

## An American Epic

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: The Prairie Years. By CARL SANDBURG. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1926. 2 vols. \$10.

Reviewed by JOHN DRINKWATER  
Author of "Abraham Lincoln"

MR. SANDBURG'S is a big book: big in a literal sense. And the practised reader of big books finds that he can generally measure the quality of a work after covering the first few pages, or at most a chapter or two. He may have to wait until the end before he knows whether or not he agrees with general conclusions and whether the governing design has been fitly carried out, but early in his perusal he knows, or thinks he knows, whether there is distinction or fumbling. Mr. Sandburg's "Abraham Lincoln" should warn him against any such agreeable securities. In less than twenty pages, two impressions have asserted themselves. This is obviously a book, we feel, created out of long and patient love; that is well, and the impression remains, as we shall see. But also we are from time to time, even in twenty pages, brought up short in our appreciation by such passages as this of Lincoln's mother before he was born: "And the smell of wild crab-apple blossom, and the low crying of all wild things, came keen that summer to the nostrils of Nancy Hanks." Is it possible, we ask ourselves, that the bleak poet of Chicago can really be falling to this romantic frippery? And then as we read on we find ourselves confronted by a very strange problem of style. For page by page, as such notes recur, we find that this is not romantic frippery at all, but a quite sincere, and cumulatively very touching reversion of a mind, closely disciplined in an almost savage candor, to a natural grace and leniency of sentiment. Confronted by epic character or action, we find, this least compromising of realists can stand up and prophesy with revivalist fervor. And the arresting thing, so genuine is the reality behind his voluble moods, is that he can make this rhetoric a natural modulation of his style. At first we suspect that crab-apple blossom and the crying of the wild things; but very soon we are convinced that they are conceived in an utter simplicity of faith, that they are a complement to the concrete, direct contacts that account for the more familiar aspect of Mr. Sandburg's manner, and we remain so convinced to the end. In such passages he uses what is perhaps the most dangerous of all figures in writing, and as one follows another at appointed intervals we are persuaded that he uses it with entire success.

Mr. Sandburg has been at this work for half a lifetime; it runs to nearly a thousand large and closely printed pages. A brief review can do no more than suggest something of the effect produced by a careful reading. The story covers the years from Lincoln's birth in 1809 until the time when he left Springfield for Washington in 1860. It is more than a biography of Lincoln in those years, it is a minutely elaborated study of the environment in which he grew up and matured, of the social, political, and natural forces that went to the shaping of his character, and of the far-reaching and profoundly significant implications of that character itself. It is, in fact, a comprehensive survey of the development, at once romantic and stark, of middle western America, with Illinois as the centre of the action.

Mr. Sandburg's method is a daring one. At first it may seem that his narrative has little or no consecutive design. His way is to present a scene, a social order, the shaping of political conflict of ideals, or the play of individual character, by means of a rapid succession of images and anecdotes. To read a few pages only of his book would inevitably be to feel that while these impressions separately were effective enough, they were not very strictly selected or combined to a fixed purpose. But to read on is to discover, again, that this view is wrong, and that Mr. Sandburg is using his means steadily to the accomplishment of an elaborately conceived work of art. To make a personal confession, I am a very slow reader, and having in my time absorbed some dozens of volumes about Lincoln I never expected to be beguiled by Mr. Sandburg or anyone else into reading another thousand pages on the matter. But I began to read these volumes and found thenceforth that there was no escape, and I have gone on to the end with a growing admiration for a work that slowly reveals itself not only as big in

compass but as absorbing in conception and achievement. Chapter by chapter—there are a hundred and sixty-eight of them—Mr. Sandburg convinces us of his skill in handling immense masses of detail. Pioneer life, the spread of population and the assembling of races, the progress of agriculture and industry, finance and the railroads, the ramifications of slavery and abolition, the courage, the disasters and the subtleties of personality, the loneliness and the horizons of a new nation, the drama of men and women looking westward into the wilderness and eastward to old civilization, the quarrels of politicians and the visions of statesmen, all these and countless other circumstances Mr. Sandburg marshals with the industry and the intuition of genius. And always governing this patient and absorbing argument is the figure of Lincoln, realized here as I believe it has never been realized before, the creation of a perfect blending of historical knowledge with imagination. It is not too much to say that Mr. Sandburg's book is an honor no less to the American people than to himself; it is, indeed, not unlikely that he will be found to have given the world the first great American epic.

