

THE AMERICAN MERCURY

Editorial NOTES

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MR. NORMAN TAYLOR, who contributes "The Potato" to this issue, sends in the following autobiographical notes:



Norman Taylor

I was born in England in 1883, but came here when seven years old. Of formal education I had very little and I have no academic degrees whatever. Early in my career I came under the influence of the leading botanist in America, Nathaniel Lord Britton, then director of the New York Botanical Garden. He set me to pasting labels on herbarium specimens,—a palpable device to weed out triflers. Later I became a member of the scientific staff of the garden and went on explorations to Inagua, Haiti, Turks Island, Cuba, and Santo Domingo.

This and subsequent work elsewhere led to much scientific writing of no interest to the general public. It apparently interested various publishers, however, for I have never been, and hope never to be, free from pleasant associations with them as reviewer, reader, author or editor of books and magazines dealing with plants. The most important of these is my present editorship for botany of Webster's New International Dictionary, the publishers of which have twice given me time out to study economic plants in Yucatan, Trinidad and Brazil.

Among the contents of THE AMERICAN MERCURY for April will be "Yeggs," by Jim Tully; "The American Theatre Goes Broke," by Arthur Mann; "The Gentleman From Greenpoint," by Henry F. Pringle; and "Uncle Sam as a Treaty Breaker," by Hamilton Butler.

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Check List of NEW BOOKS

*Continued from front advertising section,
page xiv*

BIOGRAPHY

ZOLA.

By *Henri Barbusse.* E. P. Dutton & Company
\$3 5 7/8 x 8 3/4; 279 pp. New York

M. Barbusse here attempts "an intimate fusion of documentary truth and probable deduction." His book is thus not a biography in the ordinary sense of the word, but "an animated life." Zola once heard a neighbor denounce "L'Assommoir." M. Barbusse comments on the incident in this omniscient manner: "Idiot!" said Zola to himself." About this time Duranty invited Zola for a private conversation. It was carried on "quietly, in a rather emotional, gentle tone." Duranty was lavish with his praise of the man before him. He acknowledged Zola's superiority. His hands "were twitching and in his throat the voice of his heart stammered." The volume is full of such "recreative" monkeyshines. Coming from the pen of so eminent a man as M. Barbusse, they make, not only dull, but also sad, reading. No life, least of all Zola's, needs "animating." The facts as ordered and arranged by God are interesting and tragic enough. There are some illustrations, and also an index. The translation is by Mary B. Green and Frederick C. Green.

SAMUEL BUTLER: *A Mid-Victorian Modern.*

By *Clara G. Stillman.* The Viking Press
\$3.75 6 3/8 x 9 1/2; 319 pp. New York

Samuel Butler was one of the most fortunate of authors. Scorned all his life, and therefore goaded always to write the best that was in him, he became an immortal one year after his death—to be precise, in 1903, when "The Way of All Flesh" was published. The critics, publishers, and public would have nothing to do with him in 1902, but a year later everybody was talking about him. He was a painter, classical scholar, biologist, satirist, theologian, and novelist, and in each capacity he had something truly important to say. Fortunately, he was devoid of discretion, that feminine virtue. Mrs. Stillman has written a fine book about him, well informed and intelligent. She is perhaps wrong in calling "Life and Habit" and "Evolution Old and New" Butler's best books, but her general tribute to the man is only just. There is a good bibliography, followed by an index.

SINCLAIR LEWIS. *A Biographical Sketch.*

By *Carl Van Doren.* Doubleday, Doran & Company
\$2 5 3/8 x 3; 205 pp. Garden City, L. I.

Mr. Van Doren starts out with what many readers will probably think is overpraise of "Ann Vickers",

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