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THE BOOK FORUM

Conducted by *Eleanor Van Allen*

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, by Henry F. Pringle (Farrar & Rinehart, \$7.50).

It seems probable that Mr. Pringle's extensive work will constitute the final and authoritative word on Taft and his times. Whether it will be read widely or remain a reference book is open to question, for it must be admitted that Taft's career, by and large, was not studded with events of real interest to any but the serious student of American history. His struggle to reduce tariffs; his war on the "trusts"; his diplomatic dealings with Mexico, Japan, and Central America — even his years as the able first Commissioner of the Philippines — seem to be rather unimportant incidents in the "old, forgotten, far-off days."

The real interest to many readers will lie in the private correspondence of Mr. Taft, now published for the first time. These letters and memoranda emphasize his infectious charm and humor, his courageous honesty, his naïveté, and his complete inability to judge men. Always evident is the tragic struggle of the man — at his best a thorough, if not brilliant, lawyer — to avoid the political career for which he knew himself unfit. It is interesting to learn that Mrs. Taft, from the earliest days of their long and happy married life, had her heart set on the presidency for her husband and that she, perhaps more than anyone else, pushed him into the political arena. She, incidentally, never made any secret of her distrust, even dislike, for "dear Theodore" but, despite the domination which she exercised over Mr. Taft, she could never convince him of the accuracy of her forebodings until it was too late. Her husband's subsequent betrayal by "T. R." may serve as a grim reminder to some readers of these volumes that the Roosevelt family does not change with the years.

Mr. Pringle's considerable humor and easy style go far toward saving the day. It is an uneventful tale well told.

G. D. DEBEVOISE

SAMUEL JONES TILDEN, A Study in Political Sagacity, by Alexander Clarence Flick (Dodd, Mead, \$5.00).

Samuel Jones Tilden's life spans the period from the War of 1812 to the end of the reconstruction era. At least outwardly, his life was typical of the prominent and successful American of the middle nineteenth century. He started life on a farm

in upstate New York, came to the rapidly growing metropolis of New York City, became a lawyer, secured important railroads as clients, and prospered with the prosperity of the times, acquiring one of the vastest fortunes of the age. Like so many other rising citizens, he dabbled in politics from earliest youth until near the end of his life, writing pamphlets, making stump speeches, and participating actively in party affairs. He was a staunch Democrat throughout his active life and a leader in both his city and State.

The one respect in which Sam Tilden's life differed importantly from that of many contemporary Americans was that in childhood and youth he was an invalid and throughout life of delicate health. For this reason his school and college careers were chaotic and spasmodic. Nevertheless, he succeeded in being admitted to the bar at the age of twenty-seven, in being elected to the State Assembly, and later in becoming a member of the State constitutional conventions of 1846 and 1867. For a number of years following the Civil War he was Chairman of the New York State Democratic Committee. As such, he actively fought the corrupt Tweed ring in New York City, analyzing the bank accounts of the leaders of this ring in order to figure out their spoils system. He ran for, and was elected Governor on a reform ticket, and, while Governor, broke up the "canal" ring.

At the culmination of his career he was nominated by the Democratic Party for the presidency, and ran against Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican candidate. The electoral college was divided evenly, and the election was disputed and settled by Congress, which, being overwhelmingly Republican, chose in favor of Hayes. Tilden showed the finest side of his character by insisting that his friends abide by this decision of their elected representatives, without contest of any kind. Tilden spent the rest of his days in retirement at his magnificent estate, Graystone, in Yonkers, and in his will left a substantial part of his vast fortune for the founding of a public library for the City of New York, one of the most enlightened bequests he could have conferred on his fellow citizens.

Mr. Flick, who for many years has been New York State's historian and in charge of the State archives, is ably qualified to write the life of one of New York's most important citizens. The book is readable and interesting because of the clarity of Mr. Flick's style and the certainty of his scholarship. It will form an

The Book Forum

important addition to Allen Nevins' series of American Political Leaders, as well as to the literature of American biography.

