

UNDER FOUR PRESIDENTS

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF OSCAR S. STRAUS

CHAPTER II—LAW AND LETTERS

MY brother Nathan at this time carried through a bit of youthful business enterprise which added greatly to his joy and mine. Having collected some old hemp rope, which was very scarce at the time, he received enough money for it to enable him to buy a handsome bay pony. This became our joint and most treasured possession. Nathan in later years became noted as a horse fancier, a driver of trotters, the owner of a fine stable. It is an old axiom that the man who really knows horses knows men also. Nathan knew both. But few things ever gave Nathan and myself as much pleasure as the possession of that pony. So it was a hard blow for us when he became a Yankee prisoner of war.

On April 16, 1865, General James H. Wilson, commanding 15,000 Federal soldiers, marched against Columbus. Lee had surrendered nine days earlier, but this was unknown to General Wilson and to our citizen soldiers, composed chiefly of superannuated men and school-boys. There was a feeble defense, and Wilson's army took possession. Soon afterwards the rabble from the factories commenced looting. Led by drunken Federal soldiers, they burned the cotton warehouses. Lost were the savings of many, including most of my father's. All horses were seized, our little pony among the rest. I never saw him again, though I still retain a vivid mental picture of him. Frequently since, when I have met that fine old veteran, General Wilson, who is still among the living, hale and hearty, I have jestingly reproached him for taking my most treasured possession.

"Go South" had been good enough advice in 1852, but "Stay South" under what was known as Reconstruction—stay there under conditions serious enough to break the strongest and discourage the most enterprising—this was not suitable to my father's enterprise. Again he forced a situation analogous to that after the '48 Revolution—much more serious, though. He was older.

The North offered an outlet for enterprise. There, too, my father could more readily dispose of the remainder of his cotton. His idea was to pay off pre-war debts contracted in New York and Philadelphia and make a fresh start. Isidor was able to help him considerably. A youngster of nineteen, but already a sagacious man of experience, a stay of two years in London had netted him several thousand dollars. Sent there as secretary of a commission to buy supplies for the State of Georgia, he had turned to brokerage when the effective blockade of Southern ports stopped shipments. He had made his profit selling

Confederate bonds. Returning, he used part of the proceeds to purchase a house for his mother and added the balance to his father's money, with which they established a wholesale china and glass-ware business in New York City.

When the Confederate Government canceled the commercial obligations of Southern merchants to Northern creditors and ordered this indebtedness paid to the Government instead, the debtors regarded themselves morally free from paying their creditors. My father, though, was true to his original obligations, saying:

"I propose to pay my debts in full and leave to my children a good name even if I should leave them nothing else."

The dry-goods house of George Bliss & Co. was his principal New York creditor, and the sum between four and five thousand dollars. When my father called about the debt, Mr. Bliss was amazed, asked many questions, and even then found it difficult to grasp how this man of fifty-seven, with four children, stood ready to plunge into a new venture and handicap himself at the start by paying off an old debt.

"I don't think you are fair to your family and yourself," said Mr. Bliss, "to deprive yourself of the slender means you tell me you possess by paying out your available resources. I will compromise with you for less than the full amount, in view of the hardships of war and your family obligations."

PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

Isidor arranged for my schooling. A picture of Columbia College in my geography text-book set me to thinking how wonderful it would be to study there. Being only fourteen and a half when we came to New York, and not having the entrance requirements, I was instead enrolled in the Columbia Grammar School. It was my first experience with a high-grade school. The teaching was much more thorough. It seemed to me I had to learn everything anew. Considering the modest income of the family, the tuition fee and the cost for books were large, but my father, economical in all other respects, was liberal beyond his means where education was concerned. My brother, moreover, was desirous that I should have the advantage of the college training which circumstances, notably the war, had withheld from him.

I appreciated to the full the privilege I was permitted to enjoy, and applied myself wholeheartedly to study. The school regulations required that the parents should fill out a blank each week stating, among other things, the number of hours we studied at home. Three or

four hours were the average for most students, but, as my average was fully double that, I felt rather ashamed to give the exact number, so I stated less.

The school was at Fourth Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street and our home was in West Forty-ninth Street. I always walked both ways, saving car-fares and at the same time conserving my health.

