

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

**THE COMING STRUGGLE FOR POWER**, by John Strachey (Covici, Friede, \$3.00). There is no aid nor comfort for capitalism in this brilliantly disturbing book by one of the younger members of the famous Strachey family. Formerly a Labor member of Parliament, John Strachey appears to have been converted to communism by logic rather than by messianic faith. The major part of his book is devoted to an analytic study of those central weaknesses of capitalism which, in Mr. Strachey's opinion, render any permanent recovery impossible. He subjects to this remorseless fire the economic theories of Sir Arthur Salter and J. M. Keynes, the free traders, the national planners, Ramsay MacDonald and the British Labor party, and all those other props on which capitalism depends. Mr. Strachey has an enormous range of knowledge, a considerable fund of wit, and a fine crusading eloquence. He has translated Marxism into clear, concrete terms suited to the Anglo-Saxon mind. Whether one tends to agree with him or not, this is as stimulating and arresting a book as the current crisis has produced.

**PAGEANT**, by G. B. Lancaster (Century, \$2.50). In these days of universal disillusionment it is pleasant to read a novel as frankly romantic as this. It is the story of the founding and development of the colony that became Tasmania. After giving land grants to people of good military or civil standing to organize this island, the British Government decided to turn it into a penal colony and sent boatload after boatload of convicts to it. Thus, while Australia began to flourish and grow fat, its neighbor Tasmania was being constantly handicapped by trying to assimilate a criminal population which was under prison rules. This tale deals mainly with two of the leading families of Tasmania, the Comyns and the Sorleys, each striving for the chief power in the new country and bound and complicated inevitably by ties of blood and breeding. The action of the plot traverses several generations and comprises an epic of this land whose colonization took place even later than our own.

**REVOLUTION: 1776**, by John Hyde Preston (Harcourt Brace, \$2.90). Most of us have forgotten two things which this informal history of the colonies' fight for independence makes clear. First, that the American Revolution was an exciting, brawling affair in which whisky, sweat, jealousy, and passion played more important parts than schoolbooks credit them. Second, that it was a revolution, and therefore as subject to disapproval and denunciation among the conservative as a communist uprising would be to-day. We have forgotten, too, the battle ma-

neuvers which Mr. Preston re-creates for us, in too great detail but with considerable skill. The book is an admirable blending of scholarship and pictorial imagination; the constantly shifting scenes it offers are colorful, living, not bookish, yet one feels that faithful research underlies them. Mr. Preston has written a story for which there was a definite need, and he has written it well.

**THE ADVENTURES OF A BLACK GIRL IN HER SEARCH FOR GOD**, by Bernard Shaw (Dodd, Mead, \$1.50). With something of his old astuteness, Shaw refers to the "curious and sudden inspiration" which led him to write this tale. Curious it certainly was. Inspired by a woman missionary, the agile-minded black girl sets out to discover deity, encounters the God of Noah, of Job, of Micah, Christ himself, and various other assorted gods, finds them all unsatisfactory, and ends up by "cultivating her garden" in company with Voltaire and a suspiciously familiar red-haired Irishman to whom she bears a brood of pickaninnies. Attached, of course, is an explanatory preface in which Mr. Shaw makes some not very original observations about the deficiencies of the Bible. Some of the old wit is there, but on the whole his parable is not as brilliant nor as notable as it might be.

**THE ABOLITION OF UNEMPLOYMENT**, by Frank D. Graham (Princeton University Press, \$2.00). Commenting upon plans and panaceas offered for turning the depression, George Soule said, in the March FORUM, "The Barter Exchange or Graham Plan is indubitably successful in limited localities and groups as a means of unemployment relief." This, indeed, is all that Dr. Graham, Professor of Economics at Princeton University, claims for his program. Unlike most theoretical economists, he does not believe in an elaborate planned economy. He regards production as necessary to prosperity and proposes to make producers out of idle consumers simply by virtue of putting them back to work under a system of barter, whereby the products of their toil could be exchanged for other needed products. His plan would not conflict with the existing system nor would it narrow the existing market for goods paid for in cash. Graham, who regards results as more important than theories, exhibits far more intelligence than could be expected from one of his professional persuasion.

