

The Sixteenth Century

Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, by Henry Osborn Taylor. New York: The Macmillan Co.

THAT modern "multiplicity" which Henry Adams contrasts with the essential "unity" of the Middle Ages begins during the epoch usually known as the Renaissance. Mr. Taylor has avoided the term in the title of his book, but he has not avoided the difficulties inherent in any attempt to survey the intellectual and artistic achievement of the sixteenth century. In order to cope with this increasing diversity he has had to depart widely from the plan of "The Mediaeval Mind" and proceed, not by means of a general survey, but by separate consideration of the varying aspects of "thought and expression" which shaped themselves under contrasting influences of national temperament in Italy, France, Germany and England, concluding with that one department of intellectual endeavor which transcends the boundaries of nationalities—Science. To his new task he has brought many of the same fine qualities that have given distinction to his former books: wide reading, independent judgment, catholicity of taste, ability to analyze discriminatingly the character of men, a sympathy with times and traditions other than our own, and especially the genuine historical spirit, that rare gift, which, while regarding all that went before the epoch under consideration as a past which entered into it, is able to treat that epoch as "a final and objective present" without concern for the stages in human progress that have since been attained. The loss in homeliness and picturesqueness incurred in thus rigidly excluding allusions to the forms of thought and expression in the twentieth century is more than counterbalanced by the verisimilitude of the resulting picture. We are "clothed upon" with the mentality of the sixteenth century; an atmosphere of the time envelops us.

Mr. Taylor's book is, as all studies in the history of the Renaissance must be, a commentary upon the allegory of Euphorion. "The Middle Ages," he says in his Preface, "helped antiquity to shape the faculties and furnish the tastes of the sixteenth century"; his two volumes are a scholarly elaboration of this truism. In Italy the offspring of this union of the classical and mediaeval heritage took the form of humanism; in France of a certain characteristically Gallic clarification of form and ideas; in Germany of a "protest against whatever robbed the spirit of its due"; in England, in one phase, of an orderly compromise between opposing religious principles, in another, of a spirit of joyous adventure and inquiry. Thus, the culmination in Italy is reached in the self-expression of the painters; in France in the clear intelligence of Rabelais and in the clarifying scepticism of Montaigne; in Germany in Luther; in England in the Anglican via media and in the Elizabethan drama. The more sombre recesses of the Renaissance mind—persecutions, superstitions, credulity—concern Mr. Taylor very little. He is interested in manifestations of intellectual growth, in the new ideas budding forth from the thought of past centuries, in the new forms of expression that come out of new personalities and new conditions. His interest, too, lies in following advancing endeavor and achievement, not in the means whereby established institutions are maintained and defended. Hence, in England, his emphasis shifts at a certain point from Anglicanism to Puritanism. Hence, the Counter-Reformation within the Roman Catholic Church does not enter into his story.

There is a certain unsteadiness and disproportion in his

treatment. At times his wide outlook becomes overclouded by summaries of particular works that are of excessive length, so that, sometimes through many pages, his book assumes the aspect of a manual or "source-book" and not, as it was intended to be and for the most part is, a general survey. There is a more serious defect. "It goes without saying," Mr. Taylor remarks (speaking of the Elizabethan age), "that the field before us is so enormous that we can do no more than select a line of illustrations, tapping them, as it were, of some of their significance." Such eclecticism may be necessary but it carries with it the dangers of omission, of under-emphasis, and of false emphasis. It cannot be said, for example, that Mr. Taylor has "tapped" enough of the "significance" of the Italian painters. A picture of the German mind in the early sixteenth century with no mention of Albrecht Durer is surely incomplete. Valois and Medicean architecture are part of the French "expression" of the period. The great development in music, the surpassing "expression" achieved by the contrapuntalists, is ignored.

Neither Spain nor the Low Countries come within the boundaries of Mr. Taylor's survey. One must record also, though space is lacking for the citation of errors, that there are a large number of small mistakes, such as the misdating of documents and events. Particularly annoying is the way in which the writer refers to various individuals now by the Latin and now by the English or French form of their name.

The author's ultimate concern has been not so much with the new content of thought as with the expressional power and beauty that the age attained. Yet the sixteenth century has failed to arouse in Mr. Taylor the full measure of sympathy and understanding and enthusiasm that he expended upon the Mind of the Middle Ages. That such is the case is a criticism not of Mr. Taylor but of the period of the Renaissance.

SAMUEL C. CHEW.

