

More Birrelling

More Obiter Dicta, by Augustine Birrell. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$2.50.

LORD ROSEBERY once delivered an address which, following the accepted formula, began: "Bookishness and statesmanship are, one would think, scarcely compatible. Nothing indeed could seem more discordant and incompatible than the life of the library and the life of politics"; and continued by presenting exceptions to this rule, from Carteret and Chesterfield to Gladstone and, by implication, himself. He might have added several more names from among his immediate political contemporaries, Lord Salisbury, Arthur Balfour, John Morley and Augustine Birrell. The last indeed would seem an exceptionally good case, for without a compelling vocation to either literature or politics he was, at the time Lord Rosebery was speaking, making an initial success at both, while maintaining a steady progress at the bar. Undoubtedly the English like a certain literary plumage as decoration to a political reputation, and Augustine Birrell's thin and early volumes of essays, *Obiter Dicta*, helped to put him into Parliament in 1889. He continued to practice politics and pursue literature. In 1900 he dropped out of Parliament in the khaki election, but in the revival of the Liberal Party he took a leading part, being president of the National Liberal Federation in 1904-5. With the return of his party to power he entered the ministry of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as President of the Board of Education; and on the reconstruction under Asquith he became Chief Secretary for Ireland. Here, like so many Englishmen before him, he honestly and earnestly sought to conciliate Ireland by giving her what she did not want. The revolution of Dublin Green in 1916 put an end to his statesmanship. Two years later he left Parliament, on the occasion of another khaki election. Now comes *More Obiter Dicta*, made up of writings contributed to magazines between 1890 and 1922, as reminder of the fact that through his strenuous years of government Mr. Birrell continued his bookishness.

The first *Obiter Dicta*, which appeared in 1884, owed their success to the light, informal, discursive manner of their saying. English criticism of that day was a somewhat pontifical affair, with Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater and Walter Bagehot and Leslie Stephen. No one would have suspected that Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm and Bernard Shaw were just around the corner. So *Obiter Dicta* were enjoyed by palates refined, and not yet corrupted by too highly seasoned food. They added a word to the English vocabulary of that day. To Birrell was to talk lightly, easily, pleasantly, about familiar things, dissimulating pedantry and excluding malice—almost the exact equivalent of the Harvard term, to drool. And Birrell's talk flowed brightly and persistently on, deepening about such rocks as Milton and Carlyle, playing gaily over such diverse substances as Lamb, Benvenuto Cellini, Hazlitt, Pope, Johnson, Borrow, Wesley, and Richardson, and rippling into a momentary rapid at Brander Matthews's silly literary chauvinism.

This gentle flow is continued in the new volume. Here it is easy to see the trend of Mr. Birrell's interests. A Cambridge man, he is always a little intrigued by Newman and the Oxford Movement. It is well enough to begin by asserting "There are men to be found in these

days—bold, bad men no doubt—ready to declare they have heard enough of the Oxford Movement; that they resent as affected and overdone the reverential attitude it has become traditional to assume towards it; . . . that it has long since spent itself out, and deserves to be forgotten." But Mr. Birrell still flutters about the flame of Newman. He is preoccupied with Scotch affairs, even very minor ones, like Miss Susan Ferrier and Sir Walter Scott's legal decisions as Sheriff of Selkirkshire. He is above all interested in biography, which is always the basis of his criticism. He looks waggishly but wistfully at the new model of Mr. Lytton Strachey. "How did Mr. Strachey select his menagerie, his caged animals, whom he attacks upon the flank or the rear, sometimes shooting searchlights into their obscure recesses, and sometimes squirting his ironical humor over them through the bars?" But so far is Mr. Birrell from being unpleasant to any one that though he refers to the story of General Gordon, "with its searching lights upon the 'obscure recesses' of the characters of Lord Cromer, Lord Hartington and Mr. Gladstone," he does not offer to cast any light of his own on obscurities of character with which he must have been somewhat familiar. But though eschewing malice himself, he recognizes its place in the biographical art. Of the *Life of Nollekens*, by John Thomas Smith he remarks: "The book takes high rank among the spiteful biographies, and it is to pass a harsh verdict upon that odd compound, human nature, to have to admit that spitefulness is a better quality in a biographer, from the biographer's point of view, than an amiable uncritical effusiveness."

His first essay, *Anti-Humbog*, is an appreciation of Sir Leslie Stephen, lord paramount of the realm of biography; and the particular quality which he singles out for appreciation is Stephen's realistic view of the value of the lives which he so actively commemorated, and his refusal to delude himself as to the value of his own performance.

In this volume Mr. Birrell strays farther from the beaten highroad than in his earlier ones and returns with a few genuine finds. One of these is Sir Charles Harding K. C. B. who fills a niche among Victorian gentleman adventurers. Another is John Chamberlain, whose correspondence covers the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. Another is Arthur Hall, the first translator of Homer into English—out of the not original French.

The last and longest essay is on Chateaubriand, another literary statesman. Here Mr. Birrell attempts something like genuine interpretation, and his comment has a touch of anticipatory pathos—the essay was written in 1902.

He was, he often reminds his readers, a man of affairs, a most travelledthane, a Foreign Minister, an ambassador, an orator, and an aristocrat who was at once alive to the sovereignty of the people, the greatness of France, the freedom of the Press, the charm of religion, and the sanctity of the monarchical idea. Yet at the bottom of his heart Chateaubriand knew perfectly well that he could no more rule France than he could have written one of Molière's comedies. He was well qualified to play many parts, but he had nothing of the soldier in his composition, and was far happier scribbling his memories in a travelling-carriage than ever he would have been on a field of battle.

