

Books of Special Interest

A Puritan Divine

COTTON MATHER—KEEPER OF THE PURITAN CONSCIENCE. By RALPH and LOUISE BOAS. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1928. \$3.50.

Reviewed by KENNETH B. MURDOCK

IN the two centuries since his death Cotton Mather has provoked historians and controversialists to much dogmatism and much myth-making, proclaimed usually with sound and fury. No good biography of Mather appeared till 1891, when Barrett Wendell wrote one, incomplete but informed with a sympathetic and moderate attitude toward the not wholly attractive personality of its subject. Apparently the doings of this colonial minister, politician, scholar, amateur of science, editor, and writer, are interesting still, for Wendell's "Cotton Mather" was reissued in 1926, and since then there have been published at least two shorter biographical and critical sketches, followed now by Mr. and Mrs. Boas's book.

Their work is admirable in many respects. For one thing, it obviously attempts to do justice to its difficult subject. For another it, for the most part, resists, in spite of the suspicion cast upon it by its sub-title, any temptation to draw from the study of Mather's career sweeping general conclusions about his compatriots, their creed, or their final position in history. The authors are content usually to display what they can of the character they treat, and to tell the story of the life of one—and not the most representative—Puritan divine. They have not made a first-hand study of the sources, except in a capable and sane, though too confident chapter on the witchcraft episode, but they have used intelligently most of the modern studies of Mather and have shown judgment and critical prowess in digging through the mass of legend and prejudice which has gathered about his name. They rephrase much of the story in the jargon of current psychology, and although this rarely contributes anything new to the understanding of the man they describe, it does, of course, bring the book into tune with recent biographical

modes. They display picturesquely, though not always adequately, the little world in which Mather lived, and with great skill they make from the tale of his life a readable story in which the none too plentiful possibilities for color and dramatic action are taken advantage of to the full.

Unfortunately the book has more than its share of small errors in fact and of hazardous generalizations which distort the picture. It is well that Cotton Mather, if he is to be remembered at all, should be dealt with in a book as well written and as entertaining as this, but it is a pity that it must so often disappoint the reader who seeks not only entertainment but historical truth. Moreover it is woefully incomplete. The sketch it gives of Cotton Mather is well drawn and the general estimate of him is, so far as it goes, probably just enough, but the whole man is not revealed. In his own eyes the long list of his printed books must have seemed one of his greatest achievements. In those books, whatever their literary value, his learning and his ideas are displayed as nowhere else. Yet Mr. and Mrs. Boas dismiss Cotton Mather, the writer, in a few words and with no knowledge of more than a small part of what he saw fit to publish. Inevitably, therefore, their remarks on his intellectual powers are to be sceptically received. There is a good chance, too, that material of biographical importance tucked away in his prefaces and sermons has been neglected in this book. Certainly Cotton Mather's story, as told by the Boases, leaves too much out of account an activity to which he gave himself wholeheartedly and in which he exposed certain defects and certain good qualities of mind which should be a part of any discerning portrait.

Probably there will never be a complete life of Mather. His own energy was so great that the task of the biographer who would follow close at his heels is too laborious to be complacently undertaken in a day when his significance seems far less than it once did. Wendell's life of him gives part of the story, and, perhaps, all that is necessary. So does the Boas's book, although its verdicts, based as they are on but part of

the evidence, cannot always be trusted, and although its merits are rather in its freedom from prejudice and its excellence as biographical narrative than in complete fidelity to fact.

Native India

THE LAST HOME OF MYSTERY. By E. ALEXANDER POWELL. New York: The Century Co. 1929. \$4.

Reviewed by CHARLES BATCHELDER

NEPAL is a country which has been visited by few white men, owing to the rigid policy of exclusion practised by its rulers, but Mr. Powell succeeded in "crashing the gates" and his resulting book is filled with descriptions which have rarely been equalled of its natural beauties, picturesque buildings, and unusual customs. He is a master of the art of word painting and makes the scenes seem as vivid as if seen in a color "movie." The excellent illustrations provide the details which the text cannot cover.

Mr. Powell on this trip travelled over India as the guest of Maharajas, and made his way by motor from Bagdad to Damascus. His observations on the Indian Princes are filled with interest. But, not satisfied with writing a most fascinating book of travel and adventure, he decided to introduce a sensational and controversial element by describing certain features of Indian religions and customs in the frankest manner. The chapter on "Unclean Gods" and many bits in the other sections are lurid in the extreme and make the accounts of repellent practices in Miss Mayo's "Mother India" seem tame in comparison. He makes the worship of Siva and Kali, to which many millions of Hindus are devoted, seem indefensible and abominable. His is one of the most skilful and convincing attacks upon the Hindu religion in print and is likely to arouse a wave of resentment, if it comes to the notice of the Indian public. In his treatment of the sex aspect, Mr. Powell certainly approaches the verge.

