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## AT A GLANCE

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### *Biography*

LEONARDO DA VINCI *by Clifford Bax*  
(APPLETON. \$2.00)

MR. BAX has an interpretation of Leonardo that is all his own. Since his book is one of the "Appleton Biographies" he sketches quickly the life of his subject, and then addresses himself to Leonardo's "secret". His principal clue is the portrait of Mona Lisa, of whom he writes "that on a somewhat lower social plane she might be a rapacious landlady at the seaside. . . . Here is a merciless face, if ever there was one: a self-satisfied ego: a shrewd and competent manageress, mean rather than generous. . . . Here, in short, is the average woman . . . a born housewife and, in spite of her history, a born mother of average offspring". In other words, Leonardo, so fond of caricature, was painting a grotesque. "But [his] grotesques reveal that he was more than anti-social. I submit that he was one of the few persons who definitely detest the experience of living . . . a man who loathed life but found it inexhaustibly interesting: and this view would at least explain his coldness, his 'indifference', his apparent carelessness about good and evil, his willingness to work for any one. . . . He drew the grotesques in order to be avenged upon [life]". The roots of this theory are sexual and lead back to Freud, to whom Mr. Bax expresses his indebtedness. The biography suffers in roundness and balance, but it may be recommended as unusually imaginative and stimulating.

GOD'S GOLD *by John T. Flynn* (HARCOURT, BRACE. \$3.50)

THE life of John D. Rockefeller, so far as matters of historical interest are concerned, came to a close well over a decade ago. Hence it is not inappropriate that, while his personal life

is not yet finished, this biography should appear. The title, *God's Gold*, refers to Rockefeller's oft-repeated statement, "God gave me my money", from which the author infers a strong sense of the responsibility of wealth. On this theme he has drawn a complete and consistent portrait of a dominant character. The book is more than a biography, however; it is equally a history of the development of Big Business, in which Rockefeller is the moving genius. The author's painstaking research, his impartiality, his sincere desire to ascertain and set forth all the facts have resulted in not only an interesting biography but a valuable historical study.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT *by H. R. James* (OXFORD. \$2.50)

IT WOULD be difficult to imagine a more modest or a less compelling biography than this posthumous "sketch". The life of Mary Wollstonecraft was vivid enough: she was perhaps the first champion of women's rights and the first professional woman of letters; she married Godwin, and before that she bore an illegitimate daughter who became the wife of Shelley. But H. R. James, who appears to have been an Anglo-Indian educator of moderately liberal tendencies, has deliberately toned down the colourful and controversial aspects of her life, in order to show what a good woman she was. The piety of the book's intentions is disarming, but it has little more than this and the excellence of its manufacture to recommend it.

SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN *by C. Whitaker-Wilson* (MCBRIDE. \$3.00)

THIS biography of Sir Christopher Wren by a London musician is sloppily written and so patched together that even to one unversed in Wren scholarship it seems stale and third-hand. It makes embarrassing efforts toward informal

liveliness by the injection of such remarks as "How I should like to have been there then!" And Wren, of whom it would be very difficult to make a modern hero under any circumstances, comes off even worse than might have been expected. As a youth he seems to have been the gentlemanly tinker *par excellence*, renescent in nothing but ingenuity. He invented "Divers Musical Instruments", wrote a piece on "How to Stay Long Under Water", and presented Evelyn with "a piece of white marble stained with a lively red, very deep, as beautiful as if it had been natural". He had no thought of being an architect until he saw domes in Paris and wanted England to have some too.

As a successful and terrifyingly prolific church-builder he seems, according to Mr. Whitaker-Wilson, to have been an impeccable gentleman, without passion and without humour. All of which is supposed to lead up to the author's statement on p. 253 that "Christopher Wren was the greatest genius England has ever produced at *any* time in her long history".

## History

JOHN SLIDELL AND THE CONFEDERATES IN PARIS by *Beckles Willson* (MINTON, BALCH. \$3.50)

MR. WILLSON is a Canadian who has lived for many years in Paris, and has long occupied himself with the writing of diplomatic biography, if one may create a *genre* to fit an author. His previous works include *America's Ambassadors to France*, *America's Ambassadors to England*, *The British Embassy in Paris*, et cetera. Most of Mr. Willson's earlier books had a certain solid, scholarly setting, abounding in fine print, foot-notes, and indices. The present volume, however, is far more popular in format, though the work seems thoroughly sound from a scholarly point of view. Unfortunately, in effecting their transformation, Mr. Willson's publishers have sloughed off the index as well as the more repellent impedimenta of scholarship, and the lack is all the more unfortunate in that it effectively buries much valuable information concerning personages of considerable if esoteric interest.

Mr. Willson has done an admirable job for the diplomatic representatives of the "lost cause". He has made us live through all their desperate efforts to obtain recognition for their government, efforts made abortive by the incredible obstinacy of the Confederate States in the matter of slavery. Jefferson Davis had only to have guaranteed the slaves their freedom, in however remote a future, for the South to have been recognized by Europe, and the Civil War brought to an early conclusion very different from that which came to pass. Mr. Willson's book is remarkable for the easy narrative style in which it is written, a style which makes it not only useful to those who like to explore the byways of history, but a source of real pleasure to almost any reader who enjoys new historical material cleverly dished up.

PIONEER DAYS IN ARIZONA by *Frank C. Lockwood* (MACMILLAN. \$4.00)

ARIZONA is fortunate in having found an historian in Mr. Lockwood. He is well known for his scholarly researches in the past of the Southwest; and his present volume is what one would expect from a man of his calibre. Those who like local history with a seasoning of romance, and who do not mind wading through the sometimes tiresome detail which completeness in such cases requires, will enjoy this volume. Where Mr. Lockwood's material permits, as in the case of that monumental Jesuit, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, he has achieved narrative of the highest distinction. If the present reviewer confesses that a few of Mr. Lockwood's chapters induced extreme tedium, he likewise admits that their material itself imposed a certain necessary dullness and that while they had to be included they may easily be skipped at sight.

THE ELEGANT WOMAN by *Gertrude Aretz* (HARCOURT, BRACE. \$5.00)

THIS luxurious volume, gorgeously illustrated, applies the psychology of dress, which the author conceives as being pre-eminently if not entirely a means of seduction, from the rococo period when kings' mistresses set the fashion to the present, when the bourgeoisie in her triumphal