

far below the reach surface droughts, and the arrested currents will flow again, and the permanent values eventually declare themselves.

Meanwhile one must turn to the past to learn what these permanent values are in the field of fiction; for it is not always easy to ascertain, if one tries to discover them in one's contemporaries. There is a law of mental optics which makes it difficult, in all the arts, to separate surface novelty from real originality; but few are conscious of this optical incapacity, and some (it must be remembered) are not afflicted by it. In spite of the *Quarterly* a handful of Keats's contemporaries knew what he had given them; and in every generation there has been an eye adjusted to focus the eternal at short range.

In general, however, when the range is too close, the object contemplated tends to become either blurred or monstrously enlarged; and it is only necessary to study that master of all the critics, Sainte-Beuve, to find countless instances of the unreliability of contemporary "close-ups." Perhaps only one great creative artist can discern the supreme qualities of another; as Napoleon did when he saw Goethe, as Balzac did when he read Stendhal.

Taking this difficulty into account, I am inclined to think that the best way of estimating contemporary writers is by extracting from the whole body of fiction some evidence of what its lasting qualities are; to find out what "keeps" and what does not. Though in all the arts it is admitted that contemporary judgments are often—temporary, we agree to assume that the verdict of time is final. And that verdict, where the writing of fiction is concerned, seems to say that two qualities alone survive the test. One, and the principal, is the creating of characters which so possess us with the sense of their reality that we talk of Anna Karenina, Becky Sharp, the Père Goriot, and Tess, as of real people whom we have known and lived with; and the other is the art of relating these characters to whatever general law of human experience made the novelist choose to tell their tale rather than another.

In examining the work of recent novelists it is somewhat disconcerting to find how seldom either of these points seems to have engaged their attention. They may perhaps be said to have dismissed them as irrelevant to the new theory of the novel; but I wish they had not discarded what are and must always be the two things most difficult of achievement. I am always suspicious, in creative work, of modifications which avoid difficulties; and nothing in the novelist's task puts his ability to the test as does the creating and keeping alive of his characters; and, next to that, the reasoned relating of their individual case to the general human problem. A tale in which the characters drift by like figures in a film is much easier to reel off than one in which a deeper significance is sought, and makes itself felt to the end.

Two perils beset the average reader: he is apt to be taken either by sheer sentimentality, or by what one might call a cultured mediocrity; and if left to himself would swing contentedly between the

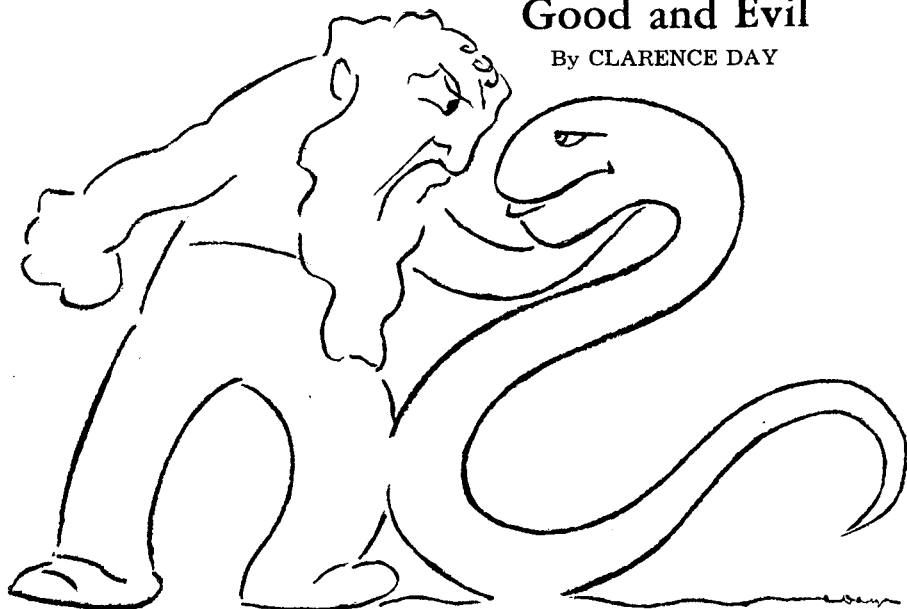
two. But the appalling facilities for the dissemination of pseudo-culture, the virtual impossibility of escaping from the current literary contagions, have disturbed the pleasant somnolence of the majority. They are told every morning, by wireless and book-jacket, by news-item and picture-paper, who is in the day's spotlight, and must be admired (and if possible read) before the illumination shifts; and every passing fad and experiment in their favorite field of letters is pressed on them with bewildering rapidity. All this tends to make popular judgments more unreliable than ever; but it is the more instructive to note that when a Babbitt struts on the stage the thin shadows take flight before his sturdy flesh-and-blood, and a deep laugh of appreciation encircles the world.

