

Free Lancing in Mexico

GLASS HOUSES. By Carleton Beals.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1938.
\$3.50.

Reviewed by GRACE FLANDRAU

IT IS with a certain delicacy and indeed reluctance that one attempts to comment publicly upon an autobiography. It is not an imaginative expression set back from reality by redistilled emotions and the rigors of an art form that one is called upon to discuss, but the personal life and point of view of the author himself—all of which are susceptible only to a personal response. Indeed, Mr. Beals recognizes this in the title, "Glass Houses," which he has given to his vivid and interesting account of free-lancing as a journalist in Mexico, Italy, and Spain.

The record begins with his arrival in Mexico during the scandalous regime of Carranza, with Villa on the war path in the north and Zapata carrying on his crusade of blood and terror, idealism, right purpose, and unspeakable brutality—which apparently armed revolution always sums up to—throughout the rich provinces of Guerrero, Morelos, and Vera Cruz. Mr. Beals gives us an unforgettable picture of certain revolutionary leaders in the capital—of the greed, debauchery, drunkenness, the waste of public moneys, the treachery, and betrayals. It was a record which was to continue through many bloody years, with practically every successive leader betrayed by fellow revolutionaries and assassinated in turn. No reactionary writer (and I need not say that Mr. Beals is not a reactionary; what his actual degree of leftism is I should not presume to say) could possibly present more accurately the ugliness, horror, suffering, and bad faith that go along with this method of achieving the high purposes of social reform.

With the downfall of Carranza Mr. Beals goes to Europe and writes absorbingly of experiences in Spain and in Italy during the coming of age of Mussolini Fascism. He returns to Mexico and the major part of what follows—though not quite all—deals with personages and affairs in Mexico from about 1923, I take it, to 1930 or '31.

Mr. Beals's political bias is one which all right-minded persons must share. He believes in the independence of Latin American countries, in their freedom from unfair exploitation, and the fulfillment of the best of the revolutionary ideals. But his approach, it seems to me, lacks a certain breadth and profundity.

He shows us that revolutionaries, like anyone else, can be corrupt, debauched, and exploiters of the people, and that politicians and, as he himself declares, especially Latin American politicians, can be and usually are shamelessly dishonest. He presents emissaries of the Soviet Workers Republic entertaining with the utmost lavishness, drinking unlimited quantities of champagne served by liveried lackeys, eager to associate with the rich and fashionable, marrying, one of them, "a flashy blonde with much sex appeal who loved fine clothes and swank." (Good old human nature.) He observes with his mind that weakness and also villainy can be and are found in any group of human beings whatever their race or political creed. But emotionally he is able to believe in only one villain—the American investor, diplomat, capitalist, or government official. Whatever he may have seen with his own eyes, in his heart of hearts the Latin American is always right, the American capitalist or corporation always wrong. The typical American leftist, intellectual rubber stamp. One longs for a deeper and less personal philosophy, a more profound and tragic sense of human problems in all their infinite complexity.

Then too, Mr. Beals's judgments are those of the man who looks on from the sidelines and doesn't have to act. His heroes are very apt to fall from grace when they are no longer talking eloquently about what should be done, but faced with the complex and difficult job of doing it. Witness his criticism of Morrow, his disappointment with Azaña.

Azaña. Men talking in cafés about the ideal state, and then a man, confronted with the impossible task of reconciling the ideas, passions, greeds, prejudices of a dozen different factions—republicans, anarchists, syndicalists, communists, as well as the left-over conservative groups. Azaña, faced with the intricate, complex, realistic job of *doing*. So many worlds removed from talking good government in a café. I didn't like the bystander, the mere commentator, criticizing Azaña.

