

and pinions—the tackle for scene shifting—the stepladders and demon traps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio." But whether from inability or disinclination

to betray the secrets of their success, the masters need no defence of their muteness, no apology for their ineptness to expound.

Silent they may remain, conscious that they are best represented by their creations.

A GROUP OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHIES*

BY FLORENCE FINCH KELLY

EXCEPTIONALLY interesting and suggestive have I found this group of American biographies. They present so great a variety of notable achievement, much of it undertaken and carried through to success under hampering conditions and against great odds, that they set one to thinking how wonderfully rich is the soil out of which American character has grown and how precious for humanity's store are the fruits it has ripened. This group, for instance, striking, varied and important as it is, has all come from the publishers within the past few weeks. It represents the product of American biography of only a small part of one publishing season. Never a year goes by but sees it duplicated, perhaps increased, in number and rarely, if ever, falling to a lower level of interest and consequence.

Americans have not yet begun to realise the importance of the contribution this country is making to literature in that section of the art which is devoted to biography. We talk much and argue endlessly about our fiction and our

poetry. And all the time, without tossing to ourselves a single compliment about it, we are writing some of the best biographical literature to be found anywhere in contemporary authorship. So unconscious are we of the good work we are doing in this respect that the captious critics who can find nothing worth while at home have not yet begun to revile it. It must be admitted that its excellence and interest depend more frequently upon the richness and variety and deep human quality of its subject-matter than upon the literary art with which it is treated. Too often it is undertaken by those without skill in writing, insight into character or vision as to its large significances. Sometimes the biographer revels in mere laudation and produces a book comparable in substance and in artistic quality to nothing so much as a confectioner's wedding cake. But also do we write biographies, and many of them, as satisfactory in manner as in matter, at once penetrating, constructive and largely embracing in their view of their subject-matter and artistic in its handling. Perhaps there would be more

*The Life of Abraham Lincoln. By Ida M. Tarbell. New edition with new matter. Illustrated. New York: The Macmillan Company.

A Son of the Middle Border. By Hamlin Garland. Illustrated by Alice Barber Stephens. New York: The Macmillan Company.

The Life of John Fiske. By John Spencer Clark. Illustrated. Two volumes. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Joseph H. Choate: New Englander, New Yorker, Lawyer, Ambassador. By Theron G. Strong. Illustrated. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.

The Life of Augustin Daly. By Joseph Francis Daly. Illustrated. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Life, Art and Letters of George Inness. By George Inness, Jr. Introduction by Elliott Dangerfield. Illustrated. New York: The Century Company.

Audubon the Naturalist. By Francis Herbert Herrick. Illustrated. Two volumes. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

An American in the Making. By M. E. Ravage. New York: Harper and Brothers.

of these if American readers were to take a more critical attitude and evince some degree of consciousness as to the possibilities of American biography, its rich resources, its splendid opportunities, and the real value to humanity of the offerings it might make. One is tempted to think that the energies of some of those classes in short-story writing in colleges and high schools would be better employed in the study of biography and its methods. For the short-story writer must be born before he can be made, while the biographer, although not needing to possess so rare a talent, yet ought to have some measure of training. To the art of biographical writing we have, indeed, made some interesting contributions. Gamaliel Bradford has developed and practises a branch of it about which he has very interestingly written, recently, in "A Naturalist of Souls." He has named it psychography. Hamlin Garland, in his book reviewed below, has tried with splendid success a method original and interesting.

The particularly striking characteristic of the group of biographies considered below is the wide variety of the notes they sound and the distinctive Americanism of each. From the story of our Greatest American down to that of the young Rumanian who wins Americanism for himself only by the toils and experiments of years, they present a wonderful diversity and contrast in the purposes, the motives, and the characters of their efforts, the phases of national life they represent, the value of their achievements.