Mr. Lewis is not the only creator of live people among modern novelists, but I choose him as a symbol because the line he follows—while it is in some danger of becoming a rut—seems to me to be the true one. In his quest of material he has conformed to Goethe's counsel, and plunged his hand into the thick of average human nature; and I believe the greatest error of the younger novelists, of whatever school, has been to imagine that abnormal or highly specialized characters offer a richer field than the normal and current varieties. Emily Brontë was a woman of genius; but if she had lived longer, and attained to a closer contact with reality, she might have made, out of the daily stuff of life at Haworth parsonage, a greater and more deeply moving book than by picturing a houseful of madmen. Dostoevsky, in "The Idiot," also essayed the study of abnormal people; but he blent them with the normal, as life itself does—and thus, incidentally, showed that their chief interest, for the reader, lies not in their own case, but in its tragic and destructive reactions on the normal. And readers who, in spite of their admiration for "Wuthering Heights," sometimes find it difficult to disentangle Heathcliff from Earnshaw, and the two Catherine from one another, will not easily forget the living presence of Prince Myshkin, and his strange vigil with the murderer beside the dead body of Nastasia.

The general reading public, suggestible though it is, and anxious to follow the hints given by the selective minority, is yet irresistibly drawn to any book based on genuine observation of character, and embodied in consecutive and significant narrative. Sinclair Lewis's success is probably due far more to the fact that he has drawn people with recognizable faces, and told their stories with a vigorous simplicity, than because of any general perception of his rare gift of tragic irony. A long course of cinema obviousnesses and of tabloid culture has rendered the majority of readers insensible to allusiveness and to irony, but they still rouse themselves when they see "a likeness" to flesh-and-blood in the people they are asked to read about; and I believe this instinct is a sound one, and that such books as Sinclair Lewis's and Theodore Dreiser's have more of the lasting stuff of good fiction in them than dozens of works dressed up in a passing notoriety.

Good and Evil

By CLARENCE DAY



Good is noble, Good is strong,
But his task is hard and long;

Evil is so epicene,
So elusive, so serene.

Soldier of the Queen

TRUMPETER. SOUND! By D. L. Murray.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

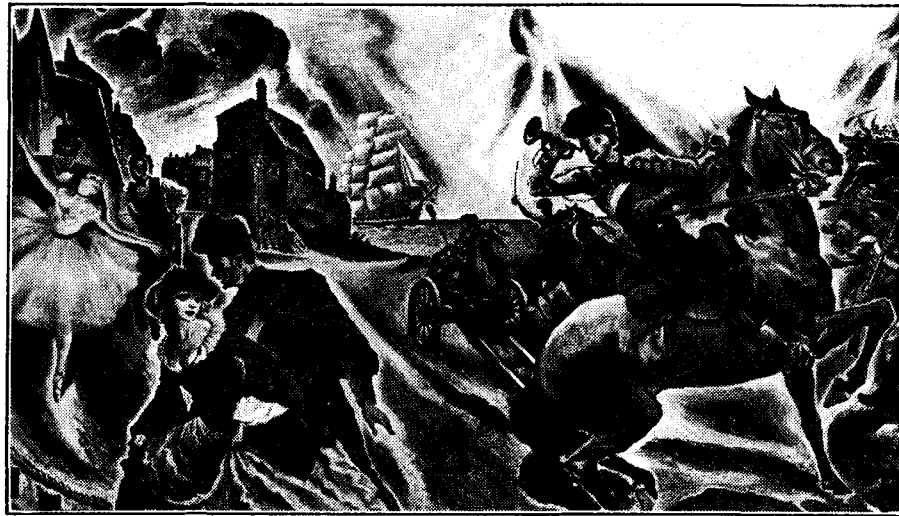
Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

MR. MURRAY, a new name to me and an author concerning whom I know practically nothing, obviously makes no bones about the fact that he is writing romance, romance in the setting of that Victorian era which, despite all our gibes at it, still fascinates us with its peculiar shadows and highlights. But he possesses a virtue that lifts his work above that of the ordinary romancer: this is his appetite for research, for ferreting out details of speech, dress, occupation, recreation, and applying skilfully all the minute touches that render a period pictorially.

