

The Pennsylvania Commoner

THADDEUS STEVENS. By Thomas Frederick Woodley. Harrisburg, Pa.: The Telegraph Press. 1935.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

IT is curious how the tempestuous, beligerent, vindictive personality of Thaddeus Stevens has remained one of the most vivid and interesting in our political history. To his own generation he was hardly more prominent than Ben Wade and not so imposing as Charles Sumner; but while rough Ben Wade has yet to find a passable biographer, and Sumner is now regarded with almost universal dislike and widespread contempt, Thad Stevens still looms up compellingly in the foreground of Civil War and Reconstruction history.

For this there are two good reasons. In the first place, he had, as Webster said of Rufus Choate, an instinct for the jugular. It was he who laid a sure finger upon the means of humiliating Andrew Johnson, of exalting the power of Congress, and of placing the Negroes and radicals in control of the still-struggling South. As a second consideration, his acrid temperament, his stinging irony and sarcasm, his imperious will, his vengefulness, made him a dramatic figure. Long after most men have forgotten what Zach Chandler and Oliver P. Morton ever did, they will retain a picture of the implacable Thad Stevens being carried in a chair to the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, and of his burial in the little Negro cemetery of Lancaster. It is perhaps not an enviable fate to be remembered in the fashion Stevens is remembered, as an incarnation of sectional hatred, the representative of the worst forces of a tragic period. But a certain respect is bound up with the remembrance; if far from a statesman, the old Commoner was every inch a man, whose qualities extort a tribute even from such hostile writers as Claude G. Bowers and George Fort Milton.

To the two good biographies of Stevens previously existing, Mr. Woodley now adds a third. The sympathetic yet judicious volume by Samuel W. McCall is a vivid bit of personal portraiture, done with literary skill, though now antiquated and too sketchy to be satisfactory; the much fuller, more scholarly, and more critical work by J. A. Woodburn has far more value, though written before some of the most significant material on Reconstruction was brought to light. Mr. Woodley has neither Mr. McCall's literary grace nor Professor Woodburn's scholarly equipment. Yet he very capably fills some gaps which the earlier writers left in Stevens's history. Being a Pennsylvania attorney, he naturally and properly presents a much fuller record of Stevens's early career—that is, his activities before 1861—than the other writers. And there are few other parts of Stevens's life to which he does not add some new touches. He has ransacked the manuscript collections in Washington, Philadelphia, Cambridge, and other cities, has hunted up the unused records of Stevens's relations with his nephews, and has cast his net widely

over old newspaper files in search of fresh items. The very illustrations of his book have a refreshing originality. It might be much better written, but it is not to be neglected by students of the man or the time.

The new material upon the grim fanatic changes none of the older views upon him or his work. It simply underlines and reinforces the accepted impression of his narrowness, his courage, his hardness of heart, and his sincerity. Mr. Woodley gives us some fresh facts upon Stevens as a business man and ironmaster, but his iron business did singularly little to enlarge his vision or render him more flexible. Its comparatively unprosperous character perhaps contributed to sour his views. The author tells us more than any previous writer about Stevens's reading; but here again his excursions into historical and political literature did little to liberate his spirit. We learn a good many details about his dexterity in politics, which often came close to trickery. A good many quotations from Stevens's public utterances do more to prove his forcefulness of speech, which sometimes had the blasting quality of a sudden burst of flame, than his supposed wit. Indeed, he was wholly lacking in the kind of wit that made Tom Reed, for example, famous. He excelled with the bludgeon and not the rapier, and even his much-praised sarcasm had a heavy, brutal quality, as in his elaborate comparison of Johnson's and Seward's swing around the circle in 1866 with the tour of a travelling circus. Perhaps the best example of his irony, as the author remarks, was his reference to his measure for seizing 400,000,000 acres of the Southerners' land as a "mild confiscation." Mr. Woodley gives some new illustrations of his total inability to see the other man's point of view, even when the other man was as mild, as persuasive, as consummately wise and practical a member of his own party as his nominal chief, Abraham Lincoln.

Perhaps the chief contribution of this thorough but unskillfully written book is the evidence it offers for Stevens's sin-

cerity. To be sure, it was the sincerity of a clouded and terribly myopic vision. But in spite of all that has been alleged against Stevens's purity of motive—in spite of the allegations that he planned the "Tapeworm Railroad" in Pennsylvania to fill his own pocket, that he opposed Lincoln's policies because Lincoln put Simon Cameron into the Cabinet instead of himself, that he hated the Southerners because Lee's army burned his iron mill, that his devotion to the Negroes gained a special fierceness from the circumstance that he made a Negro housekeeper his mistress—we rise from this record with faith that the detraction was essentially false. He was an honest man. It was his fierce, unrecking sincerity which made him so powerful a force in Reconstruction days. It was this which, conjoined with his unwisdom and prejudice, made his career so lamentable a calamity to the Southern whites, to the Republican Party of the North, and in the end to the Negro race itself.

Immoral Anthology

AN IMMORAL ANTHOLOGY. Decorated by André Durenceau. 1934.