Despite my hard work, I made a poor showing, though on one occasion I shone with accidental glory. It was the custom when a question was asked to pass it from pupil to pupil, and to set the one who gave the correct answer at the head of the class. It so happened once that I gave a fortunate answer and moved forward to occupy the seat of scholastic eminence. I sat there enjoying a near view of the teacher's countenance, wondering how long I would thus remain distinguished, and looking back occasionally to note how the last row looked. At this moment a visitor entered who was none other than the inventor of the telegraph, S. F. B. Morse, whose grandson was in my class. Knowing the custom and observing me in the seat of honor, he remarked upon my having a large head in comparison with my body, something like himself, and added that I must be a bright boy. There was humiliation rather than elation in being thus praised when I, as well as the rest, knew I did not deserve it.

The principal, Dr. Bacon, encouraged us individually when the time for college-entrance examinations approached in the spring of 1867. For me he had consolation in addition to encouragement, for he feared that because of my lack of early training I might not pass. There were still two weeks before the examination. I crammed night and day. I knew that I could not expect my father to keep me in school another year when after two years of preparation I had shown myself deficient. That thought was my spur, though I am quite sure that both Isidor and my father, knowing I had done my best, would have insisted upon my taking another year for preparation.

I was not prepared, therefore, for so surprising a result as to be the only one in my class to pass all examinations without a single condition. "Lucky dog!" said the others who flunked; and I could not but admit it was luck rather than brilliancy. The professor who examined my classmates in ancient geography was the author of the text-book upon which the examination was held. A meticulous pundit, he regarded that book as supreme and absolute. A good answer, if not exactly according to that book, was as good as no answer at all.



MRS. OSCAR S. STRAUS

From a portrait of the wife of the Ambassador, painted by Cremer

Luckily, another and more generous-minded professor had taken his place by the time it was my turn to be examined.

DISTINGUISHED CLASSMATES

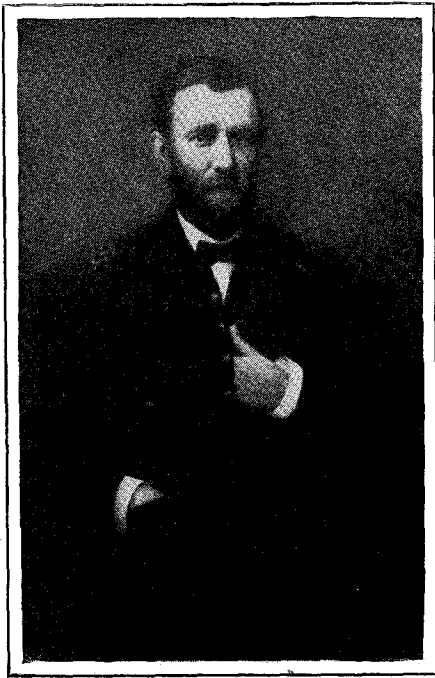
The college course began October 7, 1867. Our class matriculated fifty-two and graduated thirty-one. Among those who graduated were Stuyvesant Fish, of the well-known New York family, whose father, Hamilton Fish, Secretary of State in the Grant Administration, as

well as his grandfather, Nicholas Fish, were also graduates from Columbia.

Brander Matthews, who then carried the prefix of James, was also a graduate. He gave evidence then by his writings in the college papers of his future distinguished career as a literary and dramatic critic. Others were Robert Fulton Cutting, an ideal citizen, member of a famous old New York family, and for many years President of the Citizens' Union; and Henry Van Rensselaer, afterwards a Jesuit father, who is no

longer among the living. In 1916, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the College, three members of this class, including myself, received the honorary degree of LL.D. At this writing, fifty years since graduation, only ten among our number are remaining.

Athletic sports had very little college vogue at that time, especially at Columbia, confined as it was within a city block. With no such outlet for healthy spirits, the tendency for some students



President U. S. Grant, to whom the autobiographer appealed, as a youth, in his ambition for a military career

was to become boisterous and lacking in proper decorum in the lecture-room, particularly when the subject was not to their liking.