## New World Martyrs

THE JESUIT RELATIONS AND ALLIED DOCUMENTS. Selected and edited by EDNA KENTON. New York: Albert & Charles Boni. 1925. \$5.

Reviewed by ISABEL SKELTON  
Author of "The Life of Thomas d'Arcy McGee"

RECORDS of the beginnings of settlement in most new lands are scant and broken. Few of those who are struggling day by day with the wilderness have the training, the leisure,



THE DANCE AFTER THE HUSKING  
From "Toilers of Land and Sea." By Ralph Henry Gabriel (Yale University Press).

or the incentive necessary to write as well as to live their adventure. The outstanding exception is undoubtedly the record of the early years of the French régime in North America, preserved in the "Jesuit Relations." The Jesuit missionaries who were the pioneers of civilization in the St. Lawrence and Mississippi basins in the seventeenth century were men of wide education, acute powers of observation, and a lively interest in the land and life around them. Crowded and harried though their lives were, each year they achieved some leisure for contemplation and for record of things attempted and things done. Their centralized organization and the value of stories of converted savages and martyred priests in fanning the flames of piety in their backers in Old France, ensured minute and systematic reports. The result is an unequalled wealth of first-hand documentation.

But to most modern readers this wealth has not been easily accessible. The original "Jesuit Relations," covering the reports collected and sent home by the head of the order in New France from 1632 to 1673, were published year by year by Stephen Cramoisy in Paris. In 1858 the Canadian Government reprinted the rare Cramoisy in an edition now nearly as rare, and a little later O'Callaghan, Martin, and Carayon issued supplementary documents. Then, in 1894, the Burrows Brothers Company of Cleveland, with Reuben Gold Thwaites as editor, published a monumental edition, covering the period from 1610 to 1791, and including in its seventy-three volumes a dozen times as much material as the original Cramoisy. But this edition, limited to 750 sets, was beyond the reach of the general reader.

Miss Kenton has come to the rescue by compiling in a single volume, in English, the essential documents of this vast hoard. Her work is a masterpiece of condensation. Miss Kenton has proved her-

self to be more than the competent craftsman who saw a work which needed to be done and bent to it patient powers of execution until it was finished. Her book reveals a clear, logical, recreating grasp of the field covered. It is arranged in five self-contained but closely related parts, and each part again in chapters, each of which deals in straight and uninterrupted narrative with an episode or a character. It is surprising in many cases how the lifting of the content of these chapters out of its ephemeral setting allows a noteworthy contribution to history to stand forth in clear and uncluttered distinctness. A sure historical judgment went to the deciding what to keep and what to discard. Where Relations overlapped it was perhaps easy to choose the more complete or condensed, or the more graphic or picturesque, as the need might be. Again, where the report had merely a specialized, ecclesiastical interest, there was little question about omission in such a volume. The yearly accounts of religious services and ceremonies, which even the chronicler found wearisomely like those of the year before, the pious utterances of converted savages, and the long baptismal lists, which would impede the story for the lay reader of today, have been judiciously omitted.

Again, the extracts have been skilfully arranged so that one gains a coherent conception of each particular feature. As far as possible Miss Kenton gives complete blocks of narrative from the originals, and in this way retains the warm native vividness of writers speaking for themselves. No secondary source, not even Parkman's inimitable story of "The Jesuits in North America," can recreate exactly the same breathing picture. It might have been helpful had she indicated the omissions from the text by the usual asterisks, but they would no doubt have detracted from the satisfying completeness one feels in reading the unbroken lines. She did well to include in full the Marquette manuscripts and Coquart's "Mémorial upon the Posts of the King's Domain." These are two of the most valuable documents in the Thwaites edition. Another unique part, the "Journal des Jésuits," the running story of their daily life at Quebec during many years, has been lifted out of each little yearly division, and in the twelfth section of Part IV suggestive passages have been quoted from it and make up an intimate picture capable of arousing any one's imagination. Thus a volume of extracts becomes in reality a unified story, an artistic whole, thanks to the sympathetic care which went to the arranging.

