

goisie had all the democracy it wanted. It systematically frustrated every effort of the masses to raise themselves to the guild status, to organize, to exercise the franchise, or to participate in any other way than as "hands" in the life of the city. Exploitation of the masses was indirect as well as direct. Taxation was chiefly in the form of indirect levies imposed with that "equality" beloved by the rich, upon all classes in the same amount. The bourgeois democracy was in practice an oligarchy of the leading bankers and industrialists; and the oligarchy became a tyranny under the Medici when the political situation in Italy demanded unified control.

First under communal, then under the princely patronage that continued it, learning and art flourished. But Florence made magnificent contributions to the world in coinage, business, and industrial technique as well as in learning and the arts. A distinct development toward capitalist industry as we understand it, was proceeding when the balance shifted and economic power inclined to western and northern Europe. The step into capitalism was to be taken by the northern inheritors.

Dr. Schevill writes with a real love of his subject. His style is graceful and fluent. He shows admirable selectivity in dealing with the overwhelming data that face the historian of Florence, one of the most articulate communities in history. His use of the Marxian key, though unacknowledged by him, provides a chain of causality that gives the work unusual clarity. Altogether, it is one of the distinguished pieces of historical writing of recent years.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Illegal "Justice"

VILLAINS AND VIGILANTES, by Stanton A. Coblentz. Wilson-Erickson. \$3.

IT is hardly necessary for this reviewer to remark upon the tremendous social significance and disastrous consequences of the growth of vigilanteism in California, for readers of a magazine which has ably reported its most recent incidences—El Centro, Salinas, Santa Rosa—and shown its complete incompatibility with what passes for Americanism. There is hardly a commentator on the scene in that state who does not see in its spread the ominous development of an indigenous fascism.

Oddly enough, despite the non-intellectual character of the movement, in its present setting it has been aided and abetted and made to seem "indigenous" by the historians of the early Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856. These historians include Hubert Howe Bancroft, whose books on California history form the nucleus of all public school courses in the subject, Josiah Royce, Theodore H. Hittell, and Mary Floyd Williams.

Today, whenever the tarring and feathering of labor supporters in a middle-class community occurs, or the disruption of a student peace demonstration, or the threat of a lynching, newspapers and the vigilante leaders lend encouragement to the deed by speaking of the

spirit of '56 pervading the community. There is thus a constant and remarkable interlacing of written history and contemporary action expressed in the vigilante movement.

Histories of the vigilantes possess more than academic or antiquarian interest. They have a considerable import in and to the present. For that reason, it is all the more necessary to reexamine that history. Mr. Coblentz is obviously aware of this need, for he says in the concluding pages of his book, bluntly and determinedly, what no other historian has said:

Today, the term Vigilante is used to denote almost everything that the original Vigilantes were not. Whenever bands of hired thugs and bullies are employed to put down strikes at a mine, we hear them referred to as Vigilantes; whenever a gang of desperadoes set out to inflict punishment on alleged Reds or Communists, again the term Vigilante is used; whenever a mob of race-inflamed southerners undertake to hang a Negro without the semblance of a trial, once more we hear mention of a Vigilance organization. And the perpetrators of a thousand and one diverse atrocities, while knowing nothing of the original Vigilance movement, use the name of Vigilance to justify them in their villainies.

Nevertheless, he has been content to accept the historical hypotheses of Bancroft & Co., to portray once again the old vigilantes as noble, honest, sincere men.

What were the concepts of "justice" which the vigilantes held? To cite a case from Mr. Coblentz's book: why were the laboring groups termed "mobs" when they attempted to apply justice to sea-captains accused of bestial treatment of seamen, while the application of penalties by the Vigilance Committee to Australian convicts (60 percent of whom had committed no worse offense than having fallen into debt) brought acclaim? To what extent did the formation of the vigilance committees coincide with increasing labor organization, as Ira B. Cross reveals in his excellent *History of the California Labor Movement*? Can we attach no significance to the fact that the leaders of the committees were ship-owners, merchants, financiers, and landlords at a period when labor shortage, high prices, financial manipulation, and crashes, and exorbitant rents prevailed? That, as Royce remarked, the extremes of concentrated wealth and dismal poverty had already appeared in the city—a circumstance later to bring forth the Single Tax theory?

Again, did the committees fulfill their own concept of honor? We know that they expended an average of five thousand dollars a month and that the manufacturers of uniforms and ammunition were extremely active among them. Even Bancroft admits that the financier to whom was entrusted the benefit funds collected for the widow of James King (crusading editor assassinated in the fifties) lost the major portion of them in security speculation. There are similar accusations made by O'Meara, an anti-Vigilante pamphleteer of the times; yet historians deny him even the courtesy of a *précis*.

Above all, there is the larger question of the probability of a reform movement initiated by the business men effecting a reform. If the city was purified in '56, whence came its cur-

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rent corruption? Were the merchants in '56 other than they are today? Would any sincere student of sociology, outside of the universities, propose to rid communities of crime by banishing thieves? Can any reader of Steffens, who found business and its civilization the stumbling block to real reform, suggest a period when business could reform itself?

In Mr. Coblenz's book, then, we are given not an insight into the effects of capitalism in its early setting in California, but a fairy-land of villains and vigilantes. If we view this past as having no resemblance or immediate relation to the present, then it must continually appear a land of Bret Harte fiction. Mr. Coblenz, indeed, has to start with this proposal:

And if the stranger in San Francisco will but pause to peer upon the phantom of yesterday, and will let it return to life in the contours of eighty or ninety years ago, he will witness a series of scenes not less fantastic and in some ways hardly less incredible than anything in the *Arabian Nights*.

It may be more difficult now to muck-rake the San Francisco of 1851 and 1856 than to repeat Bancroft's tales in one thousand and one books. But even Scheherazade must have become somewhat bored by and skeptical of her tales. And she had less to lose than we.

HARRY CONOVER.

Brief Review

THEATRE WORKSHOP: A QUARTERLY. *The New Theatre League*. 50c.

Under the able editorship of Mark Marvin, the New Theatre League has published the first number of a quarterly, *Theatre Workshop*. This most important periodical comes at the time when theater workers in this country are beginning to inquire again into the basic mechanics of their craft, an investigation long overdue.

Theatre Workshop gives over its first issue of ninety-six pages to the art of acting. I. Rapoport of the Vakhtangov Theater contributes a series of elementary and important exercises for the actor. V. I. Pudovkin, famed film director, writes on film acting. The case history of a role is described by A. S. Giatsinova of the Moscow Art Theater. There are invaluable reprints of articles by George Henry Lewes and Tommaso Salvini.

The format is designed by Stanley Burnshaw, and Lee Strasberg contributes a helpful and clarifying introduction. There is an excellent book review section but no play review department.

It is obvious that in *Theatre Workshop* we find a theater document which must become part of the library of everyone who has more than a cursory interest in the arts.

M. B.

**Recently Recommended Books**

- The Crisis in the Socialist Party*, by William Z. Foster. Workers Library Publishers. 5c.
Landlord and Peasant in China, by Chen Han-Seng. International. \$2.
Biology and Human Behavior, by Mark Graubard. Tomorrow. \$2.50.
Nursery School and Parent Education in Soviet Russia, by Vera Fediaevsky and Patty Smith Hill. Dutton. \$2.50.
Sam Adams, Pioneer in Propaganda, by John C. Miller. Little, Brown. \$4.
The Theory and Practice of Socialism, by John Strachey. Random House. \$3.
Art and Society: A Marxist Analysis, by George Plekhanov, with an introduction by Granville Hicks. Critics' Group. Cloth \$1; paper 35c.