A compulsory and most unpopular subject in the senior class was Evidence of Christianity, and, as that gentle, good-natured professor Rev. Dr. McVickar was entirely lacking in the power to maintain discipline, Evidence of Christianity was a battle-ground. It gave rise to many boisterous demonstrations. The study was compulsory and denominational, and a number of the students who were not Episcopalians resented it. In common with most of the class, I strongly favored that the subject should be elective instead of compulsory. Yet the College found a legal, if unreasonable, justification for the study, based upon the fact that Columbia was originally an Episcopalian foundation. Dr. McVickar complained to the College Board. President Barnard gave serious attention to the matter, but nothing was done to improve the situation.

CLASS-ROOM DIPLOMACY

The disturbance in the lecture-room one day grew unbearably boisterous, and the professor was in considerable distress. I arose and told him I knew how he could have an orderly class. He was in such a plight that any suggestion would have been favorable to him. I asked him to let me take his chair for a moment, which he did. The class was silent, curious to know what I was about to do.

I made an appeal, reminding them briefly that we were now seniors, and that some of us, especially those who intended to study for the ministry, were interested in the subject but were un-

able to follow it because of the disturbance. As I paused I heard several jeers of "Professor Straus." Then I called upon those who were opposed to the study of Evidence of Christianity—and I knew there were a number—to rise. They arose.

"You may leave the room," I said. Eight or ten remained. Turning to Dr. McVickar, I said: "Here is a class you can teach."

Subsequently a petition was drawn up and signed by a majority of the seniors requesting that the class be excused from examinations in Evidence of Christianity. The request was denied.

Among the few collegiate prizes was one known as the Alumni Prize for the most deserving students in the graduating class. The College Board nominated William H. Sage, J. F. Vermilye, and myself as the candidates, and the class elected Vermilye, to whom the prize was awarded.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GRANT

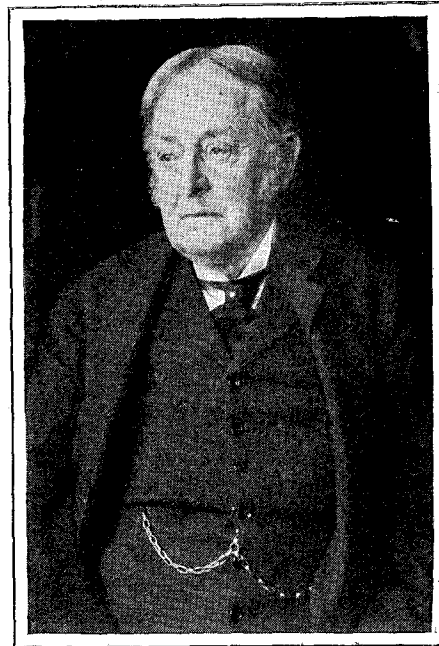
I had a short-lived notion at this time of entering the army. Reading in the newspapers that President Grant had a few cadetships open for West Point, I obtained from President Barnard, of Columbia, a letter of introduction to Grant, in which I was commended highly.

I called on the President, who was in the city. He received me kindly, and said the few appointments allowed him by the law must be offered first to sons of officers who had been killed in the war. If sufficient were not available for all the appointments, he would be glad to give me a chance. I told him I thought he was perfectly right. That ended my great military career.

Not from special aptitude, but because I preferred it to business, I chose the law for my profession. My entire outlook was idealistic rather than practical. As with other young men, it cost me considerable mental struggle to harmonize the two divergent views into a workaday plan. As my father and brothers had begun to prosper in business, and as I had no one but myself to look ahead for, I felt free to follow my own bent. Besides, being the youngest, I had the benefit of their brotherly interest and economic protection if there were need for it. This served to encourage my utmost efforts not only on my own account, but to justify their interest and help.

I graduated sixth in my class and was designated to deliver the class poem at Commencement. The choice, I remember, lay between Brander Matthews and myself, and for some reason which I have not been able to ascertain to this day, I was chosen. "Truth and Error," which I had had gravely entitled the poem, was well received by the large audience of proud parents and sympathetic friends who gathered at the Academy of Music.