JOHN H. G. PELL

FREE ARTIST: *The story of Anton Rubenstein and His Brother*, by Catherine Drinker Bowen (Random House, \$3.00).

It was almost seventy years ago that Anton Rubenstein toured this country, to delight our grandparents and fix a legend of virtuosity which survives to this day. His career closed before the mechanisms of recording had been perfected. Some hint of his incomparable mastery of the piano is occasionally given us by musicians who knew him in their youth — Josef Hofmann, his last celebrated pupil; Joseph Lhévinne; and Rachmaninov. He was a prolific composer also, but his grandiose symphonies, operas, and concertos are largely forgotten. His name is kept alive only by the Kammenoi Ostrov, the Melody in F, and the D Minor and G Major concertos.

Miss Bowen, whose *Beloved Friend* explored the romance of Rubenstein's pupil, Tchaikovsky, now redeems from neglect the illustrious master and his brother, Nicholas. *Free Artist* is fictionalized biography, but is firmly based on exhaustive and scholarly research. The story which Miss Bowen has to tell — from the mass conversion to Christianity of the Rubenstein clan to Anton's disillusioned last years — is by its very nature a great one. It is a story of incessant struggle and unflagging idealism; of the failure of success and the ultimate success of failure; of genius sought by the world because it had so much to give. And the background of this story is a panorama of the European world of music during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

To the musical audience and to students of music, Miss Bowen's excellent research has made available some fascinating material. But the reader's debt to her exceeds mere appreciation of her scholarship. For she has achieved an arresting portrait, remarkable equally for sympathy and force.

LLOYD MORRIS

IN PLACE OF SPLENDOR, by Constanca de la Mora (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.00).

This autobiography of a Spanish woman takes an extraordinary place in the growing literature of exile. It is a very moving and tender personal record; it is a collection of intensely exciting adventures; it portrays Spanish life at every level before and during the civil war; it gives a

shrewd and accurate historical dissection of the causes of the war and of its outcome.

Constancia de la Mora was a legend in Spain, says Ernest Hemingway, and rightly so. The granddaughter of a prime minister, she had lived in and broken with the storybook world of the monarchy. When the Franco uprising began, she was a spirited republican, ready to fight. It was she who organized the foreign press bureau and as its head she saw the most heartwarming and heartbreaking aspects of the tragic struggle. Writing so closely after the events, she might be expected to deal in flat blacks and whites, and so her subtle shadings of humor and candor are all the more remarkable. For anyone who is inclined to feel dismal about the human race, she is recommended as a restorative and a tonic.

WORLD WITHOUT END, by Stoyan Pribichevich (Reynal & Hitchcock, \$3.50).

For the politically short-tempered reader, this should prove a wholesome, keep-your-shirt-on sort of book. It is a friendly and detached and altogether charming history of the Balkans, whose unfortunate peoples have been reaping someone else's whirlwind for a good many centuries. Particularly they have reaped for the great powers, and it is rather startling to discover how often, as Emerson said about his thoughts, all of the present-day statesmen's best tricks were stolen from them by the ancients. It has been thought necessary, for example, to rescue the Balkans several times from the Turks or the Russians — but always depending on which of the two seemed the more dangerous to the West. And this has led to a mistaken impression that the inhabitants of these regions are themselves bad-tempered and contentious.

"The fact is," says Mr. Pribichevich, "that during the last hundred and fifty years, there have been only two wars between the small Balkan nations themselves. . . . Each lasted a few weeks. During the same century and a half the great powers fought six wars over the Balkans, involving sometimes the Balkan nations."

This is not to say there is anything of the cynic about the author. He looks realistically but urbanely at the political games of the past. He has given a valuable and absorbing record.

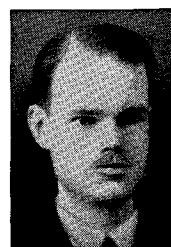
ART YOUNG: His Life and Times, by Art Young (Sheridan House, \$3.50).

This frank and ingratiating autobiography of America's greatest caricaturist is one of those books that tempt a reviewer to an immoderate deal of tub thumping. About so simple and modest a self-portrait there is always a fear that it may be

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