

History for East and West

The Story of American Democracy, Political and Economic, by Willis Mason West. Boston: Small, Maynard and Company. \$3.20.

THERE is a vicious campaign for the control of history teaching in the United States, a campaign quite similar in certain respects to the campaign which followed the rise of Bismarck to power in Germany. Since the Civil War the North has adopted the philosophy of economic control and mastery that signalized the old South and even brought on the war itself. One fights to destroy one's economic and political opponent, and then one coolly adopts the policies that have been condemned. That was true of the Republican party which, after the death of Lincoln, became at once the party of privilege that the Democratic party had been from the advent of James K. Polk.

In this country we are now experiencing one of those propagandist periods in which the ideals of a broken opponent are moulded and adopted for future use. One of the most effective means to the desired end is the control of teaching. History texts become, then, the most important books, and the writers of accepted school texts are among the most important public men, good or bad, according to their moral and scholarly standards. For history is what men make it: it partakes of the strength and weakness of human character. Even to the greatest historian the pitfalls are many. One of these is nationalism or hyper-nationalism. Another is the interpretation of constitutions and laws in the sense of religious sanctions, thus erecting in the minds of American youth bulwarks against the truth—for actually the first principle of American constitutional ideals is the right of revolution, change according to the will of the people. Still another pitfall is the justification of any particular economic order. And finally there are the race groups and the sectional blocs. Truly, no historian ever had a more delicate task than the American historian. Yet no true nationalism; no noble conceptions of American constitutional ideals, none of the best of sectional and racial contributions to American life can be duly appraised if we cannot have texts that shall be acceptable in the schools of all states and all elements. Not that I would have a single text for every school in the country, but the reasons for the use of different texts should not be such as have actuated most of the struggles about school books which have lately reached the proportions of scandals.

Now Professor Willis Mason West has endeavored to write a book that can be used East or West—that is, among people who entertain the most contradictory views about constitutions and the present social order. He has tried to write a book that would be acceptable in Ohio as well as in Virginia. He has also sought to teach the contending race groups the real history of the country. He is neither Irish nor German nor English. Has he succeeded? I think he has. Let us look for a moment into the three great subjects of American history, the Revolution of 1776, the Civil War and the period of industrial overlordship that began with the death of Lincoln and reached a climax with McKinley. In the American mind these subjects form a great trinity; if an historian fails in any one of these he is indeed no true historian.

Professor West makes plain that the American Revolution was a social upheaval, akin to that greater upheaval which set all Europe by the ears in 1789. Men who have been engaged too long in petit research or who have fallen under that most subtle of all propagandas, the spell of

economic or social success, have of recent years convinced themselves that the American Revolution was a pink tea affair that had as its object merely the substitution of American masters for English masters. Professor West is right. It was a social movement of deep significance. Its object was the creation of a new social order, an order which was to be spread over the earth as all good things ought to be. Not until after the Civil War did Americans in general begin to lose that sense of the radicalism of their system which made them seem so dangerous to Europe.

On the great problem of slavery and plantation privilege in the United States Professor West is fair, and disposed to give just treatment to those "to whom we do not wish to be just." What he says of the masters of slaves ought not to offend the descendants of slaveholders. What he says of the abolitionists ought to please even the editors of the Nation. What he does not say of John Quincy Adams would make an interesting tale for college students—particularly that formal document written by the venerable New Englander calling upon the people of the North to secede in 1843, and not published in the famous Adams Diary. Disunion advocated by an Adams! That shows how foolish even the best of men can be. But I am a little sorry Professor West republishes Ichabod, unless it be to show again how fatal would have been the adoption of the abolitionist policy in 1850, for anyone must realize that secession at that time would have given the South victory, and slavery as an institution would have been immeasurably strengthened as a result. Of course a textbook must tell the truth and the whole truth, but young students must also be guided to an understanding of it if there is ever to be any sound social policy in this country.

Of the growing industrial imperialism that has filled the political spaces of American history since the death of Lincoln the historian must speak, although all the evidence is not yet available. Enough is known, however, for young students to be taught the greater facts, namely that a second exploitation quite as terrible as slavery ever was is fixed upon the country, upon that democracy of which men dreamed in 1776. The chapters in which Professor West treats this problem—the methods of business, the plight of the farmer, of labor and of the poor of the great cities—are admirable for restraint as well as for plain but judicious speaking. One might as well "out with the truth" when speaking of the elections of 1876 and 1896. Nor may one mince words when one describes the work of McKinley or Roosevelt or the magnates of industry at the time of the Armistice and the Paris Conference. I do not think it the place of the historian to suggest ways and means of democratic procedure, and Professor West has not done so, but the treatment of modern American business makes it plain that the advocates of democracy must "get busy" if they hope to make that ideal of social cooperation a reality. On this difficult subject, the author has shown his power as a historian and a friend of honest methods in politics. That far he must have gone; and really no one can complain of his fairness.

After all the younger generation will realize that it has not been democracy all the way. It has been an everlasting struggle for democracy, sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful. It is very evident that the country is now less democratic in essential economic life than it was in 1776, though perhaps more democratic in the behavior of men one to another in matters not essentially important.

WILLIAM E. DODD.

A Page of Minor Poetry

Real Property, by Harold Monroe. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.25.

