

The New Books

Biography

COUNT RUMFORD OF MASSACHUSETTS. By James Alden Thompson. Farrar & Rinehart. 1935. \$3.

In the one hundred and twenty-five years since the death of Count Rumford, his career has been the subject of numerous pamphlets, notices in biographical collections, sketches in more general histories, and one lengthy and unreadable biography, the "Memoir of Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford," by George E. Ellis, published in 1871. Now James Alden Thompson has written the first readable full-length Rumford portrait.

At first sight it would appear that biographers have been missing something for more than a century. Benjamin Thompson, born in Woburn, Massachusetts, in 1753, first ventured as a dry-goods merchant's apprentice, but became, in rapid succession, colonial major, English Under-Secretary of State, colonel of a regiment of dragoons, knight, count of the Holy Roman Empire, and chamberlain to the Elector of Bavaria. Also, he was a leading scientist of his time. But Rumford's character is discouraging to his would-be biographer. As Mr. Thompson observes, "brilliant mathematician, painstaking investigator, pioneer in the field of light and heat, excellent organizer, and a scientist of the first rank, Rumford was utterly devoid of humor and of humanism. Except for a cold statistical record of accomplishment there is nothing about him to remember pleasantly, no incident or anecdote which serves to lighten up his personality. He was hard, brilliant, self-centered from first to last."

If, therefore, this biography seems at times to be too much a mere narrative of events, and too little a character study, the fault lies quite as much with the subject as with the author. And though the work shows no evidence of original research, it presents a readable and interesting account of a strange Yankee genius who got to the top largely by his knack of knowing which side of his bread was buttered.

R. J. B.

Fiction

WITHIN THE WALLS. By Agnes Carr Vaughan. Macmillan. 1935.

An old and favorite tale retold always has a special fascination even if the new interpretation falters a little. So it is with "Within the Walls," an imaginative but rather simple account of the siege and sack of Troy. The new story is woven around the married life of Andromache, the wife of Hector; and the long and futile struggle within the walls and hearts of the Trojans has great pathos when seen through the eyes of this gentle yet courageous alien girl. One follows charming apocryphal episodes in the domestic life of Troy and carefully reconstructed rituals in temple and longhouse. One sees the Trojans at home, without their epic splendor. They seem very primitive in

their superstitions and very modern in their loves and jealousies.

As Chaucer, writing of Troy, gave it the manners of a medieval love-court, so the modern author has, perhaps unconsciously, given the relationships of her characters a modern informality. She has dealt warily with the more famous events, so much so that the narrative is sometimes impressionistic to the point of haziness. Trivialities of housekeeping and the gossip of the town are given in detail, while the actual course of events is often only barely suggested. But even when it is difficult to follow, without referring to the old texts, "Within the Walls" gives the reader a deep sense of the reality behind the myth.

D. P.

KING COFFIN. Conrad Aiken. Scribner. 1935. \$2.50.

One cannot open this novel without being struck by the resemblance of its endless paragraphs, its solid, unindented blocks of print, to those that fill the pages of Henry James. The resemblance is not accidental; the novel is, one feels, deliberately conceived in the Jamesian tradition of horror. The horror is psychological, purely subjective, a web spun out interminably in the attics of the mind. It is the story of a consciousness locked within itself, continually revolving in the tireless and trivial logic of insanity. Certainly, Jasper Ammen is mad; of that much one can be sure; it is in the insidious approach of madness that the horror of the story lies.

The flow of Jasper Ammen's consciousness is filled with the details of an external world but they no longer seem to have an existence in themselves. The factual descriptions of Boston streets produce a dream-like impression upon the reader, or perhaps, rather, that sense of a dislocation in reality that comes occasionally as the result of exhaustion or prolonged insomnia. It is no doubt precisely such an effect that Mr. Aiken has striven to produce; he has been immensely successful in creating the atmosphere of an abnormal state of mind. One admires

the cleverness with which he handles his theme and turns it this way and that and explores its every possible winding, but one is never entirely absorbed. A certain effort of attention is necessary in following the tenuous thread of the story through all the obscure subtleties woven about it; the rather curious and fascinating quality of the beginning does not sustain itself far along; and one is left at the end with a feeling that the book is one of those tours-de-force essentially more interesting to the author in its writing than it is ever likely to be to the reader.

C. C.

ALCUIN: A DIALOGUE BY CHARLES BROCKTON BROWN. A Type-facsimile Reprint of the First Edition with an Introduction by L. E. Kimball. New Haven: Carl & Margaret Rollins. 1935.