Victorian London, with all its sights and sounds and smells, lies about us in rare

curies" in action on the Peninsula. Here is a romancer with a truly remarkable eye for realistic detail and the ability to recreate the soldierly life of an epoch, not merely in the officers' mess but in barracks and through the tedium of a campaign. In fact, one of the most striking things in the book is its revelation of the barbarous treatment of the common soldier in that day, a treatment that a certain number, like Mark, survived. It is a wonder that any of them did. Living conditions in peace-time for the common soldier seem to have been far worse than conditions on Welfare Island today!

I may say, frankly, that I myself did not mind the melodrama attendant upon the character of Lord Blackwater, though his character is distinctly out of Bulwer-Lytton and "Ouida." Nor did I particularly care that old Fawkes and his daughter,



JOHN ALAN MAXWELL'S JACKET DESIGN FOR "TRUMPETER, SOUND!"

reality from the moment Mark, the nine-year-old, and his mother and putative father descend from one of the early railroad trains at London Bridge Station. Mark is placed, in trade, with a Mincing Lane firm of wholesale importing druggists, drysalers, and macassar-oil merchants, and a lodging found for him with O. Fawkes, late Bluemantel of the Juvenile Drama, Print, and Tinsel Warehouse in Greensleeves Row. Mr. Fawkes has a most delightful daughter, Fancy Fawkes, a dancer in the romantic drama at the Ionic Theatre. The first book of the novel takes Mark into young manhood, through various vicissitudes, his final falling in love with Fancy, and his disastrous, though epic, fight at the Loriner's Arms with Jim Ballon. As a result of this fight he leaves the Fawkes and takes the Queen's shilling.

The second book involves Mark's being whipped into shape at Ranelagh Cavalry Barracks till he becomes a trumpeter in the "Mercuries," the same being the Hereditary Prince of Saxe-Rothburg's Own Hussars. Meanwhile Fancy Fawkes meets with disaster upon the stage and falls into a strange marriage. The third book shows the Light Division on the Crimean Peninsula, shows it in action at the Alma, Balaclava, and Inkerman. It also completes a melodramatic story involving Mark as a bastard son of the late Earl of Blackwater, his legitimate half-brother, Lord Blackwater, Fancy Fawkes, and other characters.

It is not, however, in the development of a rather fantastic plot—as were most of Dickens's—that my interest lies. Mr. Murray is, of course, a true romancer. One of the matters he has woven into his story is a romancer's explanation of the "Apparition of the Unknown Mounted Officer" at the Alma, discussed by A. W. Kinglake, to whom he makes grateful acknowledgment and to whom, with one other, he dedicates his book. This apparition bore upon the fate of the Light Brigade in its famous charge at Balaclava. Mr. Murray's explanation, despite its melodramatic elements, is plausible. But, taking this as an instance of the romancer's inspiration, the outstanding merit of Mr. Murray's writing exists not in plot but, for one thing, in the verisimilitude in which he clothes his description of the "Mer-

and the baby born of a mock-marriage, became gypsy outcasts on London streets before the truly Victorian happy ending. Even when Lord Blackwater murmurs, above the bay of Sebastopol, "My God! and to me she was a toy!" I choked it down, for the sake of the London described in the first book, of the military training—with all its outrage—described in the second, and for the realistic details of action on the Peninsula as described in the third. In the last book Mr. Murray handles rather nicely a "fadeout" method from one section or chapter into another—as when the cries of the stragglers coming into the first bivouac before Alma blend into the street-cries Fancy hears waking from her sleep in far-off London.

I have always liked toy theatres. Perhaps it was the toy theatre maker who seduced me in the beginning of this book; but though there are certainly elements of toy theatre representation in the story there is also present the vigorous creative ability of one not to be altogether duped by the glamour of romance.

Dramatic Suspense

HARRIET. By Elizabeth Jenkins. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1934. \$2.

