

## Maturing America

OUR TIMES: THE UNITED STATES 1900-1925. Volume II America Finding Herself. By MARK SULLIVAN. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

THE astonishing interest and value of Mr. Sullivan's history of "the average man" in our times rests upon three facts which have not had the appreciation they deserve. These are the fact that no historical era is so vital and significant to most men as that through which they have themselves lived; the fact that the average man is infinitely more affected, at least in the narrow view, by the everyday circumstances of his environment—by popular songs, dime novels, fashions in clothes, slang, changes in his food and his fuel and his recreation—than he is by most wars, political overturns, or grand intellectual movements; and the fact that just as valuable research may be done in the memories of living participants in recent events as in the time-yellowed documents of an age long dead. Mr. Sullivan did not discover these facts, but he has given them a better application than any preceding American writer. Tested by the formal standards of full-dress history, he might be denied the title of historian at all. He could be pronounced a bright journalistic annalist and nothing more. Yet he has brought into American historical writing a current of such originality and freshness that his work is likely to prove more influential than anything else done in years.

The first volume of Mr. Sullivan's history covered—nominally—the period 1900-1903. This second volume covers—nominally—the years 1904-05. Actually it is a curious and fascinating potpourri of matter extending from McGuffey's Readers of the fifties to corset styles of 1927; from calisthenics as Dorothy Canfield Fisher practised it in 1892 to Congressman James W. Wadsworth's opinion in 1907 that Roosevelt was "a faker and a humbug;" and from the petroleum industry in 1865 to the success of the Wright brothers forty years later. The social historian, especially if he loves contrasts, cannot be tied down to a narrow range of years. The roots of this or that tendency may go back for decades: the public attitude toward the League in 1927 may be colored by the treatment of Europe in Quackenbos's school history of 1880, and the significance of buggy sales in 1903 can hardly be measured except against a chart of Ford and Buick sales in 1925. When it is added that Mr. Sullivan is either frankly indifferent about arrangement or quite unable to furnish any logical pattern, that he is most capricious in the space he gives or denies topics, and that he ranges from hairpins to Bernard Shaw, the chaotic wealth of his materials becomes evident.

Yet, split into segments, the book does reveal a certain fragmentary pattern. The first two hundred pages are an application of the thesis that we cannot understand the minds of adult Americans in 1904 unless we know what they studied, talked about, read, and played at in 1874. Despite its 50,000 words, it is an incomplete application. It takes no account of newspapers, universities, magazines, religious tendencies, Chautauqua, travel, and a dozen other important forces. But so far as it goes—the old readers and geographies, the Delsarte elocution, the sentimental poetry, the songs ranging from "Buffalo Gals" to "Yellow Rose of Texas"—it is fascinating. Then comes a series of chapters upon the integration of industry: Rockefeller, the triumph of the Standard Oil Company, other trusts, Lloyd's "Wealth Against Commonwealth," the first Sherman Act decisions, corporation immunity, and the titanic duel of Hill and Harriman. Partly following this, partly sandwiched into it, is a third series of chapters upon the emergence of Roosevelt, his war with predatory industry, the Northern Securities case, the defeat of Foraker, and the humbling of monopoly. There succeeds a brisk section upon the fight for pure foods and pure drugs. The fifth section is devoted to Langley, the Wright brothers, and the success of the airplane—with twenty pages upon the first newspaper reporting of the Kitty Hawk flights. Finally there comes a brief month-by-month record of picturesque events of 1904-5, beginning with the arrival of James Smithson's body to rest near the Smithsonian Institution, and ending with the installation of the first electric lights for railway trains in a Chicago & Northwestern flier.