In the autumn of 1871 I entered Co-



Joseph H. Choate, distinguished lawyer, with whom Mr. Straus rode horseback every morning for several years

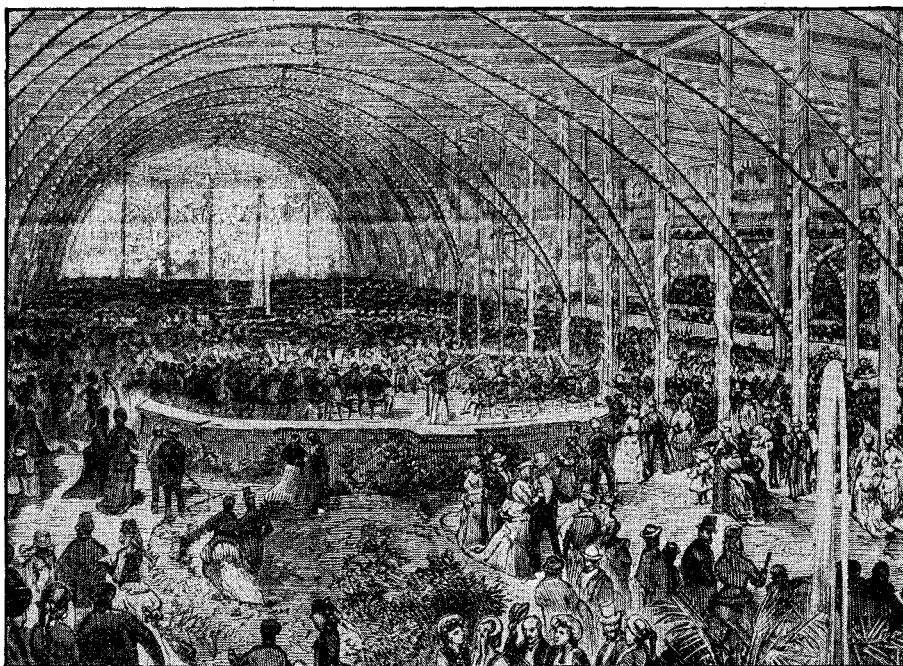
lumbia Law School, after enjoying the first vacation I had taken since I came to New York. Other summers I had spent assisting in some branch of my father's business, not because I relished work unduly, but because I regarded it less as labor than as diversion.

My first vacation, in the Wyoming Valley, near Wilkes-Barre, was a success in spite of the farmer with whom I boarded. Perhaps I did not have a right to expect much for the five dollars a week which I paid him, but, whatever I expected, I remember that I received less. But there were fish in the brooks, and I do not recall that I starved.

MEMOIRS OF LAW SCHOOL

The Law School, which was at that time situated in Lafayette Place, was under the direction of Theodore W. Dwight, who deserved his great reputation as the most distinguished teacher of law in the country.

Our professor in political science, whose lectures we attended once a week, was the distinguished Francis Lieber, a Prussian veteran who had fought in the Battle of Waterloo. At the close of the Napoleonic wars he returned to his studies in Berlin, and thereafter was several times arrested for his outspoken liberal views. After frequent persecution, and even imprisonment, he fled to England, and in 1827 came to this country. He was the author of many books, legal and political, among them being "Civil Liberty," which was adopted as a text-book in several of our universities. He prepared in 1863 "Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field," which Lincoln promulgated as a general order of the War Department. It was a masterly piece of work, embodying advanced hu-



From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, July 10, 1875

Before an audience that packed the immense Gilmore's Garden, which then occupied the present site of Madison Square Garden in New York, Mr. Straus delivered his "poetic swan song" in 1875 at a fair for the benefit of Mount Sinai Hospital. This is a view of Gilmore's Summer Concert Garden in its heyday

manitarian principles. It formed the basis for several later European codes.

Usually egotism and real merit do not co-ordinate, but negate one another; Lieber was an exception. He combined both in a marked degree, sometimes in a manner that afforded amusement to his students. He referred continuously to "My Civil Liberty" as a book of extraordinary erudition, new in its field, the last word on the subject. He was a short, solidly built man, with a distinct German accent, and so full of his subject that he was apt to lose himself in the vast field of his philosophical and historical knowledge. As his course was optional, those who came to listen came to learn, and we received a larger view of the function of law in civil society than we derived from all our studies of municipal law.

