

attends those weak creatures who succumb to the "inevitableities" of his view of life.

DONALD GIBBS

An Officer and a Gentleman

PUBLISHERS have suddenly discovered that for some reason, as mystifying as it is gratifying, the public is calling avidly for non-fiction. For the first time within memory, readers are just as willing to pay cash money for the loves of Lincoln as for the perils of Pauline. More surprising still is the hankering for those works which boldly proclaim their purpose to be uncompromisingly truthful at the expense of tradition.

Lytton Strachey blazed the way for this grand crusade in his *Queen Victoria*, with a historical method which took the Little Rollo element out of our heroes without unbearable pedantry. And now it looks as if he would have to be punished along with O'Henry and Joseph Conrad, by his imitators. No other writer of our time has established a mode which seemed so easy to copy and proves so impossible. In all the present flood of historians, biographers, and psychographers, who strive to capture that same suave impishness of outlook and that same clarity of style, Philip Guedalla alone gives promise of equaling, — and even surpassing, — the master.

Among Americans, Phillips Russell has perhaps done as well as any. First in his *Benjamin Franklin*, and now again in his *JOHN PAUL JONES: MAN OF ACTION* (Brentano's, \$5.00), he has written biographies worthy and reliable in content, intended for the man in the street. Such an undertaking can rarely be accomplished without some distortion of historical perspective, for the things which are most important historically are quite often without popular appeal. Thus Mr. Russell devotes more space to speculations upon the identity of Commodore Jones's first lady-love than to the controversy with Captain Peter Landais over the command of the "Alliance". This stupid dispute is deadly dull, to be sure, but its outcome, which deprived Jones of his first capital command at the critical moment of his career, was fatally respon-

sible for his aborted and futile later life.

In the main, though, Mr. Russell's work has been well done. From his book a faithful picture emerges of Jones as a high strung, sensitive, tireless, contentious prima donna, with an authentic flair for sensing the full possibilities of a naval situation, an absolute fearlessness in pushing these possibilities to their legitimate extreme, but with no aptitude whatsoever for the finesse and cooperative faculty needful to carry on operations on a wide scale. In painting this part of the picture, with all its difficulties and contradictions, Mr. Russell has succeeded admirably. But he has not been so fortunate in making plain the importance of Jones's contribution to the revolutionary cause, nor his effect upon naval technique. Indeed, the main accomplishment of John Paul Jones was that he shattered the tradition which held that the British navy was invincible, especially in home waters; and this Mr. Russell does not mention at all.

I can hardly believe that the present book will prove as popular as the *Franklin*, merely because the subject has not the same wide appeal. Franklin was at once the most effective and colorful of the Colonial worthies, combining in himself two of the most potent interests of the average American, his patriotism and his libido. *Jones*, although a vintage from the same cask, is a much diluted draft in comparison with the vivid and unique *Franklin*.

ALPHONSE B. MILLER

A Mount Carmel Saga

I AM going off alone and gather my mind, I have something fiery here that will burn down the world to significance." This is what the Reverend Barclay cries out in *THE WOMEN AT POINT SUR* (Boni & Liveright, \$2.50). But it might just as well be Robinson Jeffers himself speaking, at twenty-seven, when, financially independent through a timely inheritance, he went West as far as the Pacific to settle down to work in earnest as a poet. Here, in the course of fourteen years "gathering his mind", in the solitude of uninterrupted stretches of sea and sky, he wrote his *Tamar*, his *Roan Stallion*, his *Californians*, and now *The Women at*

Point Sur. At forty, his attained age, he is the author of four books of undeniable merit. The critics, long delinquent, now seem to be unanimous in heralding his advent as that of "a new genius whose daring and imagination, intensity and power, bring to mind Whitman and, — even more forcibly, — Sophocles."

The story of *The Women at Point Sur* is like Jeffers's other stories: a poem narrative of "horror redeemed by beauty". As in *Tamar* and *Roan Stallion*, he turns the fierce and unmitigable focus-light of his imagination upon a handful of persons intimately known, uncovers the stark details of their emotional lives, and then at the end leaves them, mercilessly unredeemed, to their fates. To Jeffers, who passes his daily existence amid gaunt immensities, life (human and otherwise) is a grim, disheartening piece of business, — but not without its grandeur. For one thing, it is never trivial. And that is why he writes of it in poetry rather than in prose; and with the true Whitmanesque freedom rather than in the traditional manner.

The women, — April Barclay, Aldis Barclay, Faith Heriot, Natalia Randal, Maruca, — figure less as heroines of the story than does the Reverend Barclay, as hero. It is really the drama of the awakening and god-madness of this man with which the poem is concerned. After ten years of preaching, finding he has nothing to give to his flock and that, all the time, he had been "a blind man leading the blind", he abandons not only his congregation, but his wife and daughter as well, and goes off on a rampage of discovery "out of the maps". It is then that the horrible details and Ibsen-like revelations come: Dr. Barclay, past fifty, and fearing that "chastity has withered his bones", prevails upon Maruca, an Indian house-girl, to submit to him. Subsequently he lures his daughter April to the hills. She, half crazed, vaguely plots his death, but kills herself instead. Barclay goes on, inexhaustible though dying. And more of the same sort!

It is perhaps clear, now, why Jeffers has been compared to Sophocles and, no less aptly, to Whitman. He is, in a sense, both these poets at once, but nearer to the Greek in choice of material, exposition, and grasp of dramatic values. He has not

Sophocles's lyrical restraint nor Whitman's broad humanity; for all his tragedy, he is not as tragic as the author of *Oedipus Rex*; nor, for all his intenseness and profundity, as penetrative and stirring as the sage from Camden. On the other hand, he has more than Whitman's stride, a keener grasp of the power and logic of words, a sheerer reach into formidable sublimities. In concentration, in cumulative effects, in impact, he is, of course, not the equal of Sophocles; but in intuition he is no less masterly.

Jeffers's fire is a cold one, but it burns dross away just the same, leaving the inner substance revealed, white and unscarred. He is, in all things, at all times and places, the uncompromising slayer and resurrector, sullen and glorious, hemmed in by loneliness "shattered with exaltation", a soul of granite walking "lightning-naked over the Pacific". He is Byron as Manfred, sane to madness. Or better still, Lucifer the fallen angel, writing for God.

There is a tremendous, if harsh, voice sounding out of California. And it is authentic.

GUSTAV DAVIDSON

Dropping the Pilot

CLIO is the most jealous of muses, for she guards historical truth. For that reason she has but few favorites, although thousands dress themselves in her livery and enjoy an ephemeral notoriety at her expense. The world can have but few real historians, for the labor they undertake is one which only the seeker after truth can accomplish; and such a one must have not merely the strength of Hercules but also his contempt for money.

The great historians make a very short shelf. Gibbon and Hume and Macaulay wrote not for money and they died with Clio on their lips. In our own country we honor Prescott and Roscoe Thayer, Bancroft and Washington Irving. In France the names of Taine and Lanfrey stand forth brighter for the lapse of years; and I am tempted to add that of Anatole France for the scholarship and courage with which he rescued from ridiculous hagiology the neurasthenic peasant girl whom the Roman Church proclaimed a saint. Those two volumes on Joan of Arc