He evidently had some doubts himself for he says: "It will also be said by its champions that I have not presented a fair picture of Hinduism—that I have merely picked out a few sensational examples which are not characteristic. It is true that it is impossible to generalize with complete accuracy on any subject connected with Hinduism, for India is a vast country, and practices which are common in Mysore are unknown in Kashmir and *vice versa*." Nevertheless, he has produced the impression that certain practices are extremely common, if not universal, when they are extremely rare and would be condemned by Hindu opinion if they were generally known. He has presented only the degraded side of the religion, and gives no hint that there is also a spiritual side even to the Nature worship symbolized by the "lingam." It is practically impossible, however, to disprove his statements, for he often describes accurately what he has seen, though he does not give the correct interpretation. In other cases, he has taken his statements from hearsay or from little known authorities. Throughout the book there is an absence of attempts to verify gossip, which is repeated if it is picturesque. At times, there are errors of fact. The Aga Khan, for instance, is not "the head of all the Mohammedans of India," but only of a sect which is relatively small in numbers. The whole book bears the stamp of his method, as he describes it: "That is the way I like to do things—impulsively, on the spur of the moment, without debating them in my mind." Now, this may make books sensational, even attractive, but it does not lead to accuracy.

In reading books on India it is wise to bear in mind the inherent probabilities of the case. No country, no religion, no social organization, could persist through ages, if it were as debased, degraded, and corrupt as Indian life is here described. There may be shocking abuses of many kinds, but there is also deep and sincere religious devotion, happy and self-sacrificing family life, and a social organization well adapted to past Oriental conditions, though radical changes will be forced in the immediate future. Human nature is fundamentally the same in many lands.

It is said that books like this do great harm by arousing hostility between educated Indian leaders and the Anglo-Saxon countries. Perhaps this is true. They certainly instigate much propaganda from Indian authors and lecturers. On the other hand, one who visits India at frequent intervals cannot fail to notice that the revelation of practices which shock European opinion stimulate efforts to remove them, which probably would not be made if they remained in obscurity. Letting in the sunlight is one of the best remedies for slime and filth.

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The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received. Many of them will be reviewed later.

Art

- WHAT IS ART? AND ESSAYS ON ART. By *Leo Tolstoy*. Translated by *Louise and Aylmer Maude*. Oxford University Press.
- METROPOLITAN MUSEUM STUDIES. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- AMERICAN ETCHERS. Vol. I. Ernest D. Roth. Vol. II. Alfred Hutty. New York: T. Spencer Hutsom.

Belles Lettres

- THE DECLINE OF THE AGE OF LOUIS XIV OR FRENCH LITERATURE. By *Arthur Tilley*. Cambridge University Press. (Macmillan).
- SHAKESPEARE. By *Nathan Kaufman*. Raymond Book Co. \$2.
- QUARTO CLUB PAPERS. Pynson Printers.
- THE ENJOYMENT OF LITERATURE. By *Jay B. Hubbell*. Macmillan. \$1.75.
- PROGRESS IN LITERATURE. By *Lancelles Abercrombie*. Cambridge University Press (Macmillan).
- VOICES OF THE AGE. Edited by *J. Presley Pound*. Harpers. \$2.50.
- LITERARY ETHICS. By *H. M. Paull*. Dutton. \$3.75.
- CHAUCEER AND THE ROMAN POETS. By *Edgar Finley Shannon*. Harvard University Press. \$4.
- HIGH SPOTS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE. By *Merle Johnson*. New York: Bennett Book Studios.

Biography

- SKY LARKING. By *Bruce Gould*. Liveright. \$2.50.
- THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS. By *H. A. Spurr*. Dutton. \$3.
- THE LETTERS OF TOLSTOY AND HIS COUSIN COUNTESS ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY. Translated from the Russian by *Leo Islavin*. Dutton. \$3.
- EUGENE O'NEILL. By *Barrett H. Clark*. McBride. \$1.50.
- THE LIFE OF TOLSTOY. By *Aylmer Maude*. Oxford University Press. 2 vols.
- TWENTY-FIVE YEARS WITH EARL HAIG. By *Sergeant Secrett*. Duffield. \$2.50.
- KINGS, CHURCHILLS AND STATESMEN. By *Knut Hagberg*. Dodd, Mead. \$4.
- CLARK OF THE OHIO. By *Frederick Palmer*. Dodd, Mead. \$5.
- FOCH SPEAKS. By *Major Charles Bugnet*. Dial. \$3.
- THE LITERARY BIBLE OF THOMAS JEFFERSON. Johns Hopkins Press. \$1.
- JOHN D. By *John K. Winkler*. Macy-Masius. \$2.25.
- THE WATERS OF AFRICA. By *Alfred Aloysius Horn*. Simon & Schuster. \$3.50.
- LETTERS OF REBECCA GRATZ. Edited by *David Philipson*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- LIVING EAST. By *David Wooster King*. Duffield. \$3.
- ANDREW JOHNSON. By *Lloyd Paul Stryker*. Macmillan. \$6.
- WHEN FUR WAS KING. By *Henry John Moberly* and *William Bleasdel Cameron*. Dutton. \$2.75.
- WILLIAM THE FIRST. By *Paul Wiegler*. Houghton Mifflin. \$5.

