

began to publish in 1747; the nib had already been in his fist for many years.

I am not going to carry the biographical record further, and have introduced it only to remind that Walpole was born and situate where society and politics and the polite world could pass, a gay processional, before his sharp eyes. Here in two volumes is the quintessence of sixty years of observation upon princes and lords and ladies. Here is Her Ladyship who all the town knows is mad over a certain noble lord, and will go nowhere to dinner. Here are adventuresses of high degree and lady rakes of lower station about whom the fashionable world laughs and makes epigrams. Here noble men and women play brag, and mince chicken while a reputation falls into tatters every five minutes.

Here, for a change of tone, is a solid eighteenth century cleric poet, the Reverend William Mason, whose mediocre works Walpole praises while he makes a vigorous onslaught against literary personalities he dislikes — Johnson, Thomson, and such of the lesser romantic fry as Blackmore and Dr. Akenside. In these pages we meet the literary ladies — Miss Hannah More, Mrs. Delaney, Mrs. Montagu, Mrs. Vesey, and that profound and erudite Grecian, Mrs. Carter. “Lady Mary Wortley is arrived; I have seen her; I think her avarice, her dirt, and her vivacity are all increased.”

For all their sparkle and amusing wit, the letters are not easily quotable. Walpole wrote with unstudied grace, and there is so little in them that is composed or rounded off that it is impossible satisfactorily to ladle off passages which show his quality. It is all touch and go. “Sir William Yare, who has been extinct so long, is at last dead.” “General Braddock has not yet sent over to claim the surname of

Americanus.” Amid some pleasantries about the American Indians, he makes a characteristic oblique cut at the venality of British politicians. “They are in particular great orators, with this little variation from British eloquence, that at the end of every important paragraph, they make a present; whereas we expect to receive one.” Commenting on George Edwards, author of books upon natural history, Horry says: “But what struck me most were his dedications; the last was to God; this is to Lord Bute, as if he was determined to make his fortune in one world or t’other.”

A Selection of the Letters of Horace Walpole. Edited by W. S. Lewis. Two volumes. Harper and Brothers.

## IRRITATING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By John Carter

WE are only now beginning to understand how calamitously the Yankee conquest of this country miscarried, but we are still far from knowing why it failed. One man’s guess is as good as another’s, and when the anonymous author of “The Great American Ass” expounds the Nordic débâcle in terms of “the land lust of the Old Testament” and “our venerable constipation”, he is sure of some attention. However, this attention will not be fortunate for narrative of “Roy Bradley”, the heir of John Alden, “the Yankee cub nursed on the milk of Massachusetts legend . . . reared up to roar the Yankee triumphs”. For — to be brutal — “The Great American Ass” is written by an ass for asses, an almost perfect illustration of how not to approach a subject.

The limits of this subject — how the Yankees, intoxicated by too much read-

ing of the Scriptures and too few green vegetables, attempted the feat of indefinite biological expansion in the free lands of North America — have already been indicated by two recent books, which, standing at right angles to each other, demand only an hypotenuse to complete the figure. M. R. Werner's "Brigham Young" shows how the Mormons, freed from the incubus of monogamy and bullied into sound economics and sanitation by a Yankee Moses, flourished in an area where the "Gentiles" of the same stock made their dismal and vociferous failures. Daniel Chauncey Brewer's "The Conquest of New England by the Immigrant" tells the end of the Yankees in their original habitat. Between the Mormon solution and the Puritan failure is clearly indicated a third serious study, which should bear a perfect proportion to the implications of the other two.

This relation is clearly indicated by our geometricians. The process of making the intellectual leap involved is known — aptly enough — as the Bridge of Asses. On this bridge, "The Great American Ass" stumbles, and — to strain our metaphor — the two sides of our triangle become a gallows from which dangles the squirming, gagging victim of an unlucky experiment with vital material.

Roy Bradley approaches his subject with the sublimated introspection of a murderer. Self pity reeks from every page of his turgid narrative, none the less contemptible because it seeks to avoid sentimentality. He tells of his early life in Wilber, Nebraska, and later in Harrow, Kansas; he tells of how John Bradley, his father, followed the traditional Yankee habit of crushing his family with work and abuse. He tells of days at Kansas University, newspaper work of various sorts, and then launches into an account of newspaper

work in New York. This portion of the book is marred by a vicious animosity against F. P. A., of the "World", discourteously camouflaged as K. I. K. of the "Letter". The saga ends with Roy Bradley fleeced by real estate operators in Charleston, South Carolina, but cheerfully predicting that the predatory gentry of that locality will make hash of the Babbitts with whom they combined to gobble up this unlucky Puritan.