The course at the Law School covered two years, and successful examination at the end of it entitled a student to admission to the bar without a further State examination. I was graduated in June, 1873, and immediately entered the law office of Ward, Jones & Whitehead, a prominent New York law firm, whose senior member, John E. Ward, had presided over the Democratic National Convention which nominated Buchanan in 1856. Later he served for two or three years as Minister to China. He was a friend of my brother Isidor, and took me into his office largely out of friendship for him.

I remained with his firm about six months, forming a partnership later in 1873 with James A. Hudson, who was associated with the Ward firm and was about ten years my senior. The new firm was Hudson & Straus, with offices on the fourth floor of 59 Wall Street.

On the same floor was the office of Charles O'Connor, then the acknowledged head of the American bar. He was practically retired, but still kept a small office and a clerk. Frequently, feeling fatigued during the one or two weekly visits to his office, he would rest aside in our office for a library.

It was an unusual privilege for a young lawyer like myself to enjoy such pleasant personal relations with this great leader of his profession. We received our first important case through him, and collected so much more of an old debt than our client had expected that he sent us a check for ten thousand dollars, saying that if we did not regard it as sufficient he would make the check larger. With five thousand dollars in reserve, I felt rich and independent. My wants were simple, and our general practice was encouraging.

FOUNDING OF YOUNG MEN'S HEBREW ASSOCIATION

At about this time I first became active in public-spirited undertakings. The Young Men's Christian Association a few years before had opened its Twenty-third Street Branch in New York, and the movement, on the whole, was getting much publicity and proving very successful in its work among young men. But it was an institution for Christians, and it occurred to several of us—as I remember it, there were two of my fellow-members of the bar, Meyer S. Isaacs and Isaac S. Isaacs, Dr. Simeon N. Leo, Solomon B. Solomon, and myself—that it would be a useful undertaking if we organized a Young Men's Hebrew Association for the cultural and intellectual advancement of Jewish young men.

We launched our project early in 1874. We rented a house in the vicinity of Nineteenth or Twentieth Street and began in a very modest way. Our first entertainment was of a purely literary nature, and I recollect on that occasion addressing the members of the infant enterprise on the subject of literary clubs, ancient and modern, from the time of Socrates and Plato to the days of the coffee-houses of Addison, Steele, and Goldsmith. The Y. M. H. A. subsequently had its years of struggle for existence, but to-day its place in our cities as an influence for the development of culture and patriotism is assured, as well as that of its sister organization of later birth, the Young Women's Hebrew Association.

CONCERNING PSYCHOLOGICAL SPREES

In 1876 or thereabouts we removed our office to the New York Life Building, at 346 Broadway, corner of Franklin Street, because our practice was largely commercial, and this location was more convenient for our clients. Adjoining our office on the same floor was the office of Chamberlain, Carter & Eaton, then one of the leading commercial law firms, of which subsequently Charles E. Hughes became a member. In 1878 Simon Sterne, then one of the younger leaders of the bar, entered the firm, which became Sterne, Hudson & Straus; afterwards, when our managing clerk entered the firm, Sterne, Straus & Thompson. Hudson withdrew to devote himself to patent law.

Thompson, who replaced him, was the author of books upon psychology which were commended by Herbert Spencer and other leading European and American authorities. He was more interested in psychology than in law; and Sterne, who could be very sarcastic, once said: "Do you know that Thompson is dissipating?"

I expressed surprise.

"Of course he is," he went on. "When he leaves here, he works till all hours of the night writing psychology, and returns next morning to his legal work with an exhausted brain. I'd rather he went on a spree, instead, for one gets over that quite definitely."

The firm had a varied practice, ranging from collection cases to important questions regarding street railways and other public utilities. Sterne was rapidly achieving a reputation as a leading authority upon railways and railway legislation. In 1879 he was retained as legislative counsel by an Assembly committee to investigate political corruption influenced by railway corporations. The chairman of the committee was A. Barton Hepburn, then an Assemblyman from St. Lawrence County. The committee sat intermittently for nine months. The report, including certain recommendations for legislation partly drafted by Sterne, was the first impressive and well-directed attempt to deal with the public regulation of transportation companies, and resulted in the

passage of the State Railroad Commission Bill in the 1880 session. It also exerted an influence seven years later when the Federal legislators created the Federal Inter-State Commerce Commission.