Mr. Sullivan's sources are as unpredictable as the table of contents for his next chapter. He has drawn heavily upon newspapers and magazines, and has made considerable use of books of reminiscence. But a fact which gives especial value to his work is the diligence with which he has levied upon the memories of living witnesses. The raw material thus brought together will make his book itself a rich source for future historians. Into the chapters on the formation of the American mind is woven the testimony of apparently dozens of humble citizens, who wrote of schooldays in Pennsylvania, or Iowa, or Maine. The pages on Carnegie have been corrected by James Howard Bridge, an old associate of the steel king who had assisted Carnegie in his literary work. In the chapter on the great anthracite strike of 1902 a dozen important men have had a hand—Elihu Root, James R. Garfield, President Green, Ralph Easley, and Secretary Davis among them. Proof-sheets of the book have been circulated to scores of people, and some of their more pungent comments are included, in Mr. Sullivan's informal way, in the footnotes. It is delightful, in reading the chapter on the Wrights, to find Byron Newton (formerly of the New York *Herald*) illustrating Mr. Sullivan's remark as to the curious intimacy of the brothers by a little anecdote. "There was an amusing side to the plurality or oneness of their brotherly association. When asked to have a drink or cigar, either one would answer, 'No, thank you, we don't drink.'" A little later Mr. Newton is himself corrected in a footnote. He had written of the Kitty Hawk region as swarming with snakes and wild hogs, but Arthur Ruhl informs Mr. Sullivan that there were no snakes, and Mr. Willie Hare denies the existence of the hogs.



This chapter upon the Wrights and their great achievement is, as a piece of narrative writing, the best part of the book. Mr. Sullivan has been fired by enthusiasm in treating the sudden dramatic appearance of the airplane, as in his first volume he was fired by emotional admiration of Dr. Walter Reed, Dr. Lazear, and their associates in the conquest of yellow fever. Close behind, as examples of swift and well-colored historical composition, come the pages dealing with Roosevelt's expert defeat of Mark Hanna in 1903, and of Senator Foraker a little later; the struggle for the control of the Northern Pacific Railroad, ending in a deadlock between Harriman and Schiff on the one side, Hill and Morgan on the other; and the history of that great crusade for unpoisoned foods which was begun by Upton Sinclair's publication of "The Jungle." These narrative chapters are so good, in fact, that most readers will wish that Mr. Sullivan dealt more with such subjects, and less with that class of materials which demands close analysis to bring out its full value. He can tell a story admirably; he interprets a mass of sociological data rather clumsily.

Careful though Mr. Sullivan is, he has inevitably fallen into a good many errors in presenting so huge a volume of facts concerning a period as yet not treated by many writers. Some of these errors are important; others are trivial. It is hardly fair to say of Wilson, for example, that after his campaign attacks on the New Jersey laws favoring trusts, "he was elected Governor in 1910, but took no step toward repealing the old laws." Wilson's inaugural address to the legislature in 1911 gave prominence to an urgent recommendation for repeal. Mr. Sullivan's interpretation of Roosevelt's first message to Congress as mild and on the whole reassuring to capital is not the interpretation of most historical students. As Mr. Charles Beard has said, it contained practically all the fighting doctrines of progressivism for which Roosevelt stood during his two terms, and later utterances added little that was essentially new to it. Mr. Sullivan states that there was no governmental regulation of freight rates until 1887, and no effective regulation until 1906. On the contrary, there was some very effective State regulation, upheld in the Supreme Court, in the seventies. To speak of science as wholly neglected in not only schools but colleges and universities from 1865 to 1895 is to do an injustice to the genuinely effective and widely-felt work of such men as E. L. Youmans and John Fiske. No explanation of the success of Carnegie in distancing his steel competitors can be satisfactory which completely neglects, as Mr. Sullivan does, Carnegie's great enterprise in using new chemical and technical methods. And

one might protest, to mention minor matters, against Mr. Sullivan's treatment of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas as belonging to the eighties, when "Pinafore" arrived with a bang in the seventies; against his treatment of Henry Adams's device of writing an autobiography in the third person as original, when it was very old, and had been employed by Winfield Scott in the sixties; against the photograph of a blazing oil tank of very modern construction as belonging to the sixties. To deal with the omissions would carry one far afield. Is it really right, for example, to write of the trust problem from 1901 to 1905 without once mentioning the "Iowa idea"?

Yet taken as a whole, this is an admirable book; a book which no one will fail to find engrossing from beginning to end, which no one can read without great profit and instruction, and which will be of permanent value to students of the time. It and its predecessor constitute one of the most impressive exhibitions of the scope, the variety, and the irresistible energy of American life yet published. They constitute the fullest presentation we yet have of the amazing changes and the majestic advances of the last generation within our rich and populous republic.

## A Spreading Plant

THE COUNTERFEITERS. By ANDRÉ GIDE. Translated by DOROTHY BUSSY. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by THEODORE PURDY, JR.