A certain solemnity of interest attends them in the present crisis. For, just because they visualise so clearly the workings of those spiritual forces that have been dominant throughout our national existence, that have made our country what it is, that are the essence of what we love and venerate in it, they symbolise, in a way, the spirit of our institutions, the soul of our national life, in whose defence we are now preparing to make the consummate sacrifice. And reading them with full understanding

of all their implications, of their meaning for the story of humanity, can anyone say that the sacrifice is not worth while?

In the present crisis of the nation I do not know any better biography, any better book, indeed, any more encouraging, more illuminating, than the story of the life of the Greatest of all Americans. And no one has told that story in a better, more informing way than has Miss Tarbell in her *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, first published some seventeen years ago and now brought forward again in a new edition with a new chapter, or preface, dealing with the material made available since its first appearance. Not many are still living who remember the years of the Civil War with knowledge of the tangled problems, the intrigues, the hostilities of many kinds, the dark menaces other than rebellion that President Lincoln had to face. This generation must get its knowledge of those fateful years from books. And there is not one man or woman in the whole country but will be made a better citizen, clearer sighted and more ardent in patriotism and in devotion to America's ideals, more willing to sink personal feeling, personal grievance, personal convictions in national needs, by a study of the conditions which laid so many unnecessary burdens on the heavily loaded shoulders of President Lincoln.

When Miss Tarbell says of Lincoln that "he is to-day our national touchstone" she speaks exactly the word which classifies Lincoln, describes him, proclaims his special relation to the country for which he lived and died. As long as America holds him sincerely as its touchstone American democracy will be vital, true, dominant.

In her new twenty-page preface Miss Tarbell reviews the recent materials which have thrown light on Lincoln's character and achievements and by that illumination interprets some of the features of his course as president. These recent contributions, she says, "unquestionably enlarge Lincoln, clear up our view of him." Her keenly penetrative

and calmly judicial survey and estimate of this new material brought forward by a number of writers add immensely to the value and interest of a work that was already of high consequence. This added chapter rounds out the picture presented in the former work and shows the outline of our Greatest American clear and fair in his relation to the essential principles of our national scheme.

The title which Mr. Garland has given to his autobiography, *A Son of the Middle Border*, is peculiarly apt and revealing. For the book, while it centres around the author's personality and narrates the story of his life, so comprehensively and graphically gathers up and expresses the life of that whole wide and long section which was the "Middle Border" forty years ago, namely, the western half of the Mississippi Valley, that his book is as much the story of that border as of this particular one of its sons. With his own family as the chief actors in the drama of frontier experiences and himself prominent among them, he has painted a picture that is typically true not only of the communities in Wisconsin, Iowa and Dakota in which they successively lived, but of all the whole broad belt of country. Singularly interesting and characteristically American as the story of one life, Mr. Garland's book is of vastly more consequence as the epic tale of a section and a period. For he has caught and presented in true colours not only the material facts of the story, but the spirit of the place, the time and the people, and has set it forth personified in his men and women, permeating the whole life, and glowing vividly through all the narrative. So understanding and skilful a portrayal of characteristic spiritual values gives the book added importance, makes it a contribution to our social history that is well worth while.

As autobiography, it is an original and distinctive piece of work and illustrates the possibilities of varied and unique treatment to be found in the writing of American biography. Mr. Garland has blazed a new path and in his rich, well-

rounded book has shown how many things it is possible for a biography to be. It seems to me distinctly unjust to his original and highly successful achievement that his publishers should classify and advertise it as fiction. In the first place, it is not fiction but biography, or, perhaps, combination of biography and social history would more closely classify it; and, in the next place, to call it fiction is to rob Mr. Garland of the honours he deserves for the invention of a new method in biographical writing.