There are other issues I should like to take up with Mr. Beals. Among them his emphasis on the undoubted picturesqueness, color, and charm of the Mexican peasants unspoiled by "civilization." But he makes no mention of the other side of that picture—the terrible infant mortality, the sufferings of childbirth, the lingering anguish of disease unalleviated by proper medical care; the ignorance,

dirt, sodden drunkenness one finds in the hinterland. I know and love these people as he does; I have lived among them, but to describe the colorfulness of their lives, the beauty of their crafts, the earthy poetry of their ritual and leave out the other side, smacks of sentimentality, and is as incomplete as it would be to describe the great scientific and industrial advantages of our own civilization and leave out the cheapness, the crime, the tabloid vulgarity.

This is merely my personal response to personal opinions expressed in this excellent autobiography. The book itself remains a brilliant record of experiences of historic importance and one you will not want to miss.

Mrs. Flandrau is a novelist and travel writer who has spent much time in Mexico. She is the author of "Then I Saw the Congo," "Indeed This Flesh," and "Under the Sun."

The Ingredients of Personality

PERSONALITY IN FORMATION AND ACTION. By William Healy, M.D. New York: W. W. Norton and Co. 1938. \$2.

Reviewed by BERTRAM D. LEWIN, M.D.

DR. HEALY, Director of the Judge Baker Guidance Center in Boston, has spent thirty years in psychiatry, chiefly in child guidance, and has felt the impress of many philosophies and theories. In this book, which presents the substance of the 1937 Salmon Memorial Lectures, he conscientiously records many that have affected his work and his thinking. He gives the opinions of philosophers on the mind-body problem, he presents theories of constitution, endocrine influence, body type, and he records the psychological teachings that have been of service to him. Among the latter he especially shows the great extent to which he has been served by psychoanalysis.

But all theories, one sees, are only interesting to him when they prove themselves in practice; and Dr. Healy is at his easiest and best when he tells what happened to a certain boy or girl. His humanitarian feeling is obviously his strongest guide. Thus pointed and illustrated by his experience, what Dr. Healy has to say of the effect of the physical and the social environment, of the part played by the family, by schools, and by the working world, makes extraordinarily vivid and interesting reading. Concerning the influence of education both in the schools and outside, and the effect of environmental ideals upon the individual, Dr. Healy has much that is worth hearing.

In spite of the amount that has been printed in this field, Dr. Healy's book has a freshness that depends on the immediacy of his perceptions and on his ability to transmit them to his readers.



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CARLETON BEALS

Are Reviewers Too Polite?

BY LOUIS KRONENBERGER

TWO hundred years ago, when book reviewing was a form of warfare, an author might expect a reviewer to discuss anything about him except, perhaps, the merits of his book. The author's religion would certainly be worth a line or two. His politics would certainly be worth a paragraph. His private life would be conscientiously investigated: if it was virtuous, you would be invited to laugh at it; if it was immoral, you would be invited to shudder. If our author had a squint or a clubfoot, the reviewer contrived some tactful reference to his squint or clubfoot. If our author had ever gone to jail, or his father had ever gone to jail, or his father's first wife's second cousin had ever gone to jail, it was delicately blown into the record. I am presupposing, of course, that a hostile critic was reviewing the book. We can be pretty sure that a hostile critic was.

A hundred years ago, and book reviewers wrote out of a slightly less encyclopedic knowledge of their author. But if a Whig critic was reviewing a Tory poet, or an aristocratical bigwig was reviewing a Cockney upstart, the drubbing could still be terrific. Men like Jeffrey or Gifford gave no quarter: they aimed, drew, fired, and killed. Where today more than one critic will say of more than one writer, "I made him," in those days critics would say, no less complacently, "I finished him off." We all remember the famous first line of Jeffrey's review of Wordsworth's "The Excursion": "This will never do." We all remember the abuse, the objurgation, the mockery that were heaped upon the heads of a Keats or a Leigh Hunt.