While Sterne was engaged in this public work his two junior partners, besides giving him assistance, conducted the practice of the firm. Such railway clients as we had withdrew their business as a protest against the public activities of our senior partner.

ON THE BRIDLE-PATH WITH JOSEPH H. CHOATE

I enjoyed at this time an intimacy with Joseph H. Choate, of the firm of Evarts, Southmayd & Choate. Daily for several years we spent the early mornings saddle-riding in the park. He was always full of fun and wit during these exhilarating morning hours. There was hardly a subject we did not discuss while in the saddle. His days were crowded, for amid the exacting duties of his profession he was much sought after to make public addresses on important occasions. On horseback he would frequently outline the substance of his future addresses.

"I am in fashion just now as a speaker," he said once, "but, just like wall-paper, the fashion will change."

However, the fashion to secure Mr. Choate as the principal speaker on public occasions continued until his death in 1917.

My major work for the firm was in the most exacting and nerve-racking branch, the trying of cases. I had not yet learned to conserve my energies. The result was that the wearing exacting of court work reduced my weight to 105 pounds. Consulting a physician, I was strongly advised to choose less exacting work, and especially to stop the trying of cases. As that branch of the law appealed to me most, it was a great disappointment to have to abandon it. Rather than continue in the profession with such an inhibition, I yielded to the advice of my father and brother, and early in 1881, after taking several months' vacation, I quit the law and became a member of L. Straus & Sons, already large manufacturers and importers of china and glassware.

It so happened that on account of their growing business they needed my services, and my transition period was made as acceptable and agreeable as possible. I continued for a long time, however, to long for the profession to which I was so much attached. As a compensation I devoted my evenings and spare time to historical reading and study.

JOAQUIN MILLER READS POEM AT WEDDING DINNER

Having embarked on a business career, I reversed a decision that I made while practicing law. As a lawyer I had taken very seriously and literally the

saying that "the law is a jealous mistress." I was her devoted slave, quite willingly so, and I determined never to marry. I was economically independent as a single man, and could devote my time to the law for its own sake. This I preferred to do, as the idealist that I was, rather than pursue the law for economic reasons first, and for its own sake as much as possible secondarily, which I felt would have to be the case if I married. But as a business man things were different, and I decided now to marry.

On January 23, 1882, I became engaged to Sarah, only daughter of Louis and Hannah Seller Lavanburg, and we were married on the 19th of April following, at the home of her parents, on West Forty-sixth Street, near Fifth Avenue. At the wedding dinner, to which had come hosts of our friends and acquaintances, Joaquin Miller, Poet of the Sierras, as he was called, read a poem which he composed for the event. The manuscript, I think, is still in my possession.

An address I delivered before the Young Men's Hebrew Association in 1875 denoted my line of intellectual endeavor for the next few years. My subject was "The Origin of the Republican Form of Government in the United States." Delivered before a large audience at Chickering Hall, it was given generous notices in the press, resulting some months later in my giving another address on the same subject before the Long Island Historical Society of Brooklyn. I traced the rise of democracy, as distinguished from monarchy, from the Hebrew commonwealth of the early New England Puritans, especially in their politico-

Chapter III of "Under Four Presidents"

will appear next week. It describes the interesting circumstances and events that led to the appointment of a Jewish Ambassador from a Christian democracy to a Mohammedan absolutism.

The famous Henry Ward Beecher letter to President Cleveland, urging the appointment of Mr. Straus, is printed in full, some of it in facsimile. The voyage to Turkey, including memorable visits in London and Paris, is described. Constantinople and its strange people are closely portrayed.

Mr. Straus began his autobiography in last week's issue of The Outlook with an account of his forefathers in Bavaria, one of whom figured in Napoleon's councils, and of the family's journey to Georgia. There are intimate impressions of slavery, of deacons dueling with knives, circuit riders charmed by the Biblical erudition of Oscar Straus's father, and the future diplomat's first lessons in oratory.

religious "sermons," which were delivered annually before the legislatures of the several New England colonies. This line of presentation was referred to in the notices of the address, and it attracted many of the Brooklyn ministers of various denominations.

