

Strenuous Americans

Strenuous Americans, by R. F. Dibble. New York: Boni and Liveright. \$3.00.

THE portraits of a bandit, an active admiral, a religious leader, a lady reformer, a railroad builder, a showman and a political boss should offer scope for an excellent picture of the nineteenth century in America. Mr. R. F. Dibble chose well when he chose as subjects for biographical essays Jesse James, Admiral Dewey, Brigham Young, Frances E. Willard, James J. Hill, P. T. Barnum and Mark Hanna. But, unfortunately, the execution is not so happy as the selection.

Mr. Dibble made a bad mistake when he set out, as he so obviously has, to imitate Lytton Strachey. The attempt has cramped his style. Since the publication of *Eminent Victorians*, no one can write modern biography without being influenced by Lytton Strachey, but to imitate Mr. Strachey is foolhardy and profitless, because it is too difficult, for Mr. Strachey happens to be one of the few great writers of prose of the day. One might as well try to imitate Conrad by the device of a character named Barlow who interlards his conversation with "Pass the carafe."

And Mr. Dibble has done his imitations just as crudely as that in many spots. The result is that his satire is often so heavy and forced that it turns out to be rather cheap and unentertaining sarcasm. It is impossible to gain free self-expression by imitation, and, though it is easy to imitate a mannerism, it is impossible to become a genius by aping one. In this connection Mr. Dibble's dedication, which reads, "To the greatest living biographer," is significant.

Mr. Dibble is most successful in his portraits of Admiral Dewey and Frances Willard, because the one seemed to interest him most and the other to irritate him most. But in the picture of Frances Willard which he gives, his irritation mars his effect. He gets angry, and his anger is inevitably fatal to his irony, turning it instead to sour moralizing.

He is always throughout the book more anxious to show up his characters than to show them. The portrait of Brigham Young, though physically correct, is lacking in significance. It fails even to indicate those qualities which, to my mind, made the leader of the Mormons, in spite of his obvious but superficial crudities, one of the most important and interesting men of his time. Mr. Dibble fails to take into consideration sufficiently Brigham Young's sincerity, which made of him more a fanatic than a schemer.

Mr. Dibble's portrait of P. T. Barnum is not at all interpretative, but merely narrative. It would be interesting to read Mr. Van Wyck Brooks on Barnum; Mr. Dibble has not Mr. Brooks's fine powers of analysis.

Mr. Dibble fails in the case of Frances Willard, because he lacks pity, and where pity is sometimes called for he offers disdain instead. Frances Willard is much more to be pitied than scorned because she was a homely girl and therefore had to take refuge in woman's rights. Mr. Dibble scorns her for it. Mr. Dibble successfully brings out the force of James J. Hill's personality from the maze of financial transactions which surrounded it. With Mark Hanna the biographer is too anxious to be smart, and he therefore seldom succeeds in being clever.

M. R. WERNER.

Briefs on Books

The Life of Caleb Cushing, by Claude M. Fuess. Two Volumes. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. \$10.

THIS is a thorough, well documented and readable biography of one of the ablest of the Hundred Percent Americans of the Middle Period. Cushing distinguished himself as a jurist, soldier and diplomat. His most important services in public life were rendered as commissioner to China in Tyler's administration, brigadier-general in the Mexican War, Attorney-General of the United States from 1853-57, American counsel at the Geneva Arbitration Tribunal in 1871-72, and Minister to Spain from 1874-77. Cushing's ability to follow the dictates of his conscience and convictions, even when they led to unpopular acts and positions, marks him out as something above the ordinary run of politicians who have graced most of our public offices during the greater part of our history, and doubtless accounts for the fact that not even one educated American out of ten has ever heard of him. But, along with real ability as a jurist and diplomat, he combined a somewhat arrogant and aggressive patriotism, which detracts somewhat from the high estimate which might otherwise be placed upon his character and achievements. Cushing was not only a great man; he recognized and admitted this fact, one of the results of which discernment is to be found in the excellent character of this biography. Feeling that his career would edify posterity, he carefully preserved, sorted and arranged his papers so that they would be in readiness for the labors of his biographer. His spirit may have chafed with impatience that the task was not begun until 1915, but it must have been compensated by viewing the admirable product of Mr. Fuess's efforts, which enrich the literature of American political and diplomatic history.

H. E. B.

Paul Cézanne, by Ambroise Vollard; authorized translation by Harold L. Van Doren; with sixteen illustrations. New York: Nicholas L. Brown. \$3.00.

MR. VOLLARD'S little volume on Cézanne will satisfy only those who seek snapshots and anecdotes; it abounds in these, for the author had apparently the same knack in getting hold of the unconsidered trifles of Cézanne's life as he had of the more significant products of Cézanne's art. This is not to say that Cézanne does not emerge from this succinct biography; quite plainly, he does emerge; and we are confronted with a shy, passionate, intense, childish, irritable man, whose main effort in life, apparently, was an attempt to get hung in museums and salons among the tepid respectables whom he hated. An honest craftsman, Cézanne properly despised his old friend Zola for becoming a filthy bourgeois; a simple, humble man, he eased a troublesome life by "leaning on Rome;" and above all, as an inspired artist, he occasionally vented his knowledge in gnomish scraps: "Listen! Everything in Nature is a cylinder or a cube." "Monet is only an eye: but good Lord, what an eye!" Whilst Cézanne's life has not the spiritual interest of his contemporaries, Van Gogh or Gauguin, it still awaits a biographer who will take the full measure of it, in relation to his art.