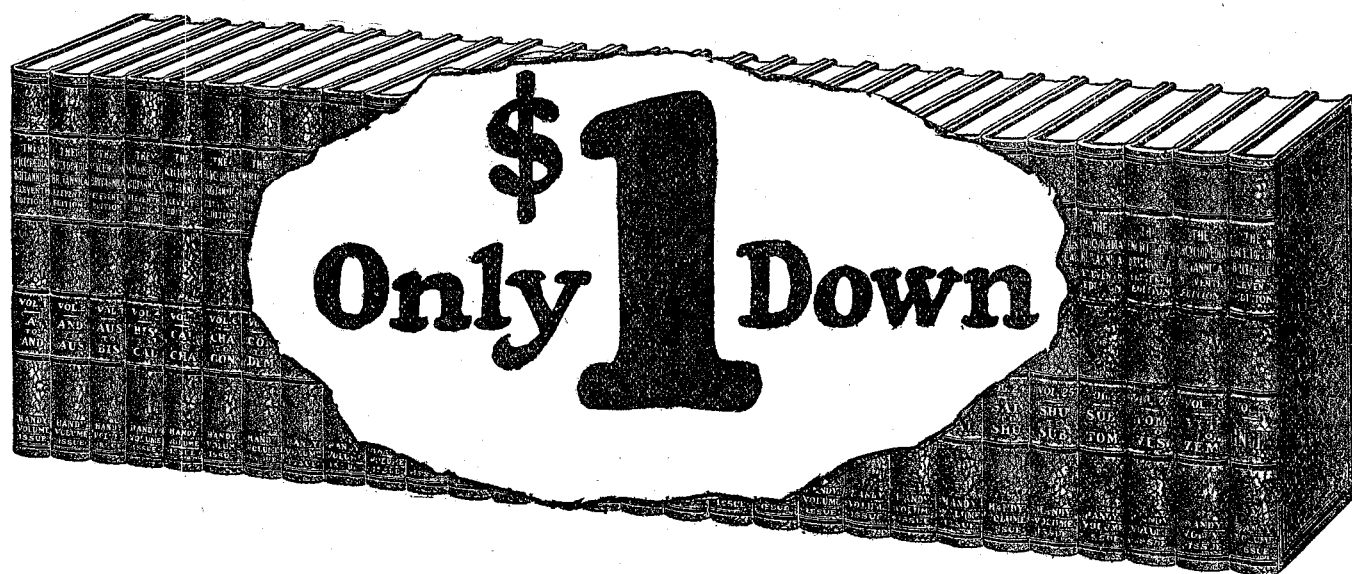
Bliss

Bliss and Other Stories, by Katherine Mansfield. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

THERE is a tang of reality in these fragmentary, imagistic sketches—the reality of a little girl on a furniture van riding through the dusk to a new home in the country, with all the vague and poignant stirrings of childhood quickened by the simple though unusual experience; the reality of flickering passion under the sophisticated intellectual companionship of two artist friends; the reality of a superannuated contralto hunting in vain for a movie job. The range of personalities and situations is broad and for the most part revealing. By skilfully sensuous detail the author suggests the vital flame of life beneath a muffling commonplaceness.

The Wind Blows gives an authentic moment of groping, baffled youth. Je Ne Parle Pas Français sets forth with brutal flatness the frustrated love affair of an English girl deserted in Paris. Bliss presents an ecstasy of joy and pain in a young wife's experience. The situation is hackneyed enough in bald fact, but through the author's imaginative treatment it "comes alive" with a hint of the inevitableness of the blossoming pear tree in the garden.

A kind of airy, eager cynicism pervades most of the book and is sometimes a bit too naively insistent. Says the



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This seems to express Miss Mansfield's outlook, arrestingly effective in the best sketches and only occasionally forced and self-conscious. Amid much that is genuine are also mannerisms of style which mar quite as certainly as would over-meticulousness which the author is a little too obviously avoiding. Through abrupt changes in the point of view the light fragmentariness is at times incoherent. Yet the volume's final impression is of fresh and vivid actuality.

R. H.

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Contributors

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SIDNEY HOWARD is a graduate of the University of California, where he was a student under Carleton H. Parker. He served with the American Ambulance in France and the Balkans a year before the United States entered the war. He afterwards held the rank of Captain in the U. S. Air Service, and was Flight Commander of the 20th Aero Squadron. He brought down three German planes and was decorated with the Croix de Guerre and the D. S. C.

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