IN the journal which he kept during the composition of his immense novel André Gide has revealed the germ from which the entire book sprang. In the beginning there were two newspaper clippings. The first told of the arrest of a band engaged in passing counterfeit coins. The youth of the members and the extraordinary code revealed in their confession made the affair unusual. The second was a simple but terrible story of suicide. Driven to the act by his schoolmates, a young student blew out his brains in the midst of a class. Details show the horrible *sang froid* and planned cruelty of his comrades. On these bits of juvenile abnormality Gide has built up, with rare firmness of touch and inventive ingenuity, a complicated narrative framework. The process is laid bare in his journal. The result is "The Counterfeiters."

Unlike his earlier stories, which he now refuses to dignify with the name of novels, "The Counterfeiters" is far from stylized, simplified, and reduced for the expression of a single principle. He has been careful to make its form such that all traces of the modern psychological novel shall disappear. Yet it is not realistic, nor does it offer us a cross-section of any particular *milieu*. He has, instead, attempted to dispense with all the unessentials, to fall back on the old idea of the "pure" novel. From his two clippings an immense plant of the imagination has grown, so luxuriant and often so exotic that any summary of it must necessarily be both inadequate and misleading. The book is a sort of demonstration of strength on the novelist's part, a kind of proof that material, a thesis, documentation, psychological correctness, and all the other shibboleths of whatever school are unimportant. What matters (he appears to claim and demonstrate) is the way in which the narrator illuminates his subject, whatever it may be. His knowledge of existence and his ability to set down that knowledge clearly is all that distinguishes even the greatest novelist from the teller of tales without meaning.

The demonstration is almost gratifyingly successful. The fabric of his novel is intricately woven, and at times extremely curious to Anglo-Saxon eyes. Against a background barely indicated, but at moments diabolic and unreal, he presents a series of interlocking episodes, each leading to another, continuing yet renewing the narrative without any slackening of interest. The principal figures are Bernard Profitendieu, his friend Olivier Molinier, and Olivier's uncle, Edouard. Finding that he is not the son of the man he has always supposed to be his father, Bernard leaves his home, confiding only in Olivier. When Olivier goes to meet his uncle at a railway station on the following day, Bernard follows him and picks up the check which Edouard has dropped after leaving his valise in the parcel room. Instead of returning check or luggage to Edouard, Bernard claims the valise, opens it, and finds in it Edouard's journal, from which he learns that Olivier's elder brother, Vincent, has become



involved in an affair with a married woman, Laura Douviers, who is expecting a child by him. He has lost at roulette the money intended to aid her during the confinement. It is to help Laura, with whom he had once fancied himself in love, that Edouard has returned to France. In a state of romantic frenzy, Bernard rushes off to Laura's hotel, where Edouard turns up in time to catch the thief of his luggage, pardon him, and arrange to take him to Switzerland with Laura, as secretary. There Bernard conceives a passion for Laura, while Edouard talks at length of the novel he hopes to write,—a novel to be called "The Counterfeiters." They meet a Polish boy, Boris, who is recovering from a nervous disease at their sanitarium, and he returns to Paris with them to enter the pension school kept by Laura's father. Meanwhile Olivier has been introduced by Vincent to Count Robert de Passavant, a brilliant and perverted young writer. Vincent has been helped by this personage both financially and in his love affair with Lady Griffith, a typical "femme fatale." He now makes Olivier editor of a magazine he is financing, and takes him to Corsica for the summer. At the pension Bernard is thrown rather unwillingly into the arms of Sarah Vedel, a daughter of the house. All these persons come together at a dinner given by Passavant's review, at which Olivier confesses his disgust for his patron to Edouard, who persuades him to give up the editorship. Bernard returns soon after to his home, much chastened, and Laura goes back to her husband. The book ends with the two episodes founded directly on the clippings,—the counterfeiting affair in which Oliver's younger brother is concerned, and the suicide of Boris.

The character of the book is not always pleasant. The preoccupation with sexual perversion which Gide has shown lately ("Corydon" and "Si le Grain ne Meurt") is here exemplified in the relationship of Passavant and Olivier, and in a more sentimental manner in the affection of Edouard for Olivier. There are traces, too, in the valise incident of an earlier attitude which may seem curious to those unfamiliar with Gide's other books. Indeed, Bernard was originally named Lafcadio, and was to have been the hero of "Les Caves du Vatican" in a later stage of development. It will be remembered that that delightful young man pushed a fellow traveler out of the window of his railway carriage simply because it occurred to him that there could be no possible motive for doing so. The influence of Dostoevsky, to whom Gide has devoted one of his best critical works, is doubtless responsible for these peculiarities of conduct on the part of his heroes.