THIS story of a brutal murder perpetrated in Victorian England by a family with pretensions to middle-class "respectability" has suggestions of Wilkie Collins and of Madame Tussaud's; but the handling is modern and incisive. Harriet is a feeble-minded woman whom Lewis Oman, a cheap climber, marries for her money. She is subjected by Oman and his family to a process of brutalization which leads to her death; but it is all so gradual that the Omans delude themselves out of any feeling of responsibility. The story is absorbing throughout, rather for its dramatic suspense than for its latent horror. Three-dimensional background and characterization are essential to the distillation of horror. But the author emphasizes the events at the expense of the potentially rich background; and psychology at the expense of characterization. The psychology, however, is convincing; and "Harriet," if it does not realize all its opportunities as a novel, is a fascinating case history.

An Authentic Hero

(Continued from first page)

torious brilliance on all occasions; that he should have done his own demolitions, his own reconnaissance, even his own spying; that he should have triumphed with a minimum of bloodshed in the bloodiest of all wars; that to the qualities of a great soldier he should have added those of an equally great statesman; that he should have displayed the virtues of courage, gentleness, tact, and humor in the highest degree; that he should have written a book that is probably destined to be a classic of literature; and, finally, that he should have cast aside the fruits of action—fame and power and emolument—in no spirit of self-sacrifice, but as things not worth bothering about—if this is not miraculous, the word has no meaning.

It is something in this age of great machinery and little minds to know for certain that a hero of heroes has, beyond doubt, risen from the ranks of our contemporaries; something more to know that he is still among us, in the prime of life, and with a wisdom ripened by years of deliberately sought retirement. It is not the Lawrence of Arabia that is of importance now. It is the Lawrence of the future, the man who, if any single man can, is capable of giving guidance and leadership to a distracted civilization.

It will, at any rate, be better for us to give a rest to the ignoble business of debunking predeceased greatness, and, instead, try to comprehend such living greatness as Providence has vouchsafed us. It is in this spirit that Captain Liddell Hart has approached his subject. His attitude might best be described as one of critical hero-worship. It is to his credit that he has resisted what must have been the temptation to limit his view to that of the military expert appreciating a soldier whom he justly ranks among the leading commanders of all time. He has, indeed, done full justice to Lawrence the soldier, and, for the first time, revealed the nature and magnitude of his achievement. But unlike the other great captains he has portrayed, Lawrence was not a soldier by profession or, indeed, by nature. The business of killing frankly disgusted him. The one pitched battle that he staged, a perfect gem of tactical skill, resulting in the complete victory of his undisciplined and unreliable tribesmen over a formidable regular force armed with machine guns, filled him with nothing but shame that he had been induced to fight at all, instead of paralyzing his enemy by bloodless finesse.

But Lawrence was not one of those geniuses who only exist in books, and to whom the solution of all problems comes in flashes of sudden intuition. If any man possessed the infinite capacity for taking pains, it was he. Not one of his almost infallibly brilliant strokes was executed without preparation of a sort that no previous commander has dreamed or dared undertake. If he wanted to know what the enemy was doing, even at a time when his name was known and dreaded, he coolly walked into his lines and found out, without ever being found out himself. The narrowest shave he had was when he was disguised as a woman, and had to flee from some lovesick Turkish soldiers!

One incident shows the practical quality of Lawrence's heroism. It was during that one battle of his. He, with a certain sheik, was taking refuge behind a little flinty bank which was cracking under the barrage of no less than twenty Turkish machine guns. Clearly it was a case of making a bolt for it, and Lawrence, being on foot, started off first. By some miracle he arrived safe at his main position. But on that run for his life he remembered to take count of his paces, in order that, when the Turks arrived at the position, he might have the exact range of them.