The Life of John Fiske will be welcomed by the many, many thousands of readers for whom his books have illuminated the history of their country or to whom they have brought clarifying and formative influences of inestimable value in religious and philosophic thinking. For he had a richness of intellectual background, a mellowness of mental temper and a surpassing lucidity of exposition which fitted him in rare degree for the literary path he chose to follow. As interpreter to the multitude of the investigations, the arguments, the conclusions of scholars, philosophers, scientists, among whom he was himself a notable figure, it would be difficult to find his equal. For however easy and delightful to read were the books he wrote, they never lacked scholarship, thoughtfulness, accuracy, truth.

Mr. Clark's two-volume life shows just why such rich quality of thought and variety of knowledge filled to overflowing all that John Fiske wrote and why he was able to present his great stores to his readers with never failing clarity, simplicity and impressiveness. For it is a chronicle of intellectual labours beginning with his infancy, continuing through his life and constantly carried on with the keenest zest. Never was there a better example of the pleasure that may be found in the exercise of mental powers. For him to feel his mind at work was the very breath of life and every inspiration filled him with satisfaction and happiness. He loved and enjoyed it as the athlete loves and enjoys the play of his muscles, as the mountain

climber delights in widening view and singing pulses as he mounts to height after height.

It is a charming and a lovable personality that is revealed, intimately and with very great detail, as the biographer carries us through his long and busy life. Mr. Clark shows him constantly against the background of both the immediate and the general life of the time, and the value of a book of exceptional interest and worth is greatly increased by these graphic pictures of the localities which scened and conditioned John Fiske's development and his life and work of the stirring times through which he lived, the controversies in which he took part and the great ones in philosophy and literature of mid-Victorian times who were his friends.

The author of *Joseph H. Choate*, just as does Mr. Clark in his story of the life of Fiske, takes a long look backward along the vista of the forebears of his subject and lets his readers know something of the sturdy, upright, capable stock from which he sprang. It is always interesting to line up and pass in review the ancestors of a man who has made himself, in any way, more interesting than the ordinary, and as they pass by to catch from one or another of the ghostly procession an intimation of whence came his faculty for this, his dexterity in that, his success in something else. Mr. Strong does this fascinating service cleverly and in the half dozen or so pages he rescues enough out of that dim vast of ancestordom to account for the rather astonishing fact that, although Mr. Choate was by long descent a New Englander of New Englanders, he was also a born cosmopolite. The author's division of Mr. Choate's long and brilliant career into four phases, each of which he treats separately, helps the reader to appreciate the many-sided variety of his character and achievement.

As New Englander, Mr. Strong describes his ancestry, his education, the environment of the years which preceded his establishment as a lawyer in New York City and the manifestations in all

his after life of his constant interest in and loyalty to New England. As New Yorker, the author passes in review the public side of his life, dwelling upon and quoting from his public addresses and after-dinner speeches, analysing and discussing his character, describing his services to city and nation. The story is brought down to his activities last spring during the welcome to the French and British Commissions, so soon followed by his death. Mr. Strong devotes especial attention to Mr. Choate's brilliant and successful career as a lawyer, while the section which considers his services as Ambassador to England is very rich and interesting, as it bears the fruits of the permission given to the author to examine and cull from the full scrap-books kept by Mr. Choate during his diplomatic experience.

Almost an epitome of the story of the American stage through its first half century, the *Life of Augustin Daly* brings to this group of American biographies the story of an important phase of achievement and of a vital and wholesome influence strongly differentiated from that of any of the others. An Irishman by birth, Mr. Daly came in his youth to New York City, where, a relative had written to his widowed mother, was "the only place for a widow with boys who have to make their way in the world," and through all the rest of his long life he was a good American. The gifts of character that he brought, of ability and of purpose, would have enriched any nation, and they were all doubly valuable to the artistic life of this young country. His native faculty for theatrical management revealed itself even in his boyhood and soon became his dominating purpose. The story of his life and of all that he did for the American stage is told in this biography by his brother very simply and sincerely. His was the first influence put forth to lift the theatre in America to its rightful position and for a generation he was its most important protagonist. The pages of his biography are filled with anecdotes, letters, reminiscences of the

actors and actresses of the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the many illustrations bring back the remembered faces of those days. Augustin Daly did a great service for the American stage, a service made all the more important by the influence of his own sterling character and single-eyed purpose, and this account of it deserves to have a place among the interesting records of American achievements.

