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**IVES WASHBURN NEW YORK**

## A Picture Book for Elders

DAVID OCTAVIUS HILL: Master of Photography. By HEINRICH SCHWARZ. New York: The Viking Press. 1931. \$6.

Reviewed by PAUL STRAND

THIS handsome American edition of reproductions of the photographs of David Octavius Hill (1802-1870) is justified by its subject and does justice to it. It brings together eighty fine examples of Hill's portraits, printed in Germany from the German half-tone plates, which in these days of shoddy, commercialized reproductions are a joy to behold. Besides the illustrations there is an interesting but uneven essay by Heinrich Schwarz, clearly translated by Helen E. Fraenkel.

Hill was the first great pioneer in the use of photography as a medium of expression and remains today one of the foremost photographers of all time. His work is not new to America but it was in danger of being lost and forgotten. Original Hill prints were shown by Alfred Stieglitz as early as 1906 in the gallery of the Photo Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue and again by Stieglitz with Max Weber in the big International Show of Photography at the Albright Gallery, Buffalo, in 1910. To Hill's work were devoted numbers 11-23-37 of *Camera Work*, but most of these books which recorded so completely and so beautifully the development of photography up to 1916 have been either lost or destroyed. It is important therefore to have this book from Germany and its American edition.

Herr Schwarz begins his essay with a scholarly account of the discovery of photography in France by Daguerre, the experiments of Niepce—also those of Fox Talbot in England, which latter led directly to photography as we know it today. Schwarz tries with considerable success to link this historical data with the social, scientific, and philosophical forces which created the early nineteenth century and lead directly to our own time. He then goes on to tell the interesting story of how Hill, a Scotch painter living in Edinburgh, was impelled in 1843 to take up the new and then miraculous process of photography. Although a landscape painter Hill had made up his mind to paint a large canvas of five hundred Scottish churchmen who were in revolt against the Anglican Church—a fight in which Hill himself had been deeply interested. And to aid him in this gigantic task, for which his technique as a painter was not adequate, he decided to make photographic likenesses. So began a series of experiments in which he was helped by his friend, a chemist, Robert Adamson. For several years they worked with indifferent success but from 1845 to 1848 a series of astounding portraits came out of this collaboration. In 1848 Adamson died and so far as we know Hill did very little photographic work after that. Schwarz attributes this sudden stopping partly to Adamson's death and partly to a loss of interest on the part of people. My own feeling is that the familiar notion that photography is an inferior medium of expression came to the fore finally and Hill's friends gave him a bad conscience by telling him he was wasting his time and should get back to his painting.

As Herr Schwarz points out, although Hill started with the idea of using photography as a means to an end he actually was by vision and talent a photographer and became completely fascinated by the possibilities of this new, untried medium. For he photographed not only churchmen but most of the prominent people of his time in the literary, scientific, and art world of Scotland, all eager to come to him and sit for exposures of five or six minutes in the sun. In remarking upon the extraordinary unself-consciousness in these portraits, Herr Schwarz makes this interesting point—that these people were not concerned with any preconceived idea of a picture of themselves and so cooperated very completely and with a certain respect, in what was for

them a mysterious and fascinating personal adventure. They had a certain innocence before the camera long ago lost by us.

Through the direct and austere arrangement of large masses of dark, broken by the head, the hands, or some part of the dress (built though it was upon the chiaroscuro of the old masters) Hill gives the eye at once an impression of simple grandeur and of true human nobility. He always emphasized the strength and never the weakness in his sitters, yet the portraits are unsentimental, free from any attempt to prettify. Possibly these men and women were not torn by inner conflict as most of us are today. For they appear sure of their direction in life to this extent—that they seem to have known what life meant to them and what was truly of value to them in it. This kind of inner strength Hill saw and recorded. And it has its esthetic counterpart in the solidity of his esthetic structure, in the indestructible dignity of his arrangements of light and dark—so simple in effect, so difficult to achieve.