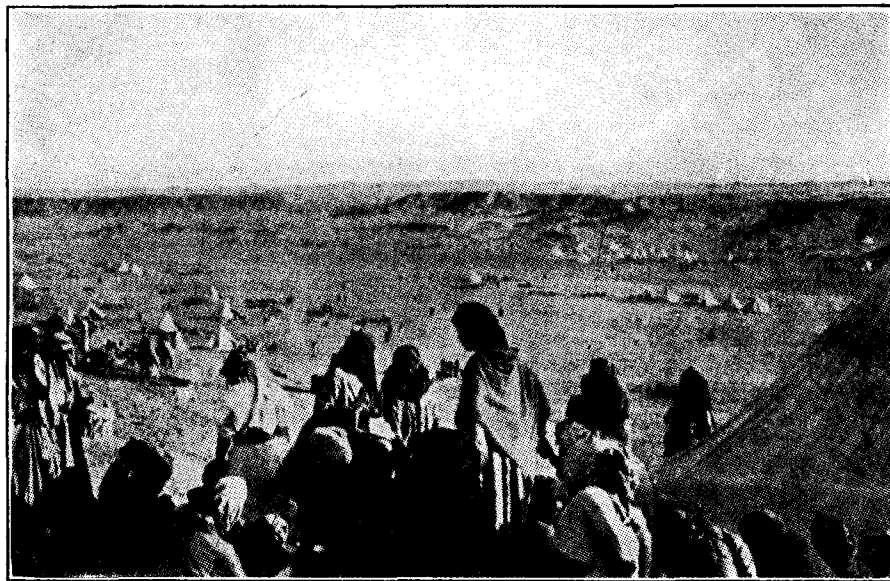
The most amazing feature in the career of this hardly credible being is the fact, brought out for the first time by Captain Liddell Hart, that the young archaeologist, when the war surprised him in his peaceful activities, was more profoundly versed in military science than, probably, any of the army chiefs. He had gone to sources that were either neglected or practically unknown, and whose importance is only being revealed now by Captain Liddell Hart himself. He had studied the French

masters of the eighteenth century, from whom Napoleon himself had learnt his trade, and of whom the most brilliant of all, Bourget, was represented in England by one solitary volume.

Perhaps no commander ever ruled such a nightmare force as Lawrence's Arabs. They were practically incapable of enduring casualties—pitted in a hammer-and-tongs fight against such a born soldier as the Turk they were a broken reed. They had scarcely any discipline, and would fly upon the spoil in the moment of victory. The tribes were at variance with each other and frequently could not be employed in each other's territory. The chiefs had to be kept loyal by perpetual bribes. And yet Lawrence was capable, by the sheer force of genius, of turning this weakness into strength, of conquering 100,000 square miles of territory and putting out of action some 70,000 Turks, with no losses worth speaking of to his own side.

As a statesman he proved himself as great as he was in the field, and he had that same gift of turning out to have been always in the right. His confidential monograph on the art of dealing with Hejaz Arabs is a masterpiece of concise wisdom. The counsel he gave to the British Government after the war was as sound as it was honorable. It was as a result of his advice that King Hussein of the Hejaz lost his kingdom.

And then comes the most surprising phase of all in Lawrence's career. With the laurels of victory on his brow, with honor, wealth, fame, at his command, and the glow of youth still in his veins, he casts all the rewards and dreams of ambition deliberately aside, divests himself even of the name he has made legendary, and retires to the servitude and drudgery of life as a common soldier. He was not even



OUTSIDE FEISAL'S TENT AT WEJH

Photograph by T. E. Lawrence

allowed the privileges of an ordinary soldier, but subjected by suspicious authority to a tyranny of petty persecution as odious as it was, perhaps, inevitable. Nothing, however, could damp his spirits or quench his genius. Though he will never condescend to accept so much as a lance-corporal's stripe, he is even now at work on what may conceivably prove the salvation of his country in case of another submarine campaign.

But this is not—cannot be—the end. In another year, Lawrence's term of service will have expired. And what then? He may think of retiring to his Wessex cottage, but I do not fancy he will find it so easy to escape his destiny. The culminating act of the drama is yet to be played, and it resembles one of those ancient mysteries in which the hero descends into the underworld for a time, only to gather fresh strength and wisdom for the final conquest. In this age of charlatans and frothing dictators mankind has need of a man who, as Captain Liddell Hart himself says, "is the Spirit of Freedom come incarnate to a world in fetters."

This, surely the most significant biography of our times, is essentially a first volume. When, and under what circumstances, will the second be written?

Esmé Wingfield-Stratford is a historian whose chronicles of the Victorian Age and the contemporary era are among the outstanding historical works of recent years.