In this review of achievement by Americans George Inness is peculiarly representative of art, for by heritage and training and character and in the nature of his endowment of genius he was wholly American. That this was true of him is brought out clearly, sometimes intentionally, sometimes by implication and sometimes unconsciously, over and over again, by his son in the *Life, Art and Letters of George Inness*. Moreover, in his specialty in art, as a painter of landscapes, he stands at the top of our achievement with the surety that as the years go by his genius, his individuality, his spirit and his charm will be more and more recognised. The story of his life, as it is unfolded by his son, has absorbing interest, not only in the details of his outer life, which are full of the flashing, lovable, erratic individuality of the man, but in all that it makes known of his theory of art, his ideals of painting, his methods of work, his attitude toward the great problems of life, the way in which he infused into his canvases the spiritual forces which governed his being. Illustrative stories and incidents, excerpts from letters, personal memories, give to the reader an intimate view of Mr. Inness that is always engaging and always helps in the visualising of him as man and as artist. The book comes most opportunely at the present stage of our artistic development, and it ought to serve, in some measure, as a corrective for some of the fantastic, distorted, barren ideas concerning art that have sprung up and spread offensively during recent years. For the art of George Inness eloquently proclaimed, with every stroke of his brush, that the

function of art is to ennoble life by interpreting and expressing beauty.

Although an adopted son of America, John James Audubon was so passionately and wholeheartedly an American, he so enthusiastically identified himself with the country and so much wished his achievements to be for its benefit that from the time of his eager coming hither, a youth of eighteen, in 1803, it might almost be said of him that he seized upon the country and made it his own rather than was adopted by it. In all the annals of science there could hardly be found another scientific career so extraordinary as his and few are the biographies of any sort that afford a story of so much and so varied adventure, such many-sided effort, such great achievement. Mr. Herrick, in *Audubon the Naturalist*, has told the whole story, with full detail, in very readable narrative. His two-volume work is especially worth while and noteworthy because he presents the results of some important discoveries of documents he made in France just before the breaking out of the Great War which throw light upon Audubon's birth, parents and early years. Incorporating the facts they contain in his narrative, he also presents them in literal, and sometimes photographic, copies in extensive appendices. So important are these matters that with justice it can be said that Mr. Herrick's is the first complete biography of Audubon.

Merchant and trader of the then frontier of the new country, explorer of the western wilds, enthusiastic student of animal life, adventurer into forest and mountain wildernesses, peerless artist of bird and beast, friend of the famous in America, England and France, Audubon's career is one long, breathless romance of adventure, eager effort, obstacles overcome and great achievement. One closes Mr. Herrick's notable book with a feeling of keen satisfaction over the pleasure it has afforded and of gratitude to the author for having written it. Not the least of its interesting features is the rather full sketch of the stormy, adventurous life of Audubon's

father, who also had a somewhat intimate connection with this country. The scores of beautiful and most interesting illustrations also deserve mention.

Some are born Americans, some achieve Americanism, some seize upon it and some have it thrust upon them. If, perhaps, Audubon was of that third category the author of *An American in the Making* is surely of the second. He has achieved Americanism by dint of labours, trials, bewilderments, disillusionings, misunderstandings and wrong beginnings, that at last brought him out with feet firmly planted on solid ground of understanding and approval, with eyesight cleared and vision widened. His account of it all makes a narrative as interesting, informing and illuminative as any of that sort that I have ever read. Indeed, it is much more so than some of them are, for Mr. Ravage, among his many mental gifts, has a little stiletto of cynicism and, although he rejoices that he has become an American, he likes to stand aside now and then and mock at us and make good-natured thrusts with his weapon. And that is much more wholesome for us than undiluted praise.