## In the Tradition

SONATA AND OTHER POEMS. By JOHN ERSKINE. New York: Duffield & Company. 1925. \$1.25.

THE AWAKENING AND OTHER POEMS. By DON MARQUIS. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925. \$2.

COLLECTED POEMS. By MAURICE BARING. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925. \$2.  
Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

NOTHING that the iconoclasts can say against the traditional attitude is worse than the effect it seems to have on most of its worshippers. Mathematical evidence may be found on every publisher's list, that there is no common denominator like tradition. A rather pointed instance of its levelling influence is furnished by this trio of volumes representing the serious poetry of a daily "columnist," a professor of literature at Columbia, and an English essayist. The three authors are distinct personalities; they have their own differentiated points of view; their backgrounds, preferences, and private tastes are manifestly dissimilar. Yet their public attitude—at least as far as it is revealed in their poetry—is one of dispiriting similarity; whatever is original in conception is somehow reduced to an irreproachable but merely satisfactory execution. One waits hopefully for the fiery moment, but the low flames are well-controlled in proper hearths. One looks for the fitful light in which a poet is revealed, a sudden turn or accent, a flash of strangeness, a personal irradiation—but nothing flickers, nothing burns. We are in the presence of a mild glow, a suave series of reflected reflections.

Mr. Erskine's intentions are the most interesting of the three. He is at his best when, untroubled by the necessity of being "modern," he can rely on his inherently academic instincts. The title-poem is the book's most successful note: a piece of philos-



ophizing which manages to record several sensitive though by no means unusual perceptions. Yet even here, Mr. Erskine's reading seems to betray him; the tone of voice is by no means his own—"Browning" is the reader's first reaction. But it is not even that, it is Browning badly remembered; worse, the speech is as flat as the blank verse of "The Ring and the Book" adapted by Edgar Lee Masters. Nevertheless, a certain sensibility persists, a tactile reasoning wins the reader's regard; if the language of "Sonata" is dull, the æsthetic theory is persuasive and it is advanced with a quiet assurance. Elsewhere, Mr. Erskine's serenity deserts him. His sonnets are neither better nor worse than the sonnets read with metronomic regularity at the ubiquitous Poetry Societies; "The Poetic Bus-Driver" is a pleasant conceit which, unable to bear the lengthy burden imposed upon it, breaks down continually into pedestrian verse (the present reviewer still prefers Gilbert's "The Bishop and the Busman"); and the "Modern Ode to the Modern School" is mere silliness. The author of "The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent" ought to know better. Or, as a professor, is he bent on supplying aid and comfort to H. L. Mencken?

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After listening to Mr. Erskine's avowed prejudices, one observes his tentative excursion into free verse with curiosity. In this *genre*, the last page is the brightest one in the book, which, though less than seventy pages long, is an almost complete study of the academy as creator, wavering between a natural conservatism which the author suspects and an experimentalism which he distrusts. The result is the traditional volume—even to the traditional false notes. The *mélange* in the following sonnet is typical:

#### VERSAILLES

Is it the evening, is it my delight  
That steals between me and the things I saw?  
Not into shade, into another light  
The figured gardens, the smooth lake withdraw,  
The hedges and the terraces depart;  
I can let go this majesty defined,  
This ecstasy controlled, this reasoned art;  
It is enough, I grow a little blind  
To balanced grace and measured clarities.  
Adventure now, adventure on great seas,  
Strong tides, lone islands, silver-green surprises!  
—The gardens and the lake, and after these,  
Into a timeless twilight fade the trees—  
It is enough, the mystic beauty rises.