"Alcuin" is interesting as the first work of the writer often spoken of as the first American man of letters. It is a very rare book, and this excellent facsimile will be welcomed by collectors of Americana. Unlike many rarities it is a good book in itself. As a dialogue on the part which women should be allowed to play in government it is a pioneer, and furthermore, unlike the florid Gothic tales which gave Brown his reputation, it is written in a simple and effective English.

H. S. C.

Miscellaneous

I BREAK STRIKES. The Technique of Pearl L. Bergoff. By Edward Levinson. Illustrated. McBride. \$2.50.

The word sincerity is ambiguous. Frequently we credit with sincerity those who believe their own rationalizations. From this point of view, capitalists who are incensed by talk of a class war, but who pin sheriff's badges on thugs to "preserve law and order," are "sincere," as are the Japanese who annex Chinese territory for the purpose of "improving relations with the Chinese people," and are not in "a state of war" when they bomb Chinese cities.

No one reading this cool, precise, and completely documented record of strike-breaking in the United States can doubt, (Continued on next page)

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE CAT AND THE CLOCK Charles G. Booth (Crime Club: \$2.)	Dancer with evil rep. slain in Hollywood. Anatole Fliquet, Sureté man on vacation, solves it 'mid rattling of old skeletons.	Full-bodied affair with flamboyant movie décor staccato action and dialog, suave sleuthing, and blobs of pupple pession.	Worth reading
THE SHADOW ON THE DOWNS R. C. Woodthorpe (Crime Club: \$2.)	Councilman-contractor, bent on desecrating English downs, is envenomed. Vinegary Miss Perks sifts suspects with odd results.	Machinations of devil in small town portrayed with insight and humor—though sundry horrors seem lugged in for effect.	Amiable

The Clearing House

CONDUCTED BY AMY LOVEMAN

Inquiries, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, should be directed to Miss Loveman, in care of The Saturday Review.

A BALANCED RATION FOR A WEEK'S READING

THE THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS. By Thorstein Veblen. Viking.

ENGLISH JOURNEY. By J. B. Priestley. Harpers.

THE VENETIAN GLASS NEPHEW. By Elinor Wylie. Knopf.

Robert Frost

S. S. of Bryn Mawr, Pa., who is writing a paper on Robert Frost, is having difficulty finding anything on the poet, and wants references to works which contain discussion of him.

IF S. S. wants a brief biographical sketch of Robert Frost she will find that in *LIVING AUTHORS* (Wilson) where his career is rapidly outlined and a few lines of characterization presented. For the man in relation to his work, to the trend of contemporary poetry, and for appraisal of his art she can turn to Percy Boynton's *SOME CONTEMPORARY AMERICANS* (University of Chicago Press: pp. 33-49); Rica Brenner's *TEN MODERN POETS* (Harcourt, Brace) in which pages 1-29 are devoted to Frost, and T. K. Whipple's *SPOKESMEN* (Appleton-Century: pp. 94-114). Amy Lowell, in *TENDENCIES IN AMERICAN POETRY* (Houghton Mifflin), has a chapter in the course of her critical interpretation of what was then the new movement in poetry in which she introduces biographical material as well as an analysis of Frost, and Elizabeth S. Sergeant in *FIRE UNDER THE ANDES* (Knopf) has a sensitive study of the man as a personality.

Books on Piracy

G. H. H. of Libertyville, Ill., asks for a list of books—"authentic historical books"—on pirates and of novels in which piracy constitutes the theme.

One of the most popular works on piracy is Howard Pyle's *BOOK OF PIRATES* (Harpers) which presents sketches of some of the most famous gentlemen who have plied this hazardous trade and of their dramatic adventures. Another book which has a wide public is *BUCCANEERS OF AMERICA* (Dutton), by A. O. Equemelin. The most authoritative study of the early pirates is to be found in Captain Charles Johnson's *GENERAL HISTORY OF THE PYRATES* (Dodd, Mead) which contains records of buccaneering exploits up to 1724. This has served as a source book for later works, its material, once reputed inaccurate, having been later proved reliable.

As to fiction, several classics of piracy spring to mind at once. There is first, of course, Defoe's *LIFE, ADVENTURES, AND PIRACIES OF CAPTAIN SINGLETON* (Everyman's Library), a striking example of Defoe's method of weaving into a novel fact and

fiction in such happy combination as to effect a complete illusion of reality. Part of the book is based on authentic reports of travellers; the portion in which the action plays in Central Africa reproduces from hearsay an unknown scene with such exactitude as to be regarded as being far in advance of the general geographical knowledge of the time. Next one recalls Scott's *THE PIRATE* into which some of his best description and most sharply individualized characters went, and then that classic of childhood as well as of maturity, Stevenson's *TREASURE ISLAND* and its only less famous successors, *KIDNAPPED* and *EBB TIDE*. Herman Melville wrote a gruesome magazine tale which is included in the volume of short stories entitled *PIAZZA TALES* (R. R. Smith) and in *SHORTER NOVELS* (Boni) and which Random House has published by itself in a handsome volume bearing its own title, *BENITO CERENO*.