L. M.

Masters and Men, by Philip Guedalla. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$2.50.

HAVING written a biography, which he entitled a history, Mr. Guedalla now writes feuilletons and reviews—

deleting the names of the books—and suggests that they are biography. His book on the Second Empire had as many shooting stars as any August night but in the darkness one could descry the pathetic figure of Louis Napoleon most admirably outlined. This volume confirms the judgment of those who thought the rhetoric more characteristic than the portraiture. We see an occasional meteor but no landscape, ironic edging but no pattern. There are, of course, occasional teasing bits of writing but, to speak in the daggered vocabulary of the author, the book is a confection of ingeminating grimaces.

A. W. V.

The Causes and Character of the American Revolution, by H. E. Egerton. New York: Oxford University Press. \$2.85.

THIS is a calm and objective example of English historical scholarship applied to the study of the American Revolution, thus giving a good sample of the state of English scholarly opinion on this subject a generation after Lecky's famous judicious summary. In general, the work is of the conventional type of political and diplomatic history, but is scrupulously fair. Professor Egerton seems ignorant of some of the most important recent American monographs on the causes of the Revolution, such as Schlesinger's *Colonial Merchants*, Sidney George Fisher's *Struggle for American Independence*, and Alvord's study of imperial problems in the Mississippi Valley. Good use is made, however, of the late George Louis Beer's monumental contributions to the relation between the Mercantile System and British colonial administration. There is a particularly good chapter on the American Loyalists, which helps to upset the respectable patriotic myth that the Loyalists were few in numbers and uniformly low down scoundrels. It is scarcely necessary to add that the book is as disruptive of the American epic as the best American scholarship has been in the last generation. It may be referred to the Mayor's committee on textbooks as a peculiarly atrocious example of the cloven hoof.

H. E. B.

The Inquisition, by Hoffman Nickerson. With a preface by Hilaire Belloc. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. \$4.00.

NOT a history, but an Anglo-Catholic tract against Prohibition. Its author, while in the New York legislature, was angered by Prohibition lobbyists and sought in history a horrible precedent for their intolerance. He has compiled from excellent sources, and when his heat permits he tells his tale with literary skill; but his contempt for all dissent soon makes him the partisan of the inquisitor. If still he seems to find a contradiction between the Inquisition and the teaching of Jesus, it is only (p. 251) "for the sake of the arguments of the Prohibitionists;" and he hastens to imply that for the Prohibitionists, at least, capital punishment is too good.

G. L. B.

A History of Ornament: Renaissance and Modern, by A. D. F. Hamlin; with 464 illustrations and 23 plates. New York: The Century Company. \$5.00.

THIS is a companion volume to Professor Hamlin's study of ornament in Ancient and Mediaeval times. It is really more than a history of ornament; it is also a history of that part of architecture which is not treated in construc-

tion and plan. The breadth of Professor Hamlin's statement, the profuseness of illustrations, and the justice of his criticisms are alike admirable; all the more so because, like every profound scholar from Fergusson onwards, he is in sympathy with fresh impulses and innovations. The inclusion of American architecture down to the twentieth century is an admirable departure. One must add that minor ornamentation, in pottery, typography, and furniture also comes within the sweep of Professor Hamlin's study.

L. M.

The Coming of Man, by John M. Tyler. Boston: Marshall Jones Company. \$2.00.

THE well-known author of those interesting books on *Man in the Light of Evolution* and *The New Stone Age* in Northern Europe here contributes to The Amherst Books a series of connected essays on the meaning of life. A marvel of compactness, this little volume contains a sketch of the evolution of living things from amoeba to man and civilization, with room left in the 136 pages for a half-dozen little essays on great biological questions. Written in a mellow, gently philosophical vein, with fine touches of the wisdom of age and the spirit of youth, yet a bit old-fashioned in spots and with here and there a lapse from scientist to mystic, it is a book of decided value for the cultivated layman.

F. H. H.

Some Victorian Women, by Harry Furniss. New York: Dodd Mead and Company. \$4.00.

ON the cover-slip we read, "his delightful book of reminiscences;" on page 190, "It would be ridiculous to bracket my chatter and caricature with memoirs." Admiring his candor, we vote with the author.

A. W. V.

Contributors

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CLIVE BELL, the English critic of literature and art, is a frequent contributor to the *New Republic*. He is the author of *Art, Since Cézanne*, etc. His most recent book, *On British Freedom*, was brought out a few months ago in this country by Harcourt, Brace and Company.

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT, who has spent several years in New Mexico and has an intimate knowledge of the Indians, is the author of several books on the subject.

H. N. BRAILSFORD, the English publicist, is the editor of the *New Leader*, and the author of *Across the Blockade*, *The War of Steel and Gold*, and *The Russian Workers' Republic*.

EDWIN E. SLOSSON, formerly professor of chemistry at the University of Wyoming, and an editor of the *Independent*, is now editor of *Science Service*. Among his books are *Creative Chemistry*, *Easy Lessons in Einstein*, and *The American Spirit in Education*.

ARTHUR WALEY is the translator of *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* published by Knopf.

M. R. WERNER is the author of *Barnum*, and has been a reporter on the *New York Tribune*. He is now at work on a biography of Brigham Young.