

of the fray, and once there he gave a good account of himself. His story is a tale of bad beginnings and brilliant endings. He was pushed into his greatest opportunities. Left to himself, he would have compromised all things, but it was his destiny to have to make desperate decisions, and once he had made them he knew how to stick to them.

Mr. Beveridge himself was a notable figure in American politics. Born to poverty, he worked his way through college, made a considerable success at the bar, and then entered public life. As Senator from Indiana for two terms, he was a stormy figure, and aroused many bitter enmities. The Progressive movement finally ruined him politically, and he gave himself over to historical studies. His huge life of John Marshall has bias in it, and parts of it are very dull, but it is also full of sound merits. His Lincoln, had he lived, would have been a far better work—perhaps a work of the first rank. Not many United States Senators have ever written books worth reading. In the present Senate there are but two, and one of them, Senator Bruce, is about to retire. There will not be many hereafter.

An American Saga

SKYSCRAPERS AND THE MEN WHO BUILD THEM, by W. A. Starrett. \$3.50. 8 x 5 1/4; 347 pp. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

CURIOUSLY enough, this is the first full-length treatise on skyscrapers to be published in America. I say curiously, because the skyscraper is one of the most thoroughly American of inventions, and the technical problems involved in its fabrication have all been solved in characteristically American ways. But until Col. Starrett took his pen in hand, no one had thought to tell the story of it—that is, its story as structure, not as mere work of art. The competence of the author goes without saying. He and his brothers have built more skyscrapers than any other group of men, and have probably had a larger share than anyone else in the successive advances of the craft.

They were not pioneers, but they came in under the wings of the pioneers, and have carried on brilliantly ever since. They have had experience in planning skyscrapers, in financing them, and in building them. It is out of this rich and first-hand knowledge that Col. Starrett writes.

Putting up a skyscraper, it quickly appears, is anything but the simple job it seems to be to the spectator across the street. Even the initial business of clearing away the old buildings on the site may present complicated technical difficulties, and when it comes to shoring up the neighboring buildings the builder's ingenuity is often tested to the full. Not infrequently the excavation has to go down far below the foundations of these buildings. In New York they commonly stand safely enough, for rock is under them, but in Chicago and other cities there is only sand, and so they have to be propped up. Given a few accidents, and it is not hard for the builder to lose enough money here to wipe out his profit on the actual building.

Laying the foundation of the latter also taxes his resources, but once he is above the street level he has relatively easy sailing, though even here a delay in the delivery of material, or its receipt in the wrong order, may expose him to heavy losses. Col. Starrett, like most highly competent and successful men, views his own trade somewhat gloomily. It is difficult, he says, to make money building skyscrapers, but it is very easy to lose it. That is not due wholly, nor even mainly, to the risk of accident, but to the ruinous competition. When a contract is to be let the competing builders first study the plans, then divide the work into sub-contracts, and then call for bids from sub-contractors. The sum of the latter is always greater than the sum the builder can hope to get for the completed building. Thus he is forced to grind down his sub-contractors, and this involves him in complex and hazardous calculations, which sometimes work out badly, and force him to take over some of the sub-contracts, to his heavy damage.

His difficulties are made worse by the attitude of labor. The building crafts are all bellicose and most of them are extortionate. They delight in blackmailing a building contractor by holding up his work. Any excuse or no excuse is sufficient. Thus it is rare for a skyscraper to come to completion without seeing a long series of strikes, many of them wholly irrational. The carpenters walk out because a bricklayer has been seen to pick up a saw; the bricklayers strike because a stone-mason has laid a brick. Some of these jurisdictional rows are so esoteric that only an expert can understand them. But every one of them, however trivial, costs the builder time and money. He needs the finesse of a Metternich to deal with them, but he also needs some of the hearty pugnacity of a steamboat mate. It is not a trade for timorous or squeamish men.

But despite all his difficulties with the gentlemen of the rivet and trowel Col. Starrett appears to have a great liking for them, and even a considerable sympathy. Their lives, he says, are not easy ones, and they not infrequently come to disaster. Even in the best of times they are seldom employed continuously. For a few weeks they work feverishly, at the hazard of their limbs and lives, and then they are laid off, and maybe have to go to some other city to get work. Among the steel workers a job lasting more than six weeks is unusual, and it is equally unusual for another to be in waiting. Most of the men, says Col. Starrett, spend half their time looking for work. The casualties of the trade are appalling. During twenty years the *Bridge-man's Magazine*, the organ of the steel erectors, recorded nearly 2,000 violent deaths. In New York City, where their

union has 1800 members, from 10 to 20 are always in the hospital. An erector who has worked for five years without meeting with a serious accident is quite unusual. Throughout the United States one erector is killed for every thirty-three hours of working time.

Naturally enough, mollicoddles do not go into the trade. It attracts only the more adventurous and careless sort of youngsters. Col. Starrett testifies to the skill and daring of those who survive. Their witless and incessant strikes are costly nuisances, but while they are at work they are ready for any emergency, and show a fidelity to duty that would do credit to soldiers. Nothing is too hard for them to undertake, or too dangerous. The skyscrapers which now bedizen the American cityscape are monuments to their obscure and singular devotion. Every such skyscraper represents at least one life sacrificed, and some of them represent half a dozen. Blood is the price of scraping the clouds, as it is of liberty.

Col. Starrett believes that most of the tall buildings now being erected, if they are not torn down to make room for still taller ones, will last indefinitely. The old fear that they would collapse soon or late is now stilled. Their steel is so well protected that it does not disintegrate, and they are far too sturdy to be blown over. They even survive fires and earthquakes. Will they continue to go up endlessly, until every American city is a series of huge canyons like Park avenue in New York? Somehow it seems improbable. Soon or late the limit of safe height will be reached, and with it, no doubt, the limit of profitable operation. Then the skyscrapers will begin to shrink, and Americans will return to earth.

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