Mr. Marquis has, as a poet, many qualities which make his work far more attractive than Mr. Erskine's. His range is wider, his tone is more vibrant, his "attack" more certain. Besides his craftsmanship—and Mr. Marquis is no mean technician—he has gusto. He is, in short, easy to read. A few of the poems, suffering from overfamiliarity, have already worn thin ("The Awakening" seems to be a selection from "Dreams and Dust," "Poems and Portraits" and other previous volumes), but his diversity carries the reader along. Mr. Marquis can write an "Envoi" scarcely inferior to Dobson's crisp *vers de société*, free verse with a swinging line, sonnets (in particular the "Savage Portraits") with a bite in every sestet. He can even play skilfully with assonance and consonantal counterpoint in saphics as flexible as:

Leaps the little river and laughs at fetters,  
Through the pebbled channel it flutes and flutters;—  
Dances down the rapids where Autumn scatters  
Gold on the waters.

Something bends the sedge and the rushes over,  
Something moves and gleams where the grasses waver,—  
Can it be a nymph that has taken cover,  
Couched by the river?

Mr. Marquis can, as I have said, strike these notes ingratiatingly. But, it must be added, he can also pluck many trite chords on the battered lute. What is more, he does not disdain the "influences," and his selected volume is a jangle of echoes in which the singer's natural voice is almost drowned. Most of his earnest stanzas thump with a pompous rhetoric; his pages are choked with *clichés*; there is scarcely a hackneyed poeticism which is avoided. "Golden shoon," "adown the sunward slopes," "futile sighs," "vain regrets," "wasted yesterdays," "red mirth mantling in the cup of morn"—all of these faded antiques may be found in one short poem! Elsewhere, a casual glance reveals "alien glamour," "rush of hidden wings," "calm Silence," "Merry, wanton air," "piping breeze," "wingéd thought," "visions new," "winds of time," "the hawthorn-scented dusks of May"—Mr. Marquis flings down

these worn counters as confidently as though he had just minted them. He can even offer us:

Fleet across the grasses  
Flash the feet of Spring!

And yet we are told that Don Marquis is a satirist.

Maurice Baring is the author of some thirty-odd volumes which Doubleday is reissuing in a uniform edition. As an essayist, Mr. Baring is remarkable for little more than an indiscriminate enthusiasm. As an authority on Russia and Russian literature, his judgments may be dubious but his devotion and intelligence are unquestionable. As an artificer of trifles, his "Diminutive Dramas" are delectable and the fascinating "Dead Letters" are worth a dozen volumes of historical essays. As a poet, this bulky volume of three hundred and fifty pages discloses Mr. Baring as merely one more Georgian, cultured, competent, and wholly without a flavor of his own. Mr. Baring's emotions are always under perfect control; his taste is trustworthy; he responds in the approved manner to war, stars, Beethoven, Greece, the paintings of Watts, and the legend of Tristram and Iseult. He is, preëminently, a "gentleman and a scholar"—particularly the former. He salutes the immensities as if he were tipping his hat to an acquaintance on Bond Street. He lives with his Muse on terms of a perfect understanding in which pleasantness takes the place of passion. She, in her turn, rewards him with complaisance; she permits him to write Shakespearean patois (the volume contains six blank verse plays), to indite sonnets on any theme at a moment's notice, to compose brisk triolets at 4 A. M. in the Trans-Siberian Railway. This is a sample of Mr. Baring's quality, the opening lines of his tragedy, "The Black Prince."

VETERAN. To-morrow, Edward, our right noble Prince,

Edward, the eldest son of England's King,  
Whom God preserve,—the Duke of Aquitaine,  
The heir of England, Edward, the Black Prince,  
Makes war against the bastard of Castille,  
With John of Gaunt his brother, and with the flower  
Of England's chivalry. Before the dawn  
He marches; so bestir betimes to-morrow  
To bid farewell, and wish Godspeed.

And this, echoing a more recent tradition, is Mr. Baring in his bucolic vein;

The snows have fled, the hail, the lashing rain,  
Before the Spring,  
The grass is starred with buttercups again,  
The blackbirds sing.