The Dilemma of the Socialist Party

THE CHOICE BEFORE US. By Norman Thomas. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LAURENCE STAPLETON

MR. THOMAS and his party are shown to us in this latest volume confronted with a dreadful alternative—marriage with communism, or a single life in which the Tolstoyan purity may no longer be preserved. Alike ruined by her faint-heartedness and—I say this in all sincerity—saved by her conscience, socialism is left a maid whom there were few to know, and very few to love.

The socialist and the communist are divided by the idea of the totalitarian state. According to Mr. Thomas, to reject the concept of democracy is "to deny what the choicest spirits of great generations have valued more than life itself, to claim that any bureaucracy, however devoted, can ever be . . . a sufficient substitute for the heretic who has always been the growing point in the development of society." Confused in logic as this statement is, one ought not to doubt the reality of the connection it indicates between the right to scepticism and the growth of knowledge. And not even the religious fanatic, in whose ultramontane philosophy political science has found much of value, will hold that man should be satisfied "to have any state or commonwealth be forever his mind and conscience." Thus firmly attacking communism in its most vulnerable point, its failure in theory or in practice to bring the real will of the thinking man into a satisfactory relationship with the general will of society, Mr. Thomas has done good service to his cause. Only by a

different. As beginning, he suggests a "get together" of socialists, communists, and the unions, and increased attention to the aspirations of white collar workers and young engineers. In the hour of conflict, a proposal in these terms is indigestible cake to the people. Topped with a plan for an amendment which would give Congress power to pass any social and economic legislation, including a capital levy (this to thwart the wicked Supreme Court which could, of course, declare the very amendment unconstitutional), it ought to increase the demand for red bread.

It is obvious that the American socialist has so far no knowledge of *Realpolitik*. If this is true, the most rational party is eliminated; and the choice before us will perhaps be determined by natural forces, seen as the hypnosis of a Hitler or as the virtue of a worker's revolution. Hope for Mr. Thomas lies in the fact that political science does not recognize the law of the excluded middle.

The Silver Rush

THE SAGA OF THE COMSTOCK LODE.

By George D. Lyman. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1934. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JAMES D. HART

ARTHUR McEWEN, a noted California newspaper man, once wrote: "The life of the Comstock in the old days has never been written so that those who did not share it can understand; it never can be so written, for to be like, all would have to be set down, and that is a feat beyond mortal pen." Dr. Lyman has accepted this challenge, and in his fascinating account of boom days on the Washoe has gone beyond all other contenders in disproving McEwen's contention. The Comstock was a calliope, its rhythm "the ceaseless rumble of ore-wagons—the shrill staccato of steam-whistles, the heavings of hoist—subterranean explosions—the quaking earth—the everlasting roll and surge of titanic stamps," and it is this rhythm which Dr. Lyman has faithfully reproduced. By writing his history in sixty-six short, quick-moving chapters he has simulated the breathless speed, the tempestuous life of the Mountain, and enclosed it once and for all between the covers of a book.

In a work as scholarly as a Ph.D. thesis, and with none of the dull impediments characteristic of such writing, he has been successful in catching the background of the community and superimposing upon it the characters who made it what it was. He has seen the life as one of action and reaction, the inhabitants making the background as much as it made them. His thumbnail sketches of "the boys"—the Grosch brothers, Comstock, Sandy Bowers, the Bonanza kings, Terry, Bill Stewart, and others who crowded the scene, are entwined in the hurly-burly tapestry of the times, and yet each manages to stand out clearly by itself. Occasionally Dr. Lyman becomes too enthusiastic about his characters and glorifies them out of perspective, forgetting that they were only silver miners bent on making their "pile" and getting back to "the States." However, such lapses are comparatively rare, and generally Dr. Lyman reproduces the spirit of flush times in Nevada with fidelity as well as vigor.

Dr. Lyman has been wise in confining the main part of his narrative to the eight most active years of Virginia City, but the desire for a dramatic ending evidently precluded his furnishing an epilogue dealing with the post-Civil War years, which would have made the book of more historical importance. His reason for ending so abruptly—the contention that the population left in 1865 as suddenly as it had come—appears erroneous, for it is to be remembered that from 1865 to 1873 the average annual production of the mines exceeded ten million dollars, and in 1875 the Con Virginia and American mines alone milled twenty-five million dollars' worth of ore. But on the whole Dr. Lyman has been successful in depicting the times objectively in their historical relation, while still keeping in key with the wild shrieking of the Comstock's steam-whistles and the thunder of its quartz-mills.