But the easy flow of Mr. Birrell's discursive mind carries him away from such sad stories of the death of

kings. After quoting Chateaubriand's magnificent diatribe against the betrayers and deserters of Napoleon he is reminded how often Milton's line has helped give expression to similar emotions.

Owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs;
and this leads to a suggestion that the blind Maconides owes an apology to the last named species, and this is followed by a recognition of the exigencies of rhyme.

ROBERT MORSS LOVETT.

Labor Before the Civil War

The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860, by Norman Ware.
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THE roots of our contemporary social problems lie in the past. If history has failed to explain the origin and the course of processes in the economic and industrial development of the United States, it is because history writing in this field has not yielded the materials for sound and intelligible interpretation. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find another century in the world's history so rich in the variety of its industrial events as the last one hundred years in this country. To describe alone the effects of the incessant impact on the country of masses of immigrants, of the discovery and exploitation of resources on a scale hitherto beyond the dream of man, of the succession of industrial revolutions which make the observations on the division of labor of Adam Smith and Charles Dobbage pale into insignificance, and of the social-political consequences of these and other forces, is a task to test the mettle of the most skilled of scholars. The illumination of these processes of American economic history and their welding into a synthetic tale requires not only painstaking grubbing after detail, but even more the courageous use of imagination, bold hypothesis, and even a bit of guessing. Conclusions so achieved may turn out to be inaccurate, but they will produce ideas and understanding incomparably more fruitful than the arid labors of the past. In this modest little book on the rise of industrialism and the labor movement in the period immediately preceding the Civil War, Mr. Norman Ware, professor in the municipal University of Louisville, has applied to a small segment of economic history the method which, in this case at least, raises real problems and throws light upon them. He comes close to doing for a brief phase of American labor history what the Hammonds did much more elaborately and, of course, with greater literary charm for the early history of English labor. But if Mr. Ware writes not so well, his writing is also less dominated by a thesis.

"The period 1840 to 1850 in American history," writes Mr. Ware, "has been regarded almost exclusively from the standpoint of the slavery issue; so exclusively in fact, as to obscure social and industrial upheavals remarkable alike for their vitality and resource." On the description of these upheavals he brings to bear a careful selection of contemporary documents, with which he reconstructs the elements in the rise of the factory system in this country and in the reaction to this changing industrial situation of workingmen's and reformists' movements. Throughout the author writes with vigor and with refreshing freedom from traditional viewpoints. His statistical materials, while naturally sparse and on the whole unconvincing, show every evidence of critical examination.

In place of the usual theoretical discussion of the ap-

pearance of industrialism and the rise of the factory system, this book describes factories, the tactics of factory owners, the composition of the changing groups of factory workers, and the working conditions which, first as individuals and later as members of trade unions, factory workers sought to improve for their own benefit. On this background organized labor appears as an agency for the redress of simple but fundamental grievances. By the fifties the labor movement had ceased to be tail to the kite of reformist movements; it had "achieved the emancipation of the worker from the traditions of 'community of interest' between employer and employed; the explicit acceptance of his trade status; the limitation of his purposes; and a compacted form of organization suitable to aggressive action." Trade unions had, in other words, begun that movement, which they have pursued faithfully ever since, to raise wages, reduce the number of hours, and to win for their members a more independent status in industry. However much they may have been temporarily beguiled by the magnificent programs of Owen, Greeley and others, their first and lasting concern was with the payment of wages from \$5 to \$10 a week, with prevailing work-days more than 14 hours long, and with a status which enabled the Crompton Mills in 1843 to post with impunity notices of this kind:

Those employed at these mills and works will take notice that a store is kept for their accommodation, . . . and it is expected that all will draw their goods from said store. Those who do not are informed that there are plenty of others who would be glad to take their places at less wages.

Particularly significant in this chronicle of two decades are the records of the beginnings of the New England textile industry, which to this day is the seat of all that is reactionary in industrial relations. In 1847 the Nashua Corporation of New Hampshire forced its employees to sign individual contracts nullifying the ten hour law which three days later became effective in that state. The Company "paper" still used for widespread propaganda in American industry, contained in 1848 this choice morsel on the "Duties and Rights of Mill Girls" from the pen of a Miss Farley: "Let me not be misunderstood. I dislike heartily the long hours system in families and in corporations, but I have a joyful faith in the corporations.

I have no doubt that, in their own good time, they will introduce the ten-hour system, and will not this be a noble deed?—A noble deed!" Again she felt that "all the diseases and inconveniences of factory communities do not spring from the inherent corruptions of the factory system, but that, on the contrary, the greater part of them proceed directly and indirectly from a neglect on the part of the operatives themselves. . . ." Those who have followed recent controversies over the decay of the textile industry in Fall River should be interested to find in contemporary comment on the early textile industry in Massachusetts that "Nepotism, the invariable offspring of autocracy, appeared. Instead of promoting the technicians in the mills, 'the son, son-in-law, nephew or relative of some director who in turn allows other directors to put their dependents in good positions also,' was given advancement."

Concerning the relations of the reform and labor movements of this period, Mr. Ware protests vigorously against the conception that the labor movement was a mere tool of reformers. "It is necessary to insist," he says,