It is significant that the poem from which this quatrain is taken ("Diffugere Nives, 1917") is dedicated to J. C. Squire; the volume itself runs the gamut from Victorian platitudes to Georgian pastiche. Urbanity, breeding, erudition, amiable sentiments abound in these pages. And, though the verses may not glitter with a poet of great gesture, at least they present a gentleman in the grand manner.

## Human Behavior

INFLUENCING HUMAN BEHAVIOR. By H. A. OVERSTREET. New York: The People's Institute Publishing Company. 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE M. DORSEY

Author of "Why We Behave Like Human Beings"

TO Martin's "Psychology" and Watson's "Behaviorism," The People's Institute Publishing Company has added Overstreet's "Influencing Human Behavior." The result is a library of psychology worth more than all the psychologies from Aristotle to James. Further, these three books can be read and understood by any layman willing to devote the same amount of time to learning why human beings behave as they do as to learning to play bridge whist. Not that human behavior is simple or to be learned in one lesson; it is infinitely complex and a lifetime may be spent in trying to understand it.

The chemistry of the carbon compounds is also infinitely complex and hundreds of lifetimes have gone into its study. But these studies have already yielded enormously important results and vast knowledge of the kind which makes for power. The new psychology likewise makes sure and steady progress because it deals, as does modern chemistry, with stimulus and response and with reactions in certain mechanisms. Human behavior became a science, as did chemistry, with—and only with—a better understanding of the nature of raw materials. Its raw materials are human infants; its

great problem is to discover and describe the situations or stimuli which will so condition those youngsters that they will not be a menace to nor yet be enslaved by society. Sociology can never be a real science of society until it builds on the findings of behaviorism.

Of the three books mentioned, Watson's is, of course, the most fundamental, and, consequently, the most important. It covers the entire field of human behavior and is the very foundation of the new psychology. Professor Overstreet's volume deals with a specific problem: How can we poor mortals sell more of ourselves and our wares to more people and at higher prices? How can a poor boob, as dull as ditch-water, shine himself up like a new silver dollar and put himself into circulation in markets hitherto closed to him? "Influencing Human Behavior" may be read with profit by the bootblack and the bootlegger, by the clerk and the capitalist, and, especially, by all salesmen, parents, and school teachers. They will all profit from it—if they get the point; and, if they do not get it, it will not be the author's fault. His directions are explicit and to the point.

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Seriously, "Influencing Human Behavior" is not a fake psychology, nor a trick book on testing intelligence or how to build character in one lesson in words of one syllable. It does set forth in everyday language enough of the data of modern psychology to help us further the "central concern" of our lives: "to be, in some worthwhile manner, effective within our human environment," "to get ourselves believed in and accepted." And it is sound, authentic, and thoroughly readable.

Part I is devoted to the simpler and more frequent techniques for influencing behavior—the key problem, appeal to wants, effective speaking and writing, etc. Part II discusses the more difficult matters of actual psychological instruction: "how can we actually change individuals, ourselves as well as others, into personalities more apt for our human enterprises?"

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The first four chapters alone of Part II—How to Change Persons, Building of Habits, Unconscious Fabrication Habits, and Problem of Straight Thinking—will be found more helpful than a shelf full of Freud and Jung. From this the orthodox psychoanalysts will, of course, dissent. Indeed, the entire tribe of orthodox psychologists and crystal-gazers gag at Behaviorism. And not without reason: to see thier Gordian knots of mystic mental faculties and instinctive abracadabras cut wide open and reduced to a few simple threads which can be dyed and woven into recognizable human patterns, is to see themselves stripped of their magic power—and, possibly, obliged to learn to like a new dish. But Behaviorism does get results without sleight of hand, and does describe human behavior without mystic formulæ or furrowed brows; and it certainly is here to stay. It is easy to digest and anyone with an open-minded tongue can learn to like it. It is the only sound brain food on the market, and, by building it into one's system, one can grow character and alter personality. Behaviorism will not explain life, or the meaning of life, or the aim of life. Behaviorism no more pretends to explain anything than chemistry pretends to explain water or carbon dioxide, or anything. Both leave explanations to philosophers and go about their business of learning more about actions and reactions in infants, in philosophers, in anybody, in water, in carbon dioxide, in anything.

## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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