It is true that for many years no photographs were made which had the spiritual depth and unity of Hill's. Both Julia Cameron and Nadar, whom Schwarz mentions, are important in the development of photography, but their portraits do not come out of a vision as deep or as clear as do those of Hill. Yet this does not justify Herr Schwarz in saying "Hill's calotypes are examples of photography so brilliant that by the side of them everything which has taken place since pales." Judging from the sensitiveness with which he has approached Hill's photographs one feels that were he not completely ignorant of what has been done by others he could not have made such a ridiculous assertion, one which greatly weakens his affirmation of photography itself.

There are, for instance, the recently discovered photographs of the Frenchman Atget, a man much more naïve than Hill, yet whose work is just as pure, just as direct, whose pictures of the shops, buildings, and markets of Paris are informed with the same nobility of spirit. More important still there is another large body of work which Herr Schwarz could not have seen except in America, for Europe knows absolutely nothing about it—the later work of Alfred Stieglitz. This photography goes far beyond either Hill or Atget—comes out of a more conscious and profound vision, a greater mastery of the medium. The world which is reflected in Stieglitz's photographs is a universe, intensely alive with the awareness of multiple forces. To embody this universe he has used every instrument possible to photography, not only chiaroscuro but the expressiveness of pure photographic line, texture, and tonality—undreamed of by Hill, only partly sensed by Atget.

The work of all these men, each so different, yet so alive, is definitive of what photography can be when, and only when—untampered with—its technique becomes the tool of vision, of spirit. Their photographs explode the still current but fallacious notion, to which even Schwarz subscribes, that in comparison with painting, photography is a limited and inferior medium, incapable of reflecting any profound human seeing. For they demonstrate that what is still attributed exclusively to the imagination of the painter actually exists in the objective world, that if it is seen it can be photographed. Further, that painting is not a substitute for photography or vice versa; each is a distinct and separate way of perceiving and of recording meanings and relationships in life. Goethe's words quoted by Schwarz are true ones in this relation. "What else have art and artists ever done except perceive the individual thing, isolate the object out of the welter of phenomena, elevate it, intensify it, inspire it, and give it meaning?" In short, the root of art, regardless of medium, is seeing.

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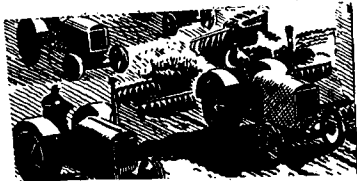
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## Representative Tales

GOLDEN TALES OF NEW ENGLAND.

By MAY LAMBERTON BECKER. New York: Dodd, Mead &amp; Co. 1931. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RACHEL FIELD

IT was a character in one of Sarah Orne Jewett's stories who once bemoaned the growing sameness about her. "These days," she said, "young folks is all copy-cats, 'fraid to death they won't be all just alike; as for the old folks, they pray for the advantage o' bein' a little different." It seems to me that the authors represented in Mrs. Becker's collection of New England tales all shared this feeling. They were eager to preserve that New England which will never return, but which impressed itself so indelibly upon the American life and literature of a past century. As in her earlier collection of "Golden Tales of the Old South," Mrs. Becker has culled her material from widely different sources to recreate a period and its people—even its very aspect and climate. Here are sly thrusts of humor; curious customs and manners, and the spicy turns of phrase that one hears so rarely now even in remote villages and lonely places.

These seventeen stories are as varied in style and the characters they portray as the jagged cliffs of the Maine coast are from the Berkshire Hills and the sand dunes of the Cape. Yet when one has read them all there is a sense of relationship between them. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Thanksgiving at Oldtown" makes admirable company for Dorothy Canfield's "Old Man Warner," and Louisa M. Alcott's "Transcendental Wildoats."

In a group of this sort one is always tempted to wonder why the editor did not choose such and such a story instead of the one included. Here, the choice, if not always the most representative of the author, has always been on a high artistic level and the tales have not suffered, as is so often the case, by removal from their background. It was good to come upon such old favorites as Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Guest of Mrs. Timms"; Thoreau's "Wellfleet Oysterman"; Hawthorne's "Old Esther Dudley," and Rose Terry Cooke's "Town Mouse and Country Mouse," and to find that they had not grown creaking or out-dated in the fifteen or more years since we had first read them. Others, to be sure, stood the test successfully, but for the purpose of the volume that matters less than that the spirit of a period should be there. Mrs. Becker's own brief comments on the different authors and their contributions are shrewd and informal,—not the least important part of a well-planned and representative collection.

