

## The Pulitzer Prize in History

(Continued from page 14)

been an excellent choice for the committee on biography but his opinions on historiography are not authoritative. Neither of these men could have appraised the books before him on the basis of his own knowledge; doubtless both sought advice, but how were they able to appraise the advice? And not only is their knowledge inadequate: it is unlikely that, in any given year, they had read all of the most publicized contenders for the prize, let alone obscure books which might have been worth more. (Mr. Webb's book was eased quietly into the world by a textbook publisher in a year when General Pershing's was in the headlines of every newspaper.)

At the present time two members of the committee, though distinguished historians, are not trained in nor primarily interested in American history. They are obviously better qualified than the two mentioned above, but they cannot be expected to keep abreast of American history and they do not know from experience what its problems and values are. A committee composed of practising American historians would do a better job. Their professional routine requires them to be familiar with all important work done in the field covered by the award, and only they have the necessary back-

ground and skill to appraise the books actually considered for the prize. Their decision would be less open to objection than, on the average, the Pulitzer selections of the last ten years have been.

In addition, the committee might stipulate that, as in 1919, no award will be made in years when no really important book has appeared. If the terms of the bequest permit, a prize so withheld might be awarded in a succeeding year when two books were thought to be outstanding. At least a negative formulation of standards might also be made; the committee might announce what kinds or classes of books it had not considered, and why. Finally, the method of selection itself should be changed. At present the committee does not select the prizewinner, does not in fact recommend one book. It makes a list of recommendations from which some one, nominally the trustees, makes a choice. Just what value this process has, just why the trustees ask advice when unwilling to take it, just why a committee of advisers should serve at all if it is allowed and even forced to avoid the ultimate responsibility, is far from clear. The committee should agree on one book—not on four or a dozen. Then, if its recommendation should be rejected by the trustees, the committee should announce its choice to the public—which after all is asked to respect the award as authoritative.

## Earnest Biographer

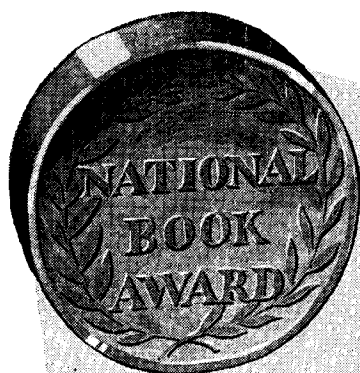
THE EARNEST ATHEIST. By Malcolm Muggeridge. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1937. \$2.75.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

MR. MUGGERIDGE'S hymn of hate against the author of "The Way of All Flesh" adds very little to our knowledge of Samuel Butler, for it simply expands what the late Stuart Sherman wrote in an essay some years ago. The Introduction, which recently appeared in these pages, is much the best thing in the book. The author's hunting down of his anti-hero, his incessant and continual badgering of him, becomes intolerable before the work concludes. The poor man can do nothing to please Mr. Muggeridge, who, though he uses Butler's famous novel as evidence, seems rather to resent the fact that the work in question is a fictional classic. This dislike extends even to Rufus Festing Jones, Butler's companion and biographer. "Jones," he says, "spoke his words, and from Jones's mouth they emerged dead; his ideas rattled about in Jones's mind, making a hollow, empty sound; his spirit in its new tabernacle, Jones, turned to stone."

There are a few flashes of sardonic humor in Mr. Muggeridge's book, lonely little lighthouses to illumine the gray waste of his pages, as when he writes that "Jones used occasionally to abandon himself to secret bouts of filial affection, and once tearfully confessed to Butler that do what he would he could not manage to detest an elderly maiden aunt." But Mr. Muggeridge fails to explain why "The Way of All Flesh" remains a fictional classic; he gives Butler no credit for the effortless ease of his prose style (surely there must be some connection between Butler's passion for Handel, and the Addisonian lucidity with which he wrote); and he fails to explain why Butler held the affection of the little group who surrounded him and hung on his every word—Mr. Cathie, the butler, for example, with whom Mr. Muggeridge talked, "obviously had a deep and sincere affection" for his employer. Mr. Muggeridge has so heavily underlined his distaste for Butler's personality as to make it impossible to get into focus the mean-minded person he constructs, and the attachment of those who believed in Butler. The Jones biography is certainly a little ridiculous, and it is easy to damage the man who thought that the Odyssey was written by a woman, but the true critical problem would seem to be, not why Butler failed as a human being, but why he succeeded as a writer of prose. Mr. Muggeridge's hostility leaves this problem in Egyptian darkness.

Howard Mumford Jones is professor of English at Harvard University. His new book of poems is reviewed on page 10.