In one part of this address, after referring to the sermons, I also quoted a similar argument advanced by Thomas Paine in his "Common Sense." Then I quoted Washington, Monroe, Dr. Rush, and others in praise of Paine's services to the patriotic cause. Several ministers in the audience left the hall, saying that they did not come to hear eulogies of Paine. I refrained from expressing any opinion of my own, but simply quoted the high estimate of the Fathers of the Republic.

LITERARY AVOCATIONS

This subject I later developed into a book with the same title, which subsequently was translated and published in France by Emile de Laveleye, the eminent Belgian publicist. It was a pleasing event in my life, since the book was well received and even spoken of among American historical writers as a distinct contribution to our history.

My next book, "Roger Williams, the Pioneer of Religious Liberty," grew out of studies made in preparing the first book. Historical writing is characterized as the aristocracy of literature, because it requires long and patient investigations and yields meager returns. Fortunately, by reason of my vocation, I could indulge in my avocation, especially after business hours. The late Russell Sage is said to have advised a young man who consulted him not to fritter away his time on books, but to concentrate upon one book, and that book the ledger. My own advice would be that of Robert Burns, who sang:

And gather gear by every wile,
That's justified by honor,—
Not for to hide it in a hedge,
Nor for a train-attendant.
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent.

My Life of Roger Williams had a generous circulation, several reprints, and was highly commended by the reviewers. I published various works later, for which I was given honorary degrees at various colleges.

One more time I figured in public as a writer of poetry before I finally put the craving aside and adjusted myself to things for which I was better adapted. In 1875 a large fair was held at Gilmore's Garden, which then occupied the site upon which is now Madison Square Garden. The purpose of the fair was to raise funds for the erection of a new building for the Mount Sinai Hospital. Samuel J. Tilden, then Governor of New York and prospective Democratic nominee for the Presidency, made the opening address and I delivered a poem. Thus my poetic swan song was sung before an audience which packed the immense garden.

THE BOOK TABLE

BOSWELL YOUNG AND OLD

BY ARNOLD MULDER

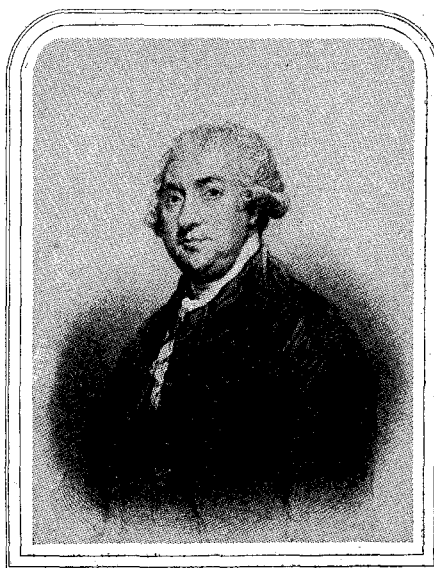
YOU walk in on a movie in the middle of the story, see it through to the end, only to find that it is the last performance of the day and that the first half of the plot must forever remain a question-mark. If the story has gripped you, your mind automatically tries to supply what has gone before. How did the disagreement between the lovers arise? What was the mysterious crime that the hero is accused of having committed? How did the villain get a hold on the girl's father? Rather fascinating study, but baffling in proportion to the subtlety of the story.

Professor Tinker's "Young Boswell"¹ supplies such a first part of a half-told tale of infinite charm and subtlety for which the world has been waiting for a hundred and thirty years. Boswell himself in his *magnum opus* had given many glimpses into his own life that were almost exasperating because they left our interest in him as a personality unsatisfied. He stepped into Johnson's life in the middle and, good artist that he was, expended his energies on developing a complete portrait of the "bear," using himself merely as a tool. But it was not possible for him to stay out of the picture, and again and again he tells about himself only in so far as the story has a bearing on Johnson, leaving our curiosity about what went before and after, so far as the narrator is concerned, unsatisfied. His love affairs, for instance. In the "Life" he marries and begets children, and there is a good deal about domestic arrangements, but it is all incidental, sketchy—as of course it should be. Professor Tinker's book fills in the picture, and a delightful picture it is. And then the strained relations between Boswell and his father: in the "Life" the story leaves us halting between two opinions; in "Young Boswell" we are given a view of the beginnings and ends of things and we are content. Boswell's life on the Continent is represented by a few sketchy letters in the biography; in "Young Boswell" such incidents as the fascinating attempt to bring Rousseau and Voltaire together form a thrilling story.

