of Strachey. Indeed, the whole volume is in the manner of the period. There is no attempt to present the persons discussed as their friends or critics knew them, after the manner of the author of "The Mirrors of Downing Street," or of Clinton W. Gilbert in "Behind the Mirrors." The author justifies his ignoring of Americans by saying in his preface: "Take away from England her poets, philosophers, orators and elegant writers of every description, and how she would be shorn of her glory, notwithstanding her commerce and manufactures. And we, too, will only then culminate as a great people when a collection of illustrious names like the present can be made also among us with the same ease, and be enlarged as this might have been."

The holders of the illustrious names in America were so near to him that Dr. Tappan could not adequately appraise them.

BUT Emerson had written distinguished things, Poe was already dead, Washington Irving had finished his work, Cooper was widely read, Jackson, one of the greatest of our Presidents, had made his record. Webster was admitted, even in Europe, to be one of the greatest orators of his time, and Hawthorne was certainly entitled to as much distinction even in 1852 as the Hon. Mrs. Norton.

The certain condescension of foreigners, of which Lowell complained, was apparently justified by a definite abasement of Americans.

There comes from Illinois in 1922 from the same part of the country which Dr. Tappan migrated from New York in 1852, a college president who states that one man at least found that America can produce something worth while that may bear comparison with the best of its kind produced anywhere else. The name of the book is "Americans" (Charles Scribner's Sons) and the author of it is Stuart P. Sherman, professor of English in the great State university maintained by Illinois.

Prof. Sherman is not liked by a certain school of critics, who make the same obeisance to Europe and European standards and technique that Dr. Tappan made in his day. The members of this school are wont to sneer at American ideas and to call them provincial and narrow. European literary fads, which are in reality but the spume of the great wave of thought bearing its fateful cargo to an unknown destination, are held up to our admiration as significant of fundamental changes in the mental attitude of mankind.

Prof. Sherman used to be a little too academic and was once fair game for those who insisted on a point of view unbiased by an effort to protect the youthful mind from contamination. He has freed himself from the limitations which once hampered him and is now writing with the fullest possible freedom of thought and with a grace and facility that the most expert might envy.

The basic theory of his new book is that there was an idea back of the American experiment and that the American thought should be influenced by that idea and should reflect it faithfully.

WHILE he writes of other Americans, his essays on Franklin, Emerson and Whitman would make the book distinguished if it contained nothing else. These three men stand as do no other three for the emancipation of man in America from the shackles that once bound his political action as well as his thinking on the problems of destiny.

Franklin, born under the Puritan influence of New England, was quickly transplanted to the more tolerant Quaker clime of Philadelphia. His natural inclinations were fostered by the atmosphere in which he found himself in his early manhood, and he developed into a great prophet of liberty of thought and action. He was not hindered by any theological prejudices from seeking out the secrets of the universe, and he became one of the greatest men of science of his time. But his attitude of mind, the attitude of a courageous seeker after the truth and a champion of the right of man to the widest possible freedom, is what made him a great American.

Emerson, who began as a Unitarian preacher, soon became restive under the restrictions on his freedom of thought involved in defending a set of theological formulas. He left the Church and let his mind roam at will, free to reach any conclusions that forced themselves upon him. And, as Matthew Arnold said, he did the most important work done in English prose in the nineteenth century. He became the friend and guide of those who would live in the spirit. What he wrote is for the most part as contemporary now as when it was first put on paper.

Whitman, in his erratic and irregular verse, was a true child of Emerson. He grasped the basic truths, and he preached them with unflinching courage. He insisted on the dignity of man and on man's duty to respect himself and all his emotions, while he bowed in awe before the spiritual forces that wrought through man.

These things and much more Prof. Sherman says about his trinity of great Americans. He pays a tribute to Hawthorne in a fine essay, and he finds that Henry Adams was the greatest Adams of his generation. In the first essay in the volume he disposes of H. L. Mencken more gracefully and more effectively than Mr. Mencken has succeeded in disposing of him. And he does it in a French quotation: "On n'a pas de la politesse, il n'y a point d'[illegible]," which he translates: "When one begins to Mencken ze the spirit of good manners flees in consternation." The concluding essay on Paul E. More, for years the editor of the Nation. Of this scholarly gentleman he writes: "If Socrates were among us today I am convinced that he would be neither of the Democrats in the House nor Plato, I suspect, would be a member of the Senate from Massachusetts. Having Plato as his master, More stays politically and socially in the little group of Athenians who feel that there are only half a dozen possibilities, all in the Republic of Plato, respecting a governing aristocracy of the United States. . . . There is intellectual refreshment in this volume for all thinking persons."