But matters of derivation and significance aside, what a miraculous growth is this novel of many novels! For from the initial situation spring new situations, the original characters engender new ones, until there is not one, but a whole series of novels within the book. One feels that Gide has stopped this endless multiplication by a sheer effort of will, and not because his imagination is in any way taxed. He is sophisticated without ceasing to be profound, and he is profound without dullness. The task of writing a novel that is modern in the worthiest sense and yet still as clearly a novel as "Tom Jones" has been superbly performed. His tact and skill in construction, the classic quality of his style (for even his enemies will admit that Gide writes French as no one else can at the present time), and the continued intelligence of his observation, combine to make "The Counterfeiters" rich beyond all but the best of twentieth century fiction. Yet it can be read with pleasure for the "story" alone. Perhaps Gide's real triumph is this manifestation of the universal beneath a glittering surface of the particular. More than a happy instinct for expressing emotions, more than the tricks of the trade, have been necessary to achieve this subterranean wealth.

André Gide's reputation in America has so far been of the most deadly sort. Four of his books have been translated; his name is known and will even produce a certain effect if injected abruptly into a literary conversation; but it may be doubted that any save the few whose business it is to read him have really bothered to do so. Now that France and Barrès and Proust are gone there is no one whose word carries greater weight in the province of French prose. He is not a "difficult" writer,—not, for example, half so difficult as Proust. His work is sufficiently varied to afford for almost any reader the discovery of some good thing.

## The BOWLING GREEN

### The Palette Knife

YOU won't mind if the Green today smells a bit of kerosene and turpentine and linseed oil; because I have just, very reluctantly, cleaned the brushes and put away the paint box and set aside the picture I am working on ("Portrait of a Glass of Gin"). It is a fine dark rainy afternoon, just the sort of weather I find excellent for painting. The darkness doesn't bother me at all—most of my painting is done by lamp-light anyhow, quite privily, where no one can see what I'm up to. Perhaps that accounts for the failure of some of my color schemes. Blue, for instance: I never can get my blues clear enough, luminous.

I've kept very quiet about my paintings, haven't I? Yes, I have; and probably I shouldn't have mentioned them at all, ever, but putting away the brushes just now, and the pleasant greasy feeling on my hands, and an unwillingness to focus my thoughts on the League of Nations (which I was going to tell you more of) gave me a sudden impulse to palaver about my Art. Which really is an important division of my secret life. I do my writing on Thursdays and my painting on Sundays. The rest of the time I answer telephone calls. It is fine to have one's program definite.

I find that almost all the writers I know best have a clandestine affection for painting. Writing has its merits, but it does seem—more and more, as you go on—to involve an attempt to think; and it's so devilish intangible. Whereas in painting (my kind of painting anyhow) you rely entirely on instinct and all the merrier moods of the psyche. Also a newly-finished painting smells so good; and you have to wash your hands frequently.



It began very innocently—oh, a long time ago—when my itinerary used to take me past the well-known store of Messrs. Devoe and Raynolds on Fulton Street; if there is any more alluring place in New York I don't know it. I had often bought water-color boxes there, and crayons, and then one day I went in, and pretending I was getting it for my small boy, I bought a box of oil painting materials. I set to work immediately to make a portrait of the Brooklyn Bridge, but after a few hours' work I concluded it was impossible. Very likely I would have said so publicly, but about that time my friend Mr. Heywood Broun began to write about his paintings. We were both newspaper columnists in those days and there is an unwritten etiquette in the columnist profession that you "lay off" topics that other columnists have made their own. Therefore, for all these years, Art had to get along without the benefit of my comments or the narrative of my private humiliations.

Mr. Broun, I don't doubt, has made much greater progress than I, because his pleasant candor about his experiments probably brought him many valuable suggestions from practised painters. My work in oils has suffered from excessive secrecy, for I was even too bashful ever to find out what the little bottles were for. One was marked Rectified Turpentine, and one Pale Drying Oil. The turpentine, I supposed, was to clean the brushes with; but what about the Pale Drying Oil? I supposed it was to mix with the paints, but evidently I was too zealous: all my early work had a sort of greasy penumbra around the edges. When the Pale Drying Oil provided by Devoe and Raynolds was used up, I found a bottle of linseed oil in the family medicine cupboard, and this seemed to do fairly well. I have also experimented with Three-in-One oil, olive oil, and one evening, when a sudden urge to paint came upon me and I could find no other vehicle, melted butter. So do all artists, I suppose, relish the backward gaze upon their early struggles. The whole problem of how oil paints are mixed and proper conduct of the implements is still a mystery to me. Once I saw a man painting a landscape down by the Mill Pond in Roslyn; I was strongly tempted to go and watch him, but knowing how alarmed I would be to be watched, I refrained. Yet I always had a feeling that I could do it all right—if I knew what to do.

