

thors as well as Professor Koch does, and he has every chance of being righter about them than I am.

The most interesting part of the whole adventure, to me, is that for twenty years the Playmakers Theater has carried on, successfully, given pleasure to many people, and taught those who have worked with it something about the theater and something about American life that they might not have come to otherwise. From every point of view, that is a sizable achievement. Nor has its influence been confined to North Carolina alone. There is a regional drama growing up, outside Broadway — there is a chance, at a number of different universities, for the youngster who has written a play to get it produced in front of an audience. And for all this, Professor Koch, as one of the pioneers, is very largely responsible. As valuable a contribution as any in the book is his own modest and sensible essay, "American Folk Drama in the Making." It should be required reading for all those interested in regional letters.

Italy in Practice

THE CORPORATE STATE IN ACTION. By Carl T. Schmidt. New York: Oxford University Press. 1939. 173 pp. \$2.25.

Reviewed by MAX ASCOLI

DR. SCHMIDT'S book is a sober and conscientious piece of work. It tells once more the story of how fascism happened to come into power in Italy and what it has been making of that country. The new tale is not particularly brightened by literary graces, but is developed with competent knowledge of the subject matter. It is only to be regretted that Dr. Schmidt, an economist of distinction, has not limited himself to the economic history and analysis of Fascist Italy. Had he used the approach in which he is particularly skillful, he would have contributed a book which is still lacking in the abundant literature on the subject. Yet this book shows that it has been written by an economist: one has only to observe the disproportion in weight and importance between the passages where the author deals with economic facts and those where he attempts historical sketches and political analyses.

The author's sentiments are outspoken against fascism, and it is refreshing to see here how scientific objectivity can be combined with partisanship. Perhaps in this direction, too, Dr. Schmidt went a little too far. He has followed the trend of many Italian anti-fascists who consider the regime they hate in an international vacuum, as if it had no relations with the social and economic forces of our day operating all the world over. With these qualifications the book can be recommended as one of the most reliable essays on the subject.

1601 and All That

1601. By Mark Twain. Edited by Franklin J. Meine. The Mark Twain Society of Chicago (Privately Printed). 1939. 80 pp. \$6.

Reviewed by BASIL DAVENPORT

IN his introduction, Mr. Meine objects to Professor Wagenknecht's characterization of "1601" as "the most famous piece of pornography in American literature," on the ground that it is not erotic. As an alternative, one may propose "the most overrated piece of scatology," since if it is not *peri pornon*, it is certainly *peri skatos*. By reputation, at least, it will be known to most readers (perhaps by its subtitle, "Conversation as It Was by the Social Fireside in the Time of the Tudors"); it represents Queen Elizabeth, a group of her ladies in waiting, and Shakespeare and other authors, industriously talking filth, without wit or humor, a salad made of nothing but garlic, without so much as a pinch of salt to commend it. This laborious muck-heap is here enshrined in a limited edition, containing a reprint of the first printing, a facsimile of an edition in imitation-Elizabethan type, an introduction and notes, and a bibliography; and one is compelled to ask, why?

In themselves, the words which give it its claim to fame are no funnier in a limited edition than chalked up on a wall. By being put into the mouth of Queen Elizabeth and her ladies, they become somewhat funnier, but not so much funnier as all that. They achieve the height of "Hell!" said the duchess"; but even if you make the duchess a queen, and "Hell" an unprintable word, that phrase will not carry a whole book. As for Mark Twain's claim, whether serious or not, that "1601" is of value as showing the actual standards of the Elizabethan court, that of course is nonsense; one need only cite the courtier who went into exile for seven years for the same breach of decorum which is the beginning of the merriment in "1601," or the fact that when Sir John Harrington translated some of the mildly indecent epigrams of Ariosto and showed them to the maids of honor, Queen Elizabeth imposed on him as a penance the translation of the whole "Orlando Furioso" before permitting him to return to court. Mark Twain, justly resenting the nineteenth-century taboos under which he wrote, always erred both in exaggerating freedom of earlier authors, and in supposing that a lady would allow in her drawing-room what she would permit on the stage. His historic judgment in this matter stands on the same level with his artistic judgment delivered in the heat of the same resentment, when (in a passage from "The Innocents Abroad," quoted by his present editor) he called Titian's Venus "the foulest, the vilest, the obscenest picture the world possesses."