I do not pardon these critical ruffians of the past. They had very bad manners. Worse, they often had very bad motives. But at least a reader got from them an extremely definite reaction. What they liked they said they liked. What they hated, or were obligated to hate, they said they hated. They used harsh words and hostile attitudes, and not even the cleverest scissors-and-paste man in a publisher's advertising department could contrive a favorable quote by juggling their words around. I condemn such people for frequently hitting below the belt. But I respect them for hitting hard.

We are none of us so inhuman that we lack sympathy with any writer, no matter how bad he is, for all the time he puts into writing a book and all the economic hardships he endures by being a writer. It is painful to have to tell a man that he has wasted a year, and that his new novel is rubbish. But I am not going to get mealy-mouthed and sanctimonious on that subject. I am sorry for the man, but I can't defend him, and I can defend him

least of all in my periodical capacity of bookreviewer.

What is the function of a bookreviewer? That is not easily answered, I suppose; but if we persist in calling him a reviewer, and rule out calling him a reporter, I think we can find something like an answer. A bookreviewer exists to *evaluate* books. He is to read them, think about them, set them up against what he knows about life and about writing, and then come out and say in so many words how good they are. He may, of course, have many other things to say besides. If he is very young, he may want to say that Mr. Ogden Nash's poems somehow lack the emotional katharsis of Sophocles's "Oedipus Rex." If he is very old, he may want to say that Mr. William Faulkner somehow lacks the wholesome perspective of Anthony Trollope. He may, whatever his age, want to say that Mr. Hemingway's novel is not up to his last one, or up to Miss Cather's latest. He may feel that Mr. Hemingway's style is not so polished as Mr. Francis Brett Young's. He may feel that Mr. Hemingway is not so clean a writer as Mr. Booth Tarkington.

But in the end, after displaying his

learning or his vocabulary or his acquaintance with esthetic theory or his bias in political thinking—in the end he is confronted with the necessity of saying just how good or bad the novel under discussion is. The best way of doing this is, I think, the simplest way. The reviewer can say: This is a great book, or This is a good book, or This is a fair book, or This is a bad book, or This is a terrible book, or This is beyond any question the most terrible book I have ever read.

How often is this method followed in practice? I have no statistics on the subject, but it is my feeling—based on reading many reviews and on writing some myself—that it is followed very little. Certainly there are critics who are wholly frank in their opinions and wholly forthright in expressing them—men and women on whom we can rely for intelligent and unequivocal criticism. And I feel sure there are many more such today than there were a generation ago. Also, of course, there are the reviewers who do say "this is a great book" so often that they debase the currency of the profession; their enthusiasms would be more contagious if they occasionally said—as they seldom or never do—"this is a terrible book." But speaking from an impression of the general run of reviewing, I am afraid that a majority of our reviewers are frequently too evasive and

Ballade of a Short Felt Want

BY FRANKLIN P. ADAMS

WASHINGTON'S life full well I know,
From the Parson Weems to the Rupert Hughes;
How he crossed the Delaware's ice and snow—
I know that painting, its buffs and blues.
Lives of the Adamases—J.'s, J. Q.'s,
Sam's, and they'll probably spill more.
Where is biography's nose for news?
Why don't they write about Millard Fillmore?

Dozens and dozens the Lives of Poe;
I've seen one of Chauncey M. Depew's;
Everyone's written of Hank Thoreau;
There's even a book about Henry Clews;
Lives of the Barrymores and the Drews;
Life of the bandmaster, Patrick Gilmore,
Come from the presses—don't ask me whose.
Why don't they write about Millard Fillmore?

The Jeffersons, Tom and the actor Joe;
George A. Custer and all the Sioux;
Now there's a Life of E. P. Roe;
And "Andrew Johnson" got swell reviews;
Benjamin Franklin without his shoes;
Teddy and Franklin—and few themes thrill more.
But—against Millard are there taboos?
Why don't they write about Millard Fillmore?

L'Envoi

Biographers looking for themes to choose
More of the same things write, and still more.
Why don't they write what I'd fain peruse?
Why don't they write about Millard Fillmore?