So, for years, I made little attempt to live up to whatever hopes Devoe and Raynolds might have

formed. I confined myself to pencil and crayons. Then, in the excellent way things happen, a random chance sent me back to my true ambition. Taking tea one afternoon this summer with the admirable Mr. Hamish Miles, whom I do not scruple to mention as he is a contributor, though not often enough, to this journal, we had admired with full sincerity the many enchanting objects of art in his house beside Hampstead Heath. It was there, in Pond Street, N. W. 3 (as a matter of fact Katherine Mansfield once lived in the same house, and one of the finest toy shops you ever saw is almost opposite) that a great moment occurred. Mr. Miles, with an air of epiphany, showed me two very modernist pictures in colored chalk, framed in the hall. "Guess what those are," he said. My first notion was that they were Gauguin, or at least Jerome Blum or Marsden Hartley. Certainly they were stunning things, enchantingly decorative, humorous, and full of suggestion. And we learned that Mrs. Miles had bought them from a pavement artist somewhere in Kensington.

This did a great deal to encourage me. Certainly Mr. Miles did not suspect it, but my inward thought, with due obeisance to the unknown artist in Kensington, was that I also had pictures in my soul which I need not be ashamed to attempt. So, returning home, I took up again my brushes and tubes, and bought a fresh bottle of linseed oil. I had another look at my "Autobiography of a Chrysanthemum" (one in a very early manner), my "What a Dog Thinks About at Night." But it was in working on the picture entitled "The Birth of a Pun" that I made a great discovery—the use of the palette knife.

Perhaps I ought to describe this work, to give you some notion of my ideas of symbolism in paint. A pun, obviously, is a head-on collision between two different meanings. So the first thing you see is two broad bands of color running diagonally across the picture and meeting in a white space in the middle. (The white space symbolizes a blank mind.) These bands of color show gradations of tone, for all meanings have their different shades. One band varies among orange and red, the other in tones of blue. But a pun involves a victory of one meaning over the other: so within the white area is a jagged vibration of red and yellow, rather feverish or scorbutic in effect, with peripheral striations suggesting tension. Within this again is a zigzag golden spark, the Pun itself—though not golden enough; it is too muddy. The artist, working in excitement, did not properly clean his brushes; besides, the colors will get mixed up on the palette.

The lower right hand area shows a rather dun and opaque territory where an assortment of mushrooms, fungi, and livid blooms is tenderly speckled. These are flowers of speech. The upper left hand region looks like a violent electrical downpour. From rolling masses of blue and black cloud discharge parallel rods of rain and stripes of lightning, directed toward the dangerous center where the pun is nucleolating. This all represents a brain-storm. And the Pun itself not having been a success, it drops rapidly down a heavy black chute which leads swiftly to the bottom of the picture.

But what I was going to say was—in dealing with the delicate problem of depicting the brain-storm (upper left corner) I was in despair until I suddenly thought of the palette knife, for which I had never had any use. I found that by splaying this about among nice thick paint the most gorgeous effects could be produced. In a later picture, "November Wind," which shows some almost bare trees in an autumn dusk and gale, I discovered that the flock of flying leaves that looked so flat and paltry when done with a brush could be nipped in with the knife blade to grand effect. And what I've been pondering ever since is, why isn't there something in a writer's kit that could correspond to the Palette Knife? Some nifty little dodge that could scatter life and dexterity into the meagre cadence of one's copy.

I haven't at all done justice to my ardors as a prentice painter—but I am too eager to get back to the "Portrait of a Glass of Gin." I intended to use, in that, some of the gold radiator-paint that gave such fine bronzy wash to the southeast corner of the "Autobiography of a Chrysanthemum." Yet I have an uneasy feeling that a merely technical trick, if once successful, should never be repeated. But if any one knows of anything, in the realm of writing, that corresponds to the palette knife . . .

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.