Mr. Ravage first paints for his readers a vivid picture of the environment and the heritage out of which, in Rumania, he came to America and then tells of his years of struggle and bewilderment

and frequent distaste here, until at last he realised that he was no longer what he was when he came. But Americanisation did not come to him, he had to find it for himself in the Middle West at a state university. Not until he went back, after a summer vacation in New York, for his second year did he realise that the bars had broken down, that he understood this country and what it means and that he was and wished to be a part of it.

Mr. Ravage's story of how he became an American and why the process took so long is of especial interest and value because he brings out the non-material reasons for the difficulties in the Americanising of our newly come peoples. He makes clear the mental and spiritual non-adjustments, the constant strong pull of the Old World soul. And that is something which we, with our so different heritage, find it difficult to realise. He shows how those who achieve Americanism earn their right to the country by conquest of both spiritual and material difficulties as surely as did the adventuring band of the *Mayflower*. And when, with eloquence and pathos, he begs those to whom America is a heritage to try to learn from the immigrant just what America means to those who swarm hither he speaks a word that is well worth listening to and thinking about.

THE IRISH HOME-RULE CONVENTION*

BY HERBERT S. GORMAN

WHEN the Irish home-rule convention started a month or so ago it was depreciated by many figures powerful in Irish politics, and since its sessions have taken place behind closed doors in order that the press might be barred from fragmentary or misleading reports its importance has apparently dwindled in the public eye. The multitudinous ramifications of the Irish question which must be thoroughly gone over and placed upon logical bases make the convention a peculiarly difficult one. Success seems hardly possible at a casual examination of the problems which the delegates must face, and when it is considered that such powerful parties as the O'Brienites and the Sinn Fein have withheld altogether from taking part the difficulties of any adjustment that may meet with widespread Irish approval appear impossible. Of course, whatever decision the convention arrives at, and it is my opinion now that one will be obtained, carries no legislative power. The convention can merely offer its solution and by a referendum or some other means have it either approved or disapproved by Ireland. That a logical, reasonable and fair solution will receive approval is possible and, more than that, probable. There will be compromises, of course, but the Irish are not so mad as to refuse the idea of compromise when it means such a culminating step toward Irish liberty. Even the Sinn Fein, withholding as it does from all part in the convention, is likely to accept a proposition that would include Ulster in the Irish government and, at the same time, offer means of absolute home rule.

*The Irish Home-Rule Convention, by George Russell, Horace Plunkett, John Quinn. New York: The Macmillan Company.

In the little volume, *The Irish Home-Rule Convention*, there are a number of pertinent thoughts brought to the reader's observation upon the possibilities of the convention, and it is encouraging to note that the tenor of the book is at all times optimistic. Besides "An American Opinion," by John Quinn, there is included George Russell's statesmanlike "Thoughts for a Convention" and Sir Horace Plunkett's speech at Dundalk in defence of the convention.

John Quinn's attitude is one of optimism throughout and his presentation of the facts involved is both clarifying and weighty in significance. The pro-German stigma that some few bought fanatics have brought to bear on workers for Irish freedom is combatted by Mr. Quinn. He gives his war credo in an opening chapter, emphasising the uselessness of considering Irish freedom under the Prussian hoof. The point that all domestic problems must be given a secondary place until democracy has crushed the black blood out of the Frankenstein's monster that is amuck in Europe is brought out, and the lamentable fact that the Sinn Fein has set domestic problems above this necessary adjustment in world politics is also presented. Mr. Quinn considers the settlement of the Irish problem a step in the successful waging of the war. Germany's one bloodless victory is in Ireland, he states, where fifty thousand British soldiers are tied up and where fifty thousand potential soldiers for freedom are lowering and disaffected. The execution of sixteen men in Dublin a year ago has cost Great Britain one hundred thousand soldiers. This is the result of putting statesmen's problems in the hands of the military authorities.

The difficulty of an Irish settlement