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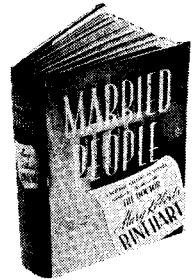
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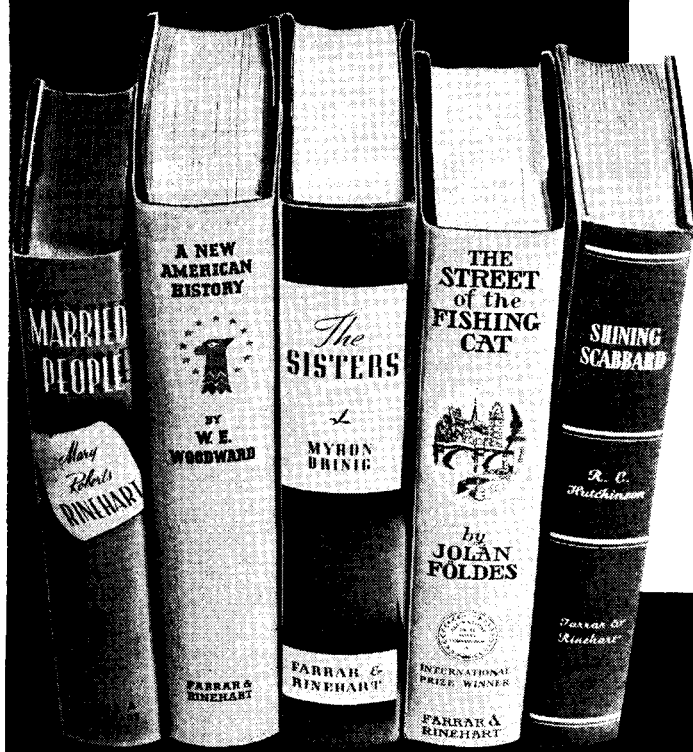
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## Wandering Minstrel

DON GYPSY: ADVENTURES WITH A FIDDLE IN SOUTHERN SPAIN AND BARBARY. By Walter Starkie. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by RICHARDSON WRIGHT

PROFESSOR WALTER STARKIE is a *Romani rai* of the purest ray serene, and probably better washed than most of his *Rom* friends. He has a highly developed nose for Gypsies. He can smell the smoke of their camp fires, miles off, play most of their songs, and read their patterans in a dozen dialects. Once his classes are over (he's Professor of Romance Languages in the University of Dublin) he grabs up his fiddle and staff and is off to be a Gypsy himself.

So far "Raggle-Taggle" has recounted his adventures in Hungary. Then came the first of his plunges into the Iberian Gitanas, told in "Spanish Raggle-Taggle." It is a more sober *Romani rai* that goes this time to Spain, and yet his account loses nothing of either raggle or taggle.

Barbary is his jumping-off place. Here he drops his respectability and tries picking up odd pennies playing on street corners. This is his technique. It invariably brings him contact with some Gypsy, after which his way becomes colorful and really adventurous. Tangier, Tetuan, and the sacred city of Xauen all contribute to his repertoire and circle of vagrant friends. Crossing the Strait, he starts off through Andalusia. Sometimes he permits himself the questionable luxury of a packed railway coach, more often he goes afoot, taking chances on finding a lift. Adventure comes to him without his seeking it—that is the luck of a wandering minstrel. What he is seeking, though, is Gypsies and Gypsy music.

Dropped in between bawdy and picaresque affairs are rich plums of learning. Raggle-taggle or not, Starkie is a learned fellow. A Moorish *Zambra* is worth the whole trip to Barbary. If he needs must perform in a bordello, he is quite satisfied with it so long as he can get some crumb of Gypsy lore or a snatch of obscure Gypsy melody. Though he can be both poetic and healthily Rabelaisian in turns, if torrid romances threaten him he remembers his tutorial dignity and manages to walk away casually. There are times when his plums of learning come thick and fast: page after page is broken by delightful translations of Gypsy songs and bars of their music.

There are times, too, when, with skillful economy of words, he draws the misery of Spain or the tranquillity of a visit to his musical hero Falla or the nostalgic memories of Fernando de Triana, the dean of Deep Song. Now Deep Song is the quarry that many a *rai* visiting Spain has hunted down. Our own Irving Brown of Columbia was one of the most successful collectors of these old songs that modern Gypsies are forgetting.

Finally, as a passionate pilgrim, Starkie went to La Mancha to pay his respects to the shades of Sancho Panza and the lady Dulcinea. For three weeks he wandered on foot from one Manchegan village to another, through a country of thyme and rosemary, of muleteers who sang *coplas* at the top of their voices along the dusty roads, and at night time he found placid bivouac beneath cork trees . . . And down those roads today?

A splendid glossary and bibliography end the book. A book that followers of Gypsy patterans will revel in, a book to make those who never heard the *Romani chib* rise up and go awandering.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
DEAD MEN ARE DANGEROUS Garnett Weston (Stokes: \$2.)	Carnival of killing on California orange hacienda forced to unexpected solution by "Highway," hobo detective extraordinary.	Well-knit fabric of family hatred, diabolical murder devices, miscellaneous villainy, and high-handed but effective sleuthing.	Excellent
THE THING IN THE BROOK Peter Storme (Simon & Schuster: \$2.)	Two thrice-slain corpses and a suicide finally elucidated by "intuitions" of verdant amateur criminologist Henry Hale.	Carefree and tangle-footed sleuthing, bright dialogue, grisly crimes, and an Aesopian—if slightly unfair—criminal <i>modus operandi</i> .	Diverting
THE UNFINISHED CLUE Georgette Heyer (Crime Club: \$2.)	Domineering and generally disliked British knight slain at stock-model houseparty where almost all are suspect. Enter Scotland Yard.	Barring the delightful Lola de Silva, self-confessed incomparable dancer, this is neither as cleverly plotted nor amusing as earlier Heyers.	Average
THE OBSTINATE CAPTAIN SAMSON Gavin Douglas (Putnam: \$2.)	All the soldiery of Savonia couldn't restrain choleric Capt. Samson from sailing with cargo of grain—and more sinister material.	Has its moments—the finish is especially hilarious—but it takes more than Samson's repetitious raging to make really good yarn.	Fair