GEORGE W. DOUGLAS.

FRED LEWIS PATTEE
who contributes some illuminating sidelights on American literature

PENNSYLVANIA CRITIC

Whimsical Humor and Keen Observation Mark Dr. Pattee's Papers

A good many high school and academy students learn the fundamentals of our native literature from Fred Lewis Pattee's "American Literature," and college students find much of reference value and critical significance in his "American Literature Since 1870."

Now Dr. Pattee, whose work has largely had cultural aim and pedagogic drive, comes forth with a volume of critical essays which, as good essays should, have a partaking sense of literature in and for themselves. The title, "Sidelights on American Literature" (Century Company), is not intriguingly attractive, sounding as if a hint of interior superficiality or stodginess. The book is neither, for it has externa charm of style and depth of thinking.

Although a teacher—he is professor of English literature at Pennsylvania State College—Dr. Pattee is not a pedant, but his pages have much accurately gleaned information as well as quaint and unexpected erudition. A quiet college town is an admirable place for measured thinking and leisured evaluation. It gives opportunity for unhurried reading and undistracted research. All these opportunities Dr. Pattee has taken advantage of.

Dr. Pattee, albeit a bit of literary conservative, has independence of judgment and does not balk at such a trifle as occasional iconoclasm. And he will be somewhat disconcerting to the superior young person and the poseur at intelligentsia, who brashly brush Homer and Shakespeare, Schiller and Racine, as well as the multitude of minor luminaries from their marble pedestals. For Dr. Pattee does not hesitate to test with his critical hammer the marmoreality of the recently carven divinities before whom much juvenile innocence is burnt.

This, his opening paper, is on what may be called O. Henryism. Dr. Pattee demolishes it to his satisfaction. He asserts that Sydney Porter was only a "funny man." Rating him with Poe, Irving and Hawthorne is sheer nonsense, according to Dr. Pattee, who offers a variety of evidence in substantiation. Fiction writers of today, he avers, suffer from the influence of O. Henry.

There is a devastating consideration of Henry L. Mencken, whom Dr. Pattee deems "The Billy Sunday of Criticism." Dr. Pattee is concerned, as in the case of O. Henry, with the effect of Mencken. Mencken is widely read, and is much imitated, both in style and in point of view. The Pattee essay will shock some of the Menckenites, for the writer goes over his whole career and even digs up a volume of poems that H. L. M. perpetrated in his salad days.

Among other themes are the decline of Puritanism after three centuries of educational and literary influence; the failure of the World War to produce a great American poet; the tragic implications of Poe's "Ulalume"; Longfellow's long and wide influence in the direction of promoting weak verse; and on Bryant considered 100 years after in connection with the centennial of his most known and potent work.

"THE HOUSE OF DELUSION" A GOOD MYSTERY STORY

Two murders, two attempted murders, one blackmailing, one kidnapping, one artist sued for breach of promise, one broker involved with a married woman, one straightforward love affair, one silent gliding Italian servant, one rich uncle courted by a raft of scheming relations and, finally, one nice amateur detective, detecting [illegible] and the confusion! These are the ingredients of Robert Sargent Holland's latest detective story, "The House of Delusion" (George H. Jacobs & Co.). Moreover that is only the half of it. But to reveal more of the colorful details would be unfair both to the author and the reader.

There are people who delight in mystery tales and people who are bored by them. This book might easily appeal to both classes. It contains a really original method of committing murder in such a way as to avoid detection, which is somewhat farfetched, and a great deal about interesting human relationships for those who prefer that sort of thing.

The only unsatisfactory thing about the story is the fact that the exact details of the murderer's methods are not given. One involuntarily wonders whether they are actually practicable or merely a picturesque fabrication of the author. At any rate, they help to create a good mystery yarn.