These are only hints of what the Boswell lover may look for in Professor Tinker's book. The pages are sprinkled with incidents that are beginnings of threads which the world has had in its hands a hundred and thirty years. The theater has more than once made a *tour de force* by developing a story backwards, and that is also about the net effect of the publication of "Young Boswell." And the fact that it is a work of ripe scholarship, that the author has spared no pains to tap the rich sources

at his command—the collection of Mr. Adam, the Temple manuscript, etc.—makes the story all the more thrilling and the portrait of Boswell all the more alluring.

Professor Tinker is not "Boswell's Boswell," as the advertisements claim—no one could be "Boswell's Boswell" after a hundred and thirty years, constant note-taking on the spot as ideas came



Engraved from a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds

JAMES BOSWELL

hot from the brain forming too great a part of Boswell's equipment; but he has done what during all this time has been crying to be done—executed an authentic portrait of the man who himself had painted perhaps the completest portrait in history.

And how very much this needed doing! Macaulay was not the only one who thought that Boswell's genius resided in his thick hide. A sort of myth has grown up around James Boswell which makes his name practically synonymous with "sycophant." Not only does "Young Boswell" give the lie once for all to this notion, but it does a still greater service by driving readers back to the "Life of Johnson." Like most great books, the "Life" has been kept before the public for more than a century by the enthusiastic praise of a very few persons. The rest of us who are at all conscious of things literary have been content to admire at second-hand.

My own case is probably typical, hence this record of a personal reaction. For twenty years I had been wanting to read the "Life of Johnson." Times without number I had taken the fat volume in my hands, but always its half million words scared me away, as did a kind of vague feeling that the book was probably rather hard going. Like, I hope,

thousands of others, I needed "Young Boswell" to push me in. And I soon found that, like a great many others who have been using Boswell as a household word, I did not have any real conception of what he is or what the "Life" is.

There is, for instance, that most common fallacy of all, that Boswell licked Johnson's boots. Not until I was well started on the great adventure did the fact take hold of me that Boswell was a man in his own right, an intellect of commanding force, a personality who would almost inevitably have made an impress upon his time, even if Samuel Johnson had never been born. The publication of "Young Boswell" of course reinforces this statement. Boswell had an admiration for Johnson that approached veneration, but in many very material respects he differed sharply with him, and he did not hesitate to tell the czar of English literature so to his face, later taking care to register his own convictions in opposition to Johnson's in his notes. And a close analysis of these instances of differences between them very often shows, in the light of subsequent history, that Boswell was right and the great Johnson wrong. As, for instance, in the case of Johnson's uncompromisingly Tory attitude on the revolt of the American colonies. Boswell stood with Burke on the subject, while Johnson, yielding to the violent and unreasonable prejudices that characterized him all his life, was almost prepared to wish that the forebears of our present Sons and Daughters of the Revolution had one neck, so that George III might place his foot upon it and hack it off.

Boswell indeed defends Johnson against many and various charges made against him by the swarm of hasty biographers who published reminiscences soon after Johnson's death, and some of those defenses rather smell of special pleading. He seems to have looked upon Johnson as more or less his own private property, whom he alone should have a right to criticise—like a wife who finds fault with her husband but will not tolerate any one else saying anything against him. In all of which Boswell is extremely human and gives a display of unconscious self-revelation that makes one love him as well as respect him. And he venerates Johnson to so high a degree that the suspicion sometimes crosses the mind that the enemies of Johnson, whom, in his own phraseology, he "animadverted against," were probably more than half right in their dislike of the "bear," who was never more delighted than when he could contradict some one and could rub some one's fur the wrong way. Boswell let slip no opportunity to call Johnson "that great and good man," which phrase occurs in the "Life" scores of times, and he painstakingly dug up examples of Johnson's kindness and

¹Young Boswell. By Chauncey Brewster Tinker. The Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston. \$3.50.