

doing things. But tradition needs to be valued and understood. In some of our smaller American colleges practises grow up overnight and are forthwith dignified by the name of "traditions." Would that the American undergraduate could understand the full meaning of the term. But if the undergraduate lacks a background, this is often because his elders also lack it. The lesson of Oxford and Cambridge is in this view also of value. Altogether Mr. Mansbridge's book, a remarkable miscellany of information, does not lack power either in its subject matter or its style.

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DIPLOMATIC PORTRAITS. By W. P. Cresson. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

The diplomatist is peculiarly in a position to see and to appreciate the interaction of personalities with events—a very real phenomenon which some historians practically ignore and to which some writers of memoirs are not unnaturally inclined to give too much importance. Mr. Cresson has not indeed written a history; but he has so interwoven his character sketches with the political history of nineteenth century Europe, that he has given us far more than a series of portraits, however striking. The relative completeness of the picture that he draws, from various points of view, of the European situation, is surprising. The coherence of the whole narrative is greater than might be reasonably expected, and the insight to be drawn from this entertainingly, if not lightly, written discourse is of the sort for which we sometimes seek vainly in pretentiously illuminating works.

After all, there is no understanding the period without some knowledge of that remarkable person, the Tsar-idealist, Alexander I. Mr. Cresson has intimately studied this enigmatic figure; he appears to know him as very few world figures are known to their biographers. In some of his most fascinating pages he tells of the future Tsar's boyhood, of his friends, of the influences which surrounded him. Without pretending to read unreadable and perhaps not very significant riddles of personality, he presents the Tsar as a man of quite natural inconsistencies, a man of generous ideals and selfish fears, illusioned and capable of illusioning others, yet shrewd in his way and autocratic.

How that strange anomaly, the Holy Alliance, came into being, Mr. Cresson tells with singular plausibility. "Go forth, my son, and see with how little wisdom the world is governed." Yet all this collective unwisdom is the resultant of collective small wisdoms, individual ideals, the motives of able men not necessarily insincere. It all comes about naturally enough, and there are probably few geniuses in any one age and still fewer monsters of iniquity! Your true diplomatist is therefore only half cynical. One closes the book with the reflection: Such was Nineteenth Century Diplomacy, such were the motives of the men in power, such was the wisdom that they could evolve among them. Such is human nature. May it not be that we have wormed

our way a little forward in the path of progress? The words are trite, but to reach this conclusion through a legitimate historic route is a sufficient reward for reading any book. Our general conclusion, otherwise empty, has the colour and the reality of the story we have read. The mental journey is itself a part of the destination.

After Alexander has once been introduced to us, we understand him well when he appears, as he repeatedly does, in later chapters. So it is throughout the successive essays. By the time we arrive at Adams and Monroe, we have acquired a great deal of that European diplomatic background which is necessary for the understanding of American diplomacy, and which it is one of the author's principal aims to give.

An extraordinarily close and interesting view is given of what appears to have been the prodigious mistakes of Napoleon's imperialistic (and imperious) diplomacy—a diplomacy influenced by military conceptions. Here again personality enters to enliven our interest and to modify views of history too exclusively mechanistic. Inevitably we are led to attribute the course of events in part to the personality even to the caprice of Napoleon—for in diplomacy little things certainly seem to count, and it cannot be held that diplomacy is a just casting up of accounts, a mere epiphenomenon upon the play of economic forces. At the same time new touches are added to the composite portrait of the little great man.

Talleyrand and that strange adventuress, Madame de Krüdener, who introduced, with the aid of the Tsar, a mystic element into the diplomacy of the period, jostle each other in these pages. But while everything from conscienceless intrigue to mystic exaltation goes into the witches' broth which the international relations of the time seem to have been, one is enabled to discern the real and more or less permanent conceptions that guided the leaders. Thus Talleyrand seems to have been the prince of opportunists and even to have outlived the vogue of opportunism pure and simple. Castlereagh, portrayed with more justice than is sometimes accorded him, was the originator of the diplomacy of reservations. Metternich is fully portrayed in his devious ways as the exponent of stability. Gentz was the genius of European conferences. John Quincy Adams developed the diplomacy of isolation.

To see these ideals at work in the lives of the men who held them and to read the words in which they and their contemporaries described them, helps one to understand what these ideals or conceptions of conduct essentially mean in men's mouths and in their actions. It does more; it even helps us to understand what may be meant by ideals in general.

Mr. Cresson appears never to have lost an opportunity to draw a true and quaint parallel between the situations and sentiments of the past and those of to-day. His book is scholarly enough with all its intimacy of manner, but it is rather of the kind that most scholars read than of the kind which many of them write. An induction into worldly wisdom of the broader and better sort may be one of the results of reading this volume.

JAPANESE POETRY. By Curtis Hidden Page. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

To say that Mr. Page's book will especially appeal to lovers of the exotic is to do it but scant justice. It ought to appeal to every lover of poetry—for there is a love of poetry which is greater than the love of any particular poem or any one type of poetic expression. So well has Mr. Page done his work, so faithful has he been to the spirit of the Japanese writers, and so exact in his translations, that he has accomplished far more than the production of a charming and appreciative series of essays. Through the medium of this scholarly work one may discern truths of much import to poetry and to the art of expression generally.

The magic of language—and especially of poetic language—depends to an extraordinary extent upon suggestion and upon the compactness that the suggestiveness of words makes possible. The paradox which seems to be involved in most valuable truths is here that the compact expression may easily be not only more “effective” (to employ the language of the now popular rhetorics) but actually more *exact* than the fuller form. In wordiness lurks not only the danger of boredom and sentimentality, but also the peril of unfaithfulness to the ultimate fact or feeling. The subtle distinction which useful truth also seems always to require is that between compactness and suggestiveness for their own sake and these same virtues exercised in the service of truth and sincerity. Those who are too much absorbed in technique are not safe, one thinks, from the former error; those who are in love with their subject will with difficulty refrain from over-elaboration.

Nothing could illustrate these literary principles more aptly than some of Mr. Page's literal versions. Consider, for example, the *hokku* about the herons. In a comparatively free version it reads:

If only noiseless they would go,  
The herons flying across the sky  
Were but a line of snow.

But how many needless words! Literally translated:

Voice not-if  
White herons see, of snow  
One line.

It is not pretended that English could advantageously imitate the extreme condensation and elision of which the Japanese is capable; and after all there is some utility in rhetorical structure and form. Nevertheless, the fact, dimly appreciable through Mr. Page's excellent skill even to us English speaking readers, that to a Japanese the latter version means probably more than does the former to the American—this fact sets one to thinking.

How much of what we say is mere rhetoric? How much of what passes for poetry is an artificial product? Is it not true that a certain pedantic habit of mind, the result of training in rhetoric and of the painfully acquired art