Brief Notices of Interesting Books

ARTHUR STRINGER'S [illegible] mystery story, "The Wire-Tappers," (Bobbs-Merrill Company) which first appeared in Pearson's, has been reprinted in book form. The conflict here is of the [illegible] kind, but it is presented in a fresh way. As a story of the struggle of two human beings against adverse circumstances it has the qualities that give long life to a book.

"The Wire-Tappers" Reprinted

DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO. have added to the list of booklets about their authors one about Christopher Morley. It tells the story of his life and his achievements more fully than it has been told anywhere else. More people have been written about his Philadelphia experiences than the author of the booklet has included in the short paragraph that he devotes to it. After serving a year as assistant literary editor of the Ladies' Home Journal, he came to the EVENING PUBLIC LEDGER because he wanted a writing job. He conducted a column in this newspaper for about two years in which were printed originally many of the poems and essays that he later put into his books. "The Haunted Bookshop" was written during the period of his residence here, and most of the material in "Shandygaff" and "Mince Pie" was taken bodily from his columns. His "Travels in Philadelphia" was written from week to week as the result of his peregrinations in search of the picturesque and interesting. But in spite of the omissions the booklet will satisfy the great reading public which is interested in the man because of its interest in what he writes.

A Booklet About Morley

L. ADAMS BECK has written an interesting story in "The Kingdom" (Dodd, Mead & Co.). Lancelot Dunmer signs some journalistic work himself at the outset of the war uncertain as to his ideas and ideals of life. He wealthy, having inherited the estate of a cousin killed in the war. With a desire to get away from a war-traveled world, Dunmer goes to Japan and there discovers that his dead cousin has an uncanny, almost sinister influence in his life. In drawing the background in Japan Beck has done so with a delicacy of touch that is appealing. His choice of descriptive words and phrases is felicitous, as: "That is one of the pictures hanging in the storehouse of memory where life is the artist," and "Sunshine that still peeps in drops of moisture." And in such a graphic way is described Miyuki, a Japanese girl, who having known his cousin, establishes a sly friendship with the living Dunmer. One is taken to places of strange exotic beauty with them and the charm of the soft Japanese girl creeps in.

Beck's Tale of Japan

The Lady Sellenger, another woman his cousin knew, is brought in and Miyuki is disposed of in a way which rather tends to vulgarize. Mr. Beck could have dispensed her a bit more gracefully. Reading "The Key of Dreams," however, is not moments wasted, for the style of the author, if nothing else, makes it worth while.

NEW BOOKS

VIRGIN OF VIRGINIA AND TUSCANY. By Hilda Hamilton Elmslie. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.
A handsome book on its subject, illustrated by [illegible] photographs taken mostly [illegible].

[illegible] AUCTION. By Harriet Federhorn. Boston: [illegible]
[illegible] and phases of the [illegible].

[illegible] DUTTON. By Charles [illegible]. New York: The Macmillan [illegible].
[illegible] of a noted educator, who [illegible] in the Teachers' College of Columbia and principal of Horace Mann [illegible].

[illegible] DONE. By Harry Pain. New York: A. A. Stokes Company.
[illegible] which have a tang of the original.

[illegible] SEEN ON THE ITALIAN LAKES. By Lucien Biese. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
A [illegible] and trim little volume with an abundance of biographical and historical information, and illustrated with many photographs.

Juvenile

SPECIAL STORIES TO BIBLE LANGUAGE. By Lucille Bryant. New York: D. Appleton & Co.
A [illegible] gift book for children, as the text is well [illegible] and the illustrations are made in various colorings.

HONEY AND PENNY. By Bertha Hall. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.
A [illegible] book for the smaller children, [illegible] illustrated.

THE BOY'S BOOK OF WHALERS. By [illegible] Verrill. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co.
A [illegible] of exciting incidents and with much [illegible] information [illegible].

General

[illegible] AND MERRY COMPANIONS. By Robin Bergengren. Boston: [illegible] Company.
A [illegible] pirate book.

SUN BEATING. By K. L. Roberts. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company.
Adventures and observations of a witty writer on Florida as a wintering place.

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