One can understand that; and one

can understand why, in the nineteenth century, it aroused so much laughter; it was the laughter of the forbidden; children who are out of bed when they ought to be in it will giggle for the same reason. But that with all our present freedom, this hoary indecency should still command such interest, that in a world with "The Country Wife" to read and so many really good unprintable limericks to print privately, so much pains should be lavished on "1601," is melancholy indeed.



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The New Books

Belles-Lettres

THE PRIVILEGE OF AGE. By Vida Scudder. Dutton. 1939. 319 pp. \$3.50.

This collection of essays contains the most significant work of Miss Vida Scudder during the past twenty-five years. It shows the wide range of interest and catholicity of taste that have long been associated with her writing. The essay which gives its title to the volume is the only one that treats specifically of age and its privileges, but the rest of them exemplify what the first states—that the greatest gain from accumulated years is the freedom from what the author calls "greediness" (a personal attitude towards life and events) with the attendant accession of detached interest in man and his works. Many of the essays deal with Miss Scudder's ideas on religion, which are based on the broadest of reading and interest and a lifelong concern with bringing Christian and social ideals into closer harmony. Eastern thought has greatly influenced her philosophy, and this book brings the fact before us again in the many sympathetic interpretations of Oriental writings and ideas. Always keenly aware of the social and political scene, the author turns her attention in several of these essays to an analysis of current ideologies, and succeeds in saying something new on themes and characters already much inkstained from being written about. Since the publication of her first work in the mythically gay nineties, Miss Scudder has always been a force in progressive education and liberal thinking, at the same time that a Quaker-like serenity has preserved her from the bitterness of latter-day radicalism. These selected contemplative essays will be welcomed by her many admirers.

G. G.

Fiction

LET ME BREATHE THUNDER. By William Attaway. Doubleday, Doran. 1939. 267 pp. \$2.

William Attaway writes easily, the way a man walks or tells a tale, with natural vigor and his objective clear every foot of the way. His first novel is one that shows off this kind of writing most effectively: a hard-bitten story of two roaming hoboes, working stiffs, and a Mexican boy they have picked up somewhere on the road. The little Mexican injects a fresh element into their lives, a note of responsibility and, irresistibly, against all stubbornness, a note of tenderness. Upon this level of unwilling masculine sentiment the tale spins its length, moving briskly and with unfailing narrative skill, towards its desperate climax. All of this is on the credit side. On the debit, we must note that Mr. Attaway has projected much of his dramatic ex-

perience (he has written and acted in plays) into his writing. Too many of his scenes are plainly stagy, seen as tableaux in terms of groups and gestures, or heard as dramatic speeches, with an eye towards effective curtains and black-outs. Sometimes he lets his characters say things that might carry a punch across the little-theater footlights, without carrying any credibility in a realistic novel. One end-product of this staginess is the cutting of the story into scenes that ought naturally to have flowed together. Mr. Attaway will write a better novel when he puts the stage entirely behind him.

N. L. R.

A SON OF THE SEA. By Sara Ware Bassett. Doubleday, Doran. 1939. 270 pp. \$2.

Today, when the youth of Stratford speak the tongue of Steinbeck and James M. Cain, when filling station attendants in Cornwall reply OK to your "thank you," it is refreshing now and again to return to the atmosphere of the English-Speaking Union, where it is America that is the literary province. Miss Bassett's newest novel, in its genteel English slang and its absence of contemporary insecurity, tenseness, and quickness, belongs in those great days of the *Atlantic Monthly* which preceded the Civil War. It was designed for that saintly white-haired grandmother who in advertisements is all day sitting and knitting and dreaming; it is tender, conventional, and unreal as she. In one episode, at least, Miss Bassett outdoes her models of the fifties. This is the climax of the story, which so far has told how the middle-aged Stephen, a magazine editor, returns to the Cape Cod of his ancestors to recuperate from a nervous breakdown. There he falls in love with young Marylee. But he has a rival, young Lin Brewster, and it is Lin whom Marylee finally chooses. The fortunate Lin at once makes the supreme sacrifice; to save another life, he jeopardizes his own. Knocking Marylee out cold, so that she will not follow him, he plunges into a burning building—to emerge a few moments later, far less damaged than Marylee, having rescued her dog. This, it seems, is a heroic tale to Cape Cod, on which Miss Bassett is an authority. Now, on Cape Ann. . .

K. S.

NOT ALL YOUR LAUGHTER. By Sally Gibbs. Appleton-Century. 1939. 237 pp. \$2.

A book about people completely removed from the exigencies of eating and working and raising children is not likely to be popular in an age which demands an excess of social