Among more recent novels in which piracy has played a prominent role are Richard Hughes's *A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA* (Harpers) in which a band of children encounter and accept as good companions a group of pirates; Rafael Sabatini's *THE SEA HAWK* (Houghton Mifflin), a chronicle of the exploits of a Barbary corsair in Elizabethan times; Robert W. Chambers's *THE MAN THEY HANGED* (Appleton-Century) which takes the dreaded Captain Kidd for hero; Jeffery Farnol's *BLACK BARTLEMY'S TREASURE* and its sequel, *MARTIN CONISBY'S VENGEANCE* (Little, Brown), a story of Inquisition years, and F. Tenynson Jesse's *MOONRAKER: THE FEMALE PIRATE AND HER FRIENDS* (Knopf), which lays part of its scene in Haiti and introduces Toussaint l'Ouverture.

A Manual for Book Reviewers

J. H. R. of Pittsburgh, Pa., wants to have recommended a manual for High School or college students which will help them in reviewing a book.

I have at my elbow the very volume that should be useful, sent to me recently by the Thomas Y. Crowell Company which brought it out a few years ago. This is *THE CRAFT OF THE CRITIC*, by S. Stephenson Smith, and it is precisely such a volume of practical directions as the college or high school student will find useful. The book falls into two parts, the first of which deals with book reviewing, the second with the reviewing of plays. After general discussion of the objective, process, and manner of reviewing, Mr. Smith proceeds to an analysis of the handling of various categories of literature. Thus, for instance, he takes up successively the picaresque novel, the historical story, the mystery tale, the psychological novel, pointing out in each instance the method of approach which is likely to yield the most illuminating comment. The book is definitely intended for the book reviewer as differentiated from the critic, and is both simple and sensible enough to be of use in the classroom.

The New Books

(Continued from preceding page)

after it, that there is a class war, whatever capitalists and their apologists may call it, and that, in this war, the government does take sides, and the side it stands on is that of the property holders. The large armies of strike-breakers supplied by numerous agencies, who also sell the services of provocateurs and spies, and scientific developments of the black-list, are evidence of the class war. And the ease with which criminals can be deputized as sheriffs, squeamish mayors and governors can be overruled in the courts, and the militia can be called in, the course of trials for violence during strikes where almost invariably strikers, men never in court before, are accused of murder and convicted, while strike-breakers, men usually with police records, and held on similar charges, are acquitted, are evidence of the other.

The data here collected for the first time make the book invaluable. But it is to be regretted that the author was satisfied with the presentation of data alone, engrossing as these data are. No doubt he believed that the data would tell their own story, and the author need not intrude to drive home an argument, or pull it together to some arranged conclusions. This self-denial has resulted in an insufficiently organized book. It is not the biography of Pearl L. Bergoff, the strike-breaker king; it is not a history of strike-breaking; it is not an orderly exposition of this front of the class war; nor is it set well enough in the general economic background in relation to which it is like a photograph too closely cropped. From it, however, all readers have something to learn, and to historians, sociologists, and economists, the book will be indispensable.

I. S.

THE SAGA OF THE BOUNTY. Edited by Irvin Anthony. Putnam. 1935. \$2.75.

When on April 28, 1789, the mutineers of His Majesty's Armed Transport *Bounty* cast Captain William Bligh and eighteen men adrift in mid-Pacific, they overlooked the first grim maxim of the pirate. Could they have foreseen the deadly tale that would be told of them in England, a whiff of grape into the overlaid launch would have swept away the saga of the *Bounty* forever.

Mr. Anthony's book makes that saga readily accessible, for the first time, in the exciting words of the men who lived it. An ably selected, swiftly moving compilation of their own first-hand narratives, it arranges the original journals, diaries, letters, and trial testimony in chronological sequence. We have here the true story of the *Bounty* from opening gun to final sullen salvo.

Captain Bligh's personal journal, noted for its account of the voyage in the launch to Timor, that little run of 1,800 leagues, is perhaps the best known of all this material. Here it is, practically complete, covering the *Bounty's* entire cruise, from Spithead to Tahiti and Tofoa, and carrying the master back to England. Equally absorbing are the diaries of Sailing-Master John Fryer and Boatswain's Mate James Morrison. Fryer, a rugged old bar-

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