THIS is a collection of ribald verses which proves by exception the rule that such books are always poorly printed: in this case the Walpole Printing Office has produced a very handsome volume! The verses themselves are interesting, and some of them are of the best of their kind—and that kind is such that under "civilized" conditions their circulation must be restricted. Yet they should be available, and it is highly desirable that they be available in decent format. The book has been set in a good kind of sans-serif type, with initials in gold; there are some excellent decorations in line, and the binding is in decorated paper boards, with cloth back. The book has, deservedly, been included in the "Fifty Books" show of the current year. Two hundred and ninety copies of it have been printed for sale.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
WAX <i>Ethel Lina White</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Deaths in British small-town wax-works gallery excite curiosity of newspaper gal—to her deadly peril.	No sleuthing to speak of but a fantastic and gashly picture of mean intrigue amid petty people—with romantic trimmings.	Grim but Good
SUDDEN DEATH <i>Lee Thayer</i> (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	All evidence—despite phony confession—points to suicide of shipping-man; but Peter Clancy thinks different, and proves it.	Author does good job of hornswoggling reader, though story is inclined to sag a bit in middle.	Agreeable
DR. TANCRED BEGINS <i>G. D. H. and Margaret Cole</i> (Crime Club: \$2.)	Envenoming of tyrannical old Briton starts young Dr. T. on trail whose end finds him much older and wiser.	Leisurely but interesting first vol. of a mystery whose final solution is divulged in a volume yet to come.	So far so good...

The New Books

Fiction

THE SECOND PRINCE. By Thomas Bell.
Putnam. 1935. \$2.50.

"Youth's eternal quest—in the chaos of today": so the jacket reads, so the first two chapters read, with Striker Godown, the very evident and virile hero, setting forth in the midst of some good writing, to find adventure, beauty, and truth. Echo? Echo? Right. The plush harps of James Branch Cabell sounded and sounded the theme for a decade. Only the chaos was lacking: there were instead the middle-of-the-week, colorless Wednesdays which all the Cabellian heroes found, at last, were their disillusioning birthdays. Meantime the depression has intervened, and heroes, like true Saturday's children, must work for their bread.

Striker Godown works and works hard, as a sailor, as a laborer, in a brief chapter. For a while the luscious harps of the twenties are still. But Striker must arise and go, now, and go to Indian Hill, where peace comes dropping slow, and think about it all. Blackie, a boy from the old home town, who went forth adventuring, too, goes back with him. (Here and there events like the cold suburban train ride are actual and real in the writing.) There is a girl. Her name is Lee and she writes advertising and cups her breasts. But she is beautiful, she is beauty. Striker decides he has Beauty, at least, when he marries her. In between his decision to think about it all and marrying the beautiful Lee, Striker thinks about it all, all being his ancestors, his disillusionments, and, hallmark of the depression, something maestro Cabell never mentioned, a strike down on River Street in the Iron Works. Striker begins to write a book in which Striker Godown sets out in search of beauty, adventure and truth. By the by, he has shocked his old neighbors and friends with his thoughts and the people he invites to dinner.

They say, or They said, a few months ago, there's "a swing to romance." "The Second Prince" sadly proves They're right. But let romance keep its mushy fingers off of places like River Street and Iron Works. These at least are no Lands of the Heart's Desire.

K. W.

VALLEY PEOPLE. By Frances Marion.
1935. \$2.

When a good book is written by someone in the movies it is as surely news as when a man bites a dog. The parasitic art has just produced its first piece of important fiction in Frances Marion's novel.

"Valley People" has nothing to do with movies. It is a series of sketches of characters in an obscure California valley, revisited by a writer afflicted with a nostalgia for her birthplace. The publishers speak of it as a prose "Spoon River Anthology," not without some justification. Miss Marion has the same feeling for the stark tragedies of simple people as Masters displayed in his poems. Yet while "Valley People" cannot be placed upon the same

literary plane as "Spoon River," it is more pleasing in one respect, that its colors are brighter, if not laid on by so sure a brush.

One element of technique Miss Marion has mastered perfectly. This is the device of producing a certain, specific effect by having an unsympathetic character say exactly the opposite. "Gray Claypool's Wife," one of the sketches in the series, has to do with a cultured and wealthy young woman who marries a prosperous farmer and comes to live in the Valley. His mother lives with them, and because "it's only fair to us that you hear it direct from me," this vicious old woman tells of her daughter-in-law's "sin." Anyone who can read this story without feeling an impulse to tear a page out of the book and rip it into shreds for the sake of doing something physically violent to Ma Claypool must have a lot of self control.

This is Miss Marion's first book. She is the author of some of the more endurable motion pictures, which have occupied her since the close of the war. It is interesting to learn that there can be exceptions to the rule that the studios smother creative ability.

R. B.

EVERYTHING IS THUNDER. By J. L. Hardy. Doubleday, Doran. 1935.

An English officer, after several unsuccessful attempts, escapes from a German prison camp in 1917; he falls in love with a Berlin prostitute who falls in love with him and stays in love, even after she learns his identity; thanks to her he escapes to Holland, but he loses her on the way and cannot rest until he has expiated the offense, however accidental, of saving himself and not her. Here is the material of a first-rate romantic melodrama out of which Mr. Hardy has extracted full value. He himself escaped from a German prison camp to Holland, and he remembers it vividly enough to make the reader live the story with him; you feel as you read it the sense of continual deadly peril of a man at large in disguise in an enemy country, wanted not only for escape but for murder—and yet along with that the vital impulse that drives a man to seize as much of life as he can on the edge of the grave.

With the psychological background of his story Mr. Hardy has been less successful, doubtless because this is his first novel. Hugh McGrath was a neurotic, tormented from childhood by a sense of inferiority and as an adult by the realization that he was never quite up to a crisis. He may have behaved as bravely, as alertly, as the average man; but his conviction of insufficiency drove him to create a mental image of himself behaving better than the average man, and he took wild chances trying to live up to it. Mr. Hardy has here projected a valid and very interesting character, but is not skilful enough to bring him to life at all times; till he gets his hero into action he cannot show us what made McGrath what he was, he has to tell us. But his heroine is by no means the conventional virtuous prostitute of romance; her behavior, however amazing, is

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