Fiction

- THE LOVER. By *Naomi Royde-Smith*. Harpers. 1929. \$2.50.

The life that lies behind the life we lead from day to day, the world that lies behind the world we open our eyes upon each morning, hold for Naomi Royde-Smith a reality not to be found in the familiar factual existence which so adequately supplies the needs of many novelists. Actualities are of value for her principally as implications. The essential for her lies beyond the observable.

This preoccupation with the other world might lead some authors quite away from realism and familiar detail. With Naomi Royde-Smith it leads rather to more particular concern with observation and presentation of the scene, since the reader is to find by looking beyond the sensuously given that "other" which the author has had at first hand. So the novels of Naomi Royde-Smith do present fresh, intimate, natural background and quick essential characterization, whether or not the overtones are as clear as intended.

"The Lover" is a study in the exquisite. It is a stylistic attempt to catch, and make permanent on a plane beyond experience, an episode which, within that plane, is already "past." An old lover, an artist, meets again the love of his youth. They talk a dawn away. That is all of the physical action of the story, yet that is almost nothing of the story. Delicately, elusively, while this harlequinade is bright before the eyes, the reality of "The Lover" is built up. This reality is the realization by the lover that

the joy and pain of his love, while utterly dead now, were of equal importance as "the means by which the things time had taken from them [the lovers] had been made eternal and were now revealed to them as existing out of time in an indestructible continuity of established experience that had passed beyond their reach." The very difficult transition from life as lived to life as philosophical material is not, unfortunately, accomplished so smoothly as to eliminate all thought of the author's effort. One knows what Miss Royde-Smith is trying to do, one may admit that she does it, but one ought not to be so conscious of it as an achievement.

- MINSTRELS IN SATIN. By *ELIZABETH COBB CHAPMAN*. Doubleday, Doran. 1929. \$2.50.

In her second novel, Mrs. Chapman tells a skilful, sophisticated, amusing tale of curiously regulated family life, concerned mainly with Fanny, the irresponsible mother, and her two daughters, Penelope and Camilla. When we first meet this devoted trio and Camilla's twin, George, the children are in their early 'teens. They are all living in Florence, Fanny, five years before, having left her prosaic husband in America and sought more congenial associations abroad. She is ardent, still attractive, mad about men, absorbed in the ambition to re-

tain her fading charms, and to be reckoned with as one of the world's great sweethearts. After the outbreak of the war, she sends her children back to their father and his people in New York, but herself remains in Europe to do her bit, which consists in brightening the lonely days of handsome allied officers on leave.

Not until four years later is dear Fanny reunited with her beloved daughters, and then with a shock she realizes that they are radiant, grown-up young women in whose pulchritude she is reflected as an aging has-been. Again the three return to Europe, this time with the purpose of having Camilla's rich voice trained for grand opera by the masters, and several years of hectic excitement follow, in the course of which Fanny remarries, Camilla gains a Syrian millionaire for husband and by means of him is established as a Continental musical celebrity. It is only the deep, reticent, self-sacrificing Penelope, her stronger nature dedicated to preserving the erratic mother and sister from the costs of their own folly, who seems destined to live in denial and frustration of her individuality. The shrewdly contrasted characters of the three, particularly those of the daughters as they pass from childhood to early maturity, are drawn with the utmost clarity and conviction. A novel which strikes that rare, happy mean between the serious and the gay, "Minstrels in Satin" should not fail to be included in one's list of summer fiction.

- VIENNESE LOVE. By *Hugo Bettauer*. Macaulay. \$2.
- A MAN SCANS HIS PAST. By *M. Constantin-Weyer*. Macaulay. \$2.50.

- KNIGHT'S GAMBIT. By *Guy Pocock*. Dutton. \$2.50.
- THE DOUBLE AXE. By *Audrey Haggard*. Dutton. \$2.50.
- THE PEOPLE OF SELDWYLA. By *Gottfried Keller*. Dutton. \$2.50.
- THE SEVEN VICES. By *Guglielmo Ferrero*. Harcourt, Brace. 2 vols.
- THE MASQUERADERS. By *Georgette Heyer*. Longmans, Green. \$2.
- GINEVRA. By *Virginia Watson*. Dutton. \$2.50.
- THE MAN IN THE QUEUE. By *Gordon Daviot*. Dutton. \$2.
- PAYING GUESTS. By *E. F. Benson*. Doubleday, Doran. \$2.50 net.
- AN IMPERFECT LOVER. By *Robert Gore Browne*. Doubleday, Doran. \$2.50 net.
- THE JEFFERSON SECRET. By *Richard Blaker*. Doubleday, Doran. \$2 net.
- FISH PREFERRED. By *P. G. Wodehouse*. Doubleday, Doran. \$2 net.
- EILEEN OF THE TREES. By *H. De Vere Stacpoole*. Doubleday, Doran. \$2.50 net.
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Juvenile

(The Children's Bookshop appears on page 1153)

(Continued on page 1152)

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