## Tubes of Sunlight

COVERED BRIDGES IN AMERICA. By ROSALIE WELLS. New York: William Edward Rudge. 1931. \$10.

Reviewed by FRANKLIN ABBOTT

MOST collectors, whether of books on heraldry, or cigar store Indians (Muirhead Bone belongs to the latter group) are secure in their confidence that once found, the item can be carried home in a parcel—if a book—or if it be a wooden Indian, can be lashed to the running-board of the car; and a triumphant and immediate return from the chase is guaranteed.

Miss Rosalie Wells can have no such comfortable assurance, her quarry being covered bridges, and her search takes her far—through some twenty-five states, to be exact.

Her book is a well-edited compilation of photographs with sufficient comment on each to satisfy normal curiosity on the part of the purchaser. It is unfortunate, however, that the photographs are not more uniform in quality—ranging as they do from really worth-while work to some rather mediocre negatives.

It would be interesting to be able to say that the bridges chosen for illustration are sufficiently architectural in design and feeling to enable an amateur on architecture, for instance, to intelligently

speculate as to the state—North or South, East or West—in which any one example originates, without referring to the title. This, however, is not the case. For instance, the photograph of the Buffalo Forge Bridge, in Virginia could without remark be substituted for that of the bridge over the Connecticut River near Columbia, New Hampshire, while the very beautiful and well photographed example which spans the Boquet River in Essex County, New York, could likewise be confused with the bridge over the St. Joseph River, Michigan.

Had the compiler-author seen fit to include one or two examples of continental bridges—(there are some inspiring examples in Switzerland)—an interesting comparison might have been suggested. It is comforting, however, to lovers of the picturesque to know that there are still extant in this country so many examples of what one enthusiastic "collector" aptly termed "speckled tubes of sunlight."

## Chicago the Great

CHICAGO: A PORTRAIT. By HENRY JUSTIN SMITH. New York: The Century Company. 1931. \$5.

Reviewed by REBECCA LOWRIE

CHICAGO in 1931 sits for its portrait, a modern portrait. Now and then Mr. Smith pulls a daguerreotype out of his reticule to make the contrast between the old town and the new city more emphatic. For an immigrant to Chicago, as is this reviewer, the daguerreotype holds as much interest as does the Protean profile of the present-day city.

One hears, on coming to Chicago, of a locality called Streeterville, but one hears also of the "Gold Coast," "The Loop," "The Yards," of "Towertown," and innumerable other sections. Streeterville, however, remained a spot, bounded by unfamiliar streets, until Mr. Smith gave it a personality—and such a personality!—in his chapter on George Wellington Street-er, one time the Barnum of the Michigan woods; one time captain of a lake steamer, and perpetual and litigious squatter on one of the Lake Front's most valuable sites.

Chiefly, however, Mr. Smith's book is a study, as current as a news-reel, of this Middle Western metropolis which changes with amazing rapidity before one's bewildered eyes. "Let there be land" say the City Fathers, and there is land, and since Chicago has no mountains from which earth and powdered earth can come, its waterside plain is the product simply of men and machines. Underneath the astonishing loveliness of Grant Park "have been hurled immense quantities of earth brought up in excavating for new buildings, and tons upon tons of the grim mixture of old iron, rusty springs, mud, broken furniture, tin cans, boxes, more mud, mattresses . . . the great city, as rapid in decomposition as it is in creation has simply discharged its waste matter into its front yard," . . . and towers bloom thereon.

Reading Mr. Smith's book is a little like being shown the town by an old and appreciative resident who cherishes the past but lives in the present and in the future. He knows what has happened in the old brown-stone houses; he is not above anecdote; he looks lovingly back at the restrained skyscrapers of the 1900's and out of his window at the clean, lean lines of the contemporary *Tribune* Tower, the Palmolive building, or "333."

Of Chicago's civic blemish—crime—Mr. Smith says little, though he does not refuse to recognize it. "That blemish," he says, "magnified and widely discussed by critics, is like a cyst on a face; a growth which the owner, when sitting for his picture, is too honest to hide. But when all the lineaments are seen that spot becomes relatively trivial." So when one studies this portrait one is struck by Mr. Smith's belief in his city.

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