His book is egocentric to a degree. The author has a persecution mania of appalling dimensions. Thus he contends that it took a World War to make him lose his job on the "Letter", and the Draft Act to teach his brother Tom to eat cabbage.

It is a pity. One feels that when "The Great American Ass" is on the trail of dietetics it would have been better for him to stick to cabbage and not be tempted by thistles. The land lust of the Yankees is a subject of engrossing importance:

We swarmed onto a woodland, felled it, soured the land and moved onto a prairie, plowed it, and were ready if it soured to swarm onto new and sweeter territory.

But, according to his own record, when he had a choice between a farm of his own and journalism, he turned cityward, making no effort to stem the tide of Poles, Germans, and Bohemians who were inheriting his birthright.

The style of the book is turbulent and occasionally effective, though vitiated by rancor of the most irritating variety. When he says, "The Nordic race thinks itself Napoleon when it nails others to the cross, and Christ when it gets nailed itself", one feels a sense of acrid pleasure in the exactitude of the author's introspective clairvoyance. But there is a good bit of repetition. Education is labeled "tribal propaganda" on various occasions, and diatribes are the order of

the day. A little variety is achieved by such passages as this, without acknowledgment to Thomas Beer:

When I was in my third year . . . Buffalo Bill was decimating the last herds of buffalo, a man from Buffalo named Cleveland was capturing New York for the Democrats, the War had been over some eighteen years, the word Mugwump had been used once in a political connotation in the New York "Sun". A Bostonian named Sullivan had his picture in the saloons at Wilber and the boys at the livery barn had bought a set of boxing gloves.

"The Great American Ass" fills over three hundred pages with his inky bray, but when all is said and done he has only intimated that "there is no health in us", and that the author, instead of chronicling a racial catastrophe, is merely stating a personal grievance.

"The Great American Ass", An Autobiography. Anonymous. Brentano's.

## FIVE MEN

By C. Hartley Grattan

ALL of the biographies under review are written with the express purpose of revealing their subjects to a curious world. Each one, in its own way, betrays serious study on the part of the author, but the method of presenting results and conclusions is different in each case.

"Darwin" by Gamaliel Bradford is a marvelously finished piece of work by an old hand in the field. It is not a heavy exposition of the theories of this so famous scientist, but rather a careful exposition of his personality and mentality. In Darwin we have one of the finest examples of the scientific spirit, and one of the most gracious and charming of men. It is indeed exceedingly ironic that so charming a man should be a major hobgoblin of the age. Darwin was astonishingly magnanimous and

modest. In spite of the fact that he suffered from ill health all of his long life, he was never irritable or bitter. And with this saintly personality, he combined a passion for science that enabled him to enunciate doctrines that are pivotal in the history of biology and in the history of thought generally. Darwin was enormously diligent, exquisitely accurate, and had a capacity far beyond the ordinary for recognizing and meeting objections to the theories he announced after careful study of all the evidence he could assemble. His scientific spirit and his genuine humility allowed him to accept the findings of others even when they were destructive of his own conclusions. Yet when convinced that he was right, he never scrupled to announce his theories to the world. What a storm his major theories produced is very well known, and Darwin's personality allowed him to take the vast avalanche of vituperative criticism without becoming arrogant, callous, or embittered. Although his personality was so admirable his passionate devotion to science caused the atrophication of several qualities of mind indispensable to a rounded existence. He lacked, in later years for example, all susceptibility to music, poetry, and the higher types of creative literature generally. It would almost seem that unusual success in one field implies limitation in another, did we not remember that Einstein, in spite of the fact that he has devoted so many long years to cosmic physics, still retains a love of music and an interest in the novel, particularly the works of Dostoyevsky. Mr. Bradford's book wisely leaves a technical exposition of Darwinism to the scientists. His sketch of the effects of Darwinism on thought and upon personality is generalized and intelligent, but the value of the book inheres in the excellent portrait of Dar-