THE assignment in voluntary bankruptcy of a Georgian who went into the metaphysical business. Mr. Monroe projected *Real Property* as a sequence about the non-conscious "common land" underlying the diverse dwellings of the human spirit; but, to quote his petition, "the imagination preferred to remain independent, and most of the poems, thus artificially planned, remained unwritten." So "the fragments" and the corporate name are tendered for what they will yield. Not a great deal, even from successful competitors. It is hard to see to what use Mr. Aiken or Mr. Lawrence could put a subconscious regarded as the Unconscious and loosely built into an unfinished natural philosophy fabricated from such worn parts as Fate, Earth, Body, Blood, and Soul. The very blue-prints were out of date. Mr. Monroe was after "the old natural brightness [sic] of the heart," but came no nearer than a "perpetual worship" of—shades of R. L. S.—Gravity. Had he completed his engine, it could not have turned over; for, though he called on Memory for fuel, his fire never burned hot enough to weld all those metals together—it is unwise to rely upon. "emotion recollected in tranquillity" where in the first instance there was no passionate lucidity. So, despite numerous fancies of the sort that invite rather than compel our imagination and a few keen evocations of the mood of communion with the subliminal—"Who was it talking within me and to me at once?"—the boundaries of *Real Property* enclose so little that is universal that Mr. Monroe did well to abandon the business before he got hopelessly committed, not to metaphysics, but to that very different thing, Metaphysical Poetry.

After the corporate assets, the bankrupt schedules a dozen items that "have no metaphysical background"—in other words, personal effects. "Some of them," he admits, "are tainted with slight Georgian affectations." Mistaken modesty! For these private assets (as likewise the happiest lyrics in *Real Property*) are the more precious the more Georgian they are in their tidy clarity, their studied artlessness. Affectation if he like, but poetry, successful minor poetry. In fact, this success and the failure of his ambitious design cooperate to clear up our notions of the minor thing: Mr. Monroe is minor in kind because his muse is particularist; in degree, because his temperament cannot realize the synthesis his thought can envisage. It is not a matter of talent as opposed to genius, but of different kinds of genius expressing themselves with varying degrees of talent.

Spindrift, by Milton Raison. New York: George H. Doran Company. \$1.25.

INVOLUNTARY bankruptcy of a bad boy who ran away to sea and set up a Masefield shop. Not even the loyal optimism of his attorney, William McFee, can obscure the fact that he was without equipment for it—sans ear, sans mood, sans taste, sans everything. "A talent," says Mr. McFee's Introduction, "which will probably come to maturity in a very different field." Well, bankrupts are no longer impounded; Mr. Raison is free to venture again wherever he can capitalize his experience.

The Ballad of the "Royal Ann," by Crosbie Garstin. New York: The Frederick A. Stokes Company. \$1.75.

THE occasional verses of a poetaster who must have been as indefatigable a globe-trotter as lately he has been an author. Upon internal evidence we locate him successively in Lamorna, among the Scilly Isles, in Montana and Alberta and the Northwest Territories, at Plug Street, Callao, Zambesi, and points beyond. But he traveled light, packing only a knack for versifying and a taste for sentimental legend, so that his fugitive souvenirs are to the genius loci as so many picture postcards. Of this his publishers appear to have been gratifyingly sensible, for they have supplied him a flexible album in purple suede, gold-lettered, tooled, and boxed. It may be that one of Mr. Garstin's pieces will escape from the parlor table—The Cow-Pony, a vernacular song worthy the bard of that immortal line, "Glory be to me, and Fame's unfadin' flower!" John Avery Lomax please note.

The Lions, by Edwin Curran. Boston: The Four Seas Company. \$2.50.

THE third and most significant exhibit in an instructive case. Mr. Curran himself published his *First Poems*, though the more alert critics promptly discovered an exceptional promise where editors and publishers presumably had not. The verse-matrix was crudely shaped, but it was substantial, rugged, and rich in gems of hardest flame—living colors, darting images, and moments of incandescent passion sustained by singing magic. In 1917 Mr. Curran seemed an unschooled poet of possibly major quality. 1918 saw *First Poems* reissued (as *Poems*) by his present publishers; but it was three years before they brought out the second document—called *New Poems*, although a more prevalent sentimentality, the still cruder working of a softer stuff, and the presence of paste among the fewer jewels suggested that these were really old poems capitalizing an unredeemed promise. Be that as it may, the promise held, and judgment was suspended.

Well, Exhibit C is a single piece that labors one episode through 250 lines as uneven, as promising as ever. Mr. Curran can write "Wind-swift and lithe as sudden air" and still be as prosy as "The old lion meets a younger lion," can see the trotting lion as a "saffron mist" and yet call the moon an "eye of snow." While he has been learning nothing he has forgotten much: he has less to say now, and less breath for the saying; the half-worked matrix already crumbles, exposing more paste among the less precious stones. In 1922 Mr. Curran is a still unschooled poet, of minor quality, who meets his promissory notes with renewals on easier terms.

Poems and *New Poems* are priced, not unreasonably, at \$1.25 and \$1. You can read *The Lions* in Poetry for November 1921; or you may pay \$2.50 for eleven pages of verse on "India Oldestyle" paper between colored boards—and Mr. Curran's signature! Does the sturdy author-publisher of *First Poems* prefer exploiting the cult of promise to earning the rewards of performance, or has he let himself be persuaded that he has already arrived? The problem is posed in the interest of the many other promising talents uncovered, and tempted to similar defalcations, by our too complacent "poetic renaissance." The moral is, once more, that poets are born—and then must make themselves.

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