**ERIE WATER**, by Walter D. Edmonds (Little, Brown, \$2.50). The author of *Rome Haul*, an expert on the history and customs of the Erie Canal, here takes us back to its very beginnings, when the whole thing was looked upon as a mad and

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## Books in Brief

adventurous feat and not even the people most intimately connected with it knew just what its scope would be. Jerry Fowler, a young man from upper New York State, was starting out to seek his fortune farther west, when he was attracted by the sight of a lovely "redemptioneer" in Albany. He bought up her papers and later married her, and it was this circumstance that brought about his change of fortune from a solid and unimaginative farmer to a pioneer engineer of the greatest waterway the world had known. Without money to go ahead with his farming project, he was forced to take the work nearest at hand, which was canal construction, and eventually he was placed in charge of the building of the locks, the most thrilling invention of the new canal. Under Edmonds' skillful hands the story of this construction assumes the epic proportions which it deserves.

**HENRY ADAMS**, by James Truslow Adams (Boni, \$2.50). Since this brief and rather perfunctory biography was originally written to preface a collected edition of Henry Adams' works, it would be unfair to judge it too rigorously. While it is nothing like so good as *The Adams Family*, it at least serves the useful purpose of filling in the gaps in the *Education*, and of so giving a clear, concise, connected account of Henry Adams' life. It does not, however, offer any very fresh or fruitful analysis of Adams' work nor of the mainsprings of his character. It is merely all right as far as it goes.

**POCAHONTAS**, by David Garnett (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50). With the aid of charts, reports, and journals of the day, Mr. Garnett has re-created a complete and convincing picture of the colony at Jamestown and of its dealings with the Indians of Powhatan's nation. Surely a worse equipped group of pioneers never set foot on a hostile shore, for these people had been led out to the Virginia colony by visions of a tropic paradise and a land rich and encrusted with gold. They found fever, starvation, and well-aimed arrows, and a terrific quantity of work to be done, with very little reward. In addition to this, there was a constant warring of factions in the perpetual contest for the leadership of the colony, and it was only by a miracle that the entire group was not annihilated. Captain John Smith was a burly, coarse army man, but by virtue of his indifference to hardship and his practical military training, he became temporary leader of the colony and staved off death for a while. The famous story of his capture by the Indians and rescue by Pocahontas, the little Indian princess, is one that every schoolboy knows, and here it is given its due importance. The

lovely character of Pocahontas, and the changing of her life from that of a pagan little girl to the wife of a sober tobacco planter of the Virginias, is one of the outstanding qualities of a book which brings alive one of the most colorful pages of American history.

**PRISON DAYS AND NIGHTS**, by Victor F. Nelson (Little, Brown, \$2.75). This account of prison life by that rare individual, an articulate prisoner, is a startling commentary on our penal system. The author, having spent twelve and a half of his thirty-four years in various prisons for crimes ranging from assault to robbery, gives a vivid picture of his experiences. With the statement that no single attempt was ever made to reform him, he gives an appalling picture of the ineffectiveness of punishment in reforming the ordinary criminal. His chapters of "Remembered Conversations" between prisoners, depicting the average convict's attitude toward society and the many disclosures of the vicious aspects of prison life, including such chapters as "Drugs," "Prison Stupor," and "Men Without Women," are startling and convincing. The book is well written and has been handled sufficiently impersonally to make the reader feel that it is a fair presentation of the evidence against our present penal system.

**THE MASK OF SILENUS**, by Babette Deutsch (Simon & Schuster, \$2.00). This novel about Socrates and his circle is a pleasant exception to the general rule that the ancient Greeks are poor material for modern fiction. Not only do the famous figures come to life — Socrates, Plato, Crito, Phaedo, and the rest — but in re-creating them Miss Deutsch has managed to outline in a painless fashion the chief elements of the Socratic philosophy. In all probability more than a few of her readers will turn back to her original source, the Platonic Dialogues, there either to be introduced to or to refresh their memories with the treasures of which she here gives us an alluring part. As a footnote to a great book, then, Miss Deutsch's novel is an unqualified success. Its satiric implications, however, in which an effort is made to relate the Athenian dilemma to our own, are often vague and confused.

**THE LOVELY LADY**, by D. H. Lawrence (Viking, \$2.00). The posthumous publication of these short stories does their author no great service. Several of them are distinctly mediocre, both in idea and execution, and even the best are far below the level of, say, "The Prussian Soldier." The most interesting tale is "The Rocking-Horse Winner," which mingles childhood and the supernatural