

The Sacco-Vanzetti Case

AFTER TWELVE YEARS. By Michael A. Musmanno. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1939. 415 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY F. PRINGLE

THE familiarities of the past sometimes make incredible reading. Memory fades in relation to even pleasant things, and it often blackens out quite completely the details of events which were terrible. So this account of the trial and legal murder—I use the word soberly—of Sacco and Vanzetti more than twelve years ago makes incredible reading.

"I never knew, never heard, even read in history anything so cruel as this court," said Nicola Sacco as he was about to hear himself sentenced to death. So cruel, too, were the people of the state of Massachusetts because they were afraid, to quote that hauntingly beautiful message of Bartolomeo Vanzetti, of "a good shoemaker and a poor fish-peddler." The people of Massachusetts might well be more afraid now than they were twelve years ago, for the story of Sacco and Vanzetti will never die.

But why another book on the Sacco-Vanzetti case when, already, the record is completely available on the shelves of any good library? The case had been dragging on for seven long years when, in the spring of 1927, a young attorney from Pittsburgh, convinced that injustice had been done, volunteered his services. Until the two men were executed the following August, he gave most of his time to the desperate and futile attempts to obtain a new trial. He talked with them three and four times a week. He kept notes on his conversations with them and with the other many figures involved in the case. His name was Michael A. Musmanno and this is his book. At the present he is a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Pennsylvania.

Judge Musmanno writes of the Sacco-Vanzetti case as a lawyer for the defense, not a judge. And it may be said that certain parts of the book are damaged by his tendency to believe nearly every detail of the defense argument and to reject the case of the state quite completely. Yet how could anybody be impartial on examination or reexamination of the evidence? Judge Musmanno analyzes most of it. He proves barbaric mendacity on the part of the prosecution. Into the witness chair filed a stream of witnesses incompetent and worse, and their garbled tales convicted two Italian radicals of a holdup and murder in South Braintree, Mass.

And yet from the mists of twelve years ago come recollections which bothered all but the most passionate and emotional believers in the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti. Did not the highest courts of Massachusetts pass on their guilt and did not honest, sober men delay the irrevocable action for seven years so that no doubt could exist? This book answers that valid question. Did not expert testimony show that the bullet taken from the body of the slain paymaster fitted the revolver of one of the defendants? Judge Musmanno shows that it did nothing of the sort. Did not other honest men—the Lowell Commission which was headed by President A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard College—examine all the evidence and then unanimously decide for their guilt? Judge Musmanno makes it amply clear that the Lowell Commission was not free from prejudice, that the case was not clearly presented before it.

So there are two main reasons why another volume on the Sacco-Vanzetti case should have been written. Judge Musmanno resolves many, if not all, of those misty doubts. This is the first reason. The second is that his conversations with the prisoners add new knowledge, of outstanding value, regarding the two men and the terrible tragedy in which fate and prejudice entangled them. There is, perhaps, a third reason. Judge Musmanno's book is short, well-written, and exciting. It will be read by many who could not possibly digest the voluminous record of the case.

The final chapters are chapters of despair with faint, faint gleams of hope. It is hard, in retrospect, to realize the number of good and honest men who would do nothing. The President of the United States was silent, although there were several grounds on which Mr. Coolidge might have interfered. Chief Justice Taft, who might have acted, would not do so. And neither, even more amazingly, would Associate Justice Holmes.

Physics and Life

ATOMS IN ACTION. By George Russell Harrison. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1939. 370 pp., with index. \$3.50.

MATTER AND LIGHT. By Louis de Broglie. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1939. 300 pp., with index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by JOHN RIORDAN

IT is not always easily rememberable, and particularly not at the moment, that in one aspect, that of modern science, the world today has a completely satisfying word to say for itself; in ideas, disinterestedness, and accomplishments its achievements relatively are little short of magical. This is splendidly illustrated, with respect to physics, by the books under review.

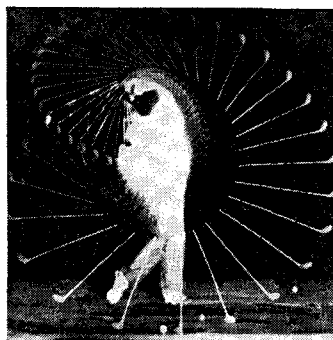
Mr. Harrison's book was written at the instance of the American Institute of Physics, and its substance was presented as Lowell Lectures in Boston in 1938 under the title "Modern Physics and Human Welfare." That title aptly defines its scope, which is the contribution of that science to everyday living. The field is roughly that of light industry, the telephone, radio, television, sound record-

ing, photography, glass, and textiles. In this field it is a kind of guide-book to the exhibits of these industries at the World's Fair (New York and possibly San Francisco). But there is an introductory chapter on energy transmission, which gets into heavy industry, a chapter on farming, and a fond recital of the exploits of the spectroscope, Mr. Harrison's own field of work.

The story told is in every instance one of phenomenal accomplishment (which we now all too inertly take for granted) not only in the past but in the present moment; thus the coaxial cable and the ultra-short-wave transmission line now under research by the Bell System have their place in the story of the telephone, and Major Armstrong's scheme of broadcasting by frequency rather than amplitude modulation has its paragraph in the survey of radio. Perhaps of more importance for the lay

reader than this up-to-dateness is the grace and facility of the writing, in connection with which it is appropriate to mention that Mr. Harrison is a namesake of the Irish poet AE.

M. de Broglie is the distinguished French physicist to whose acute in-



Harold E. Edgerton
A series of snapshots
of a swinging golf club.

tuition we owe the idea that waves and corpuscles are essential complementary aspects of the nature of things, the idea for which he received the Nobel Prize in 1927. His prize essay is the heart of his book, which is devoted to exposing the idea in as many ways as possible, in relation to matter and electricity, to light and radiation, and finally to philosophy and metaphysics. There is in consequence a considerable degree of repetition, though perhaps not more than so strange and revolutionary a notion deserves. Throughout, the typically French easy simplicity and lucidity are maintained, which should make the book available to a wide public. There is a little mathematics (poorly explained and proof-read) but it is inessential to the understanding of this source-book of modern physics. M. de Broglie's lucent intelligence would be a joy at any time and is now.

Overlapping Two Eras

A VICTORIAN IN THE MODERN WORLD. By Hutchins Hapgood. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1939. 604 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by BRUCE BLIVEN

HUTCHINS HAPGOOD and I have lived too long. We have lived out of one era and into another, and we don't like it. Perhaps because he is two decades older than I am, he does not seem to be as unhappy about modern times as I am; or perhaps he suppresses some of his feeling in his autobiography, even though it is one of the frankest in a generation where frankness is the fashion.

Probably all men at all times have been nostalgic about their youth after reaching the time of life when, as

Kipling said, the tides of the day have turned and are setting toward sunset; yet it is certainly true that—at the time—the world in which Hutchins Hapgood grew up, the world that ended on August 3, 1914, had a good deal in its favor. The illusion of progress was still strong; "evolution" was supposed to be working with the stars in their courses and with "science" to bring the millennium very soon, almost any day. Nearly all the bright young men were socialists, and while there was factionalism on the Left even then, the quarrels were few and unimportant. Depressions had been witnessed, but within the memory of that generation they had been brief, lasting only a few months, and the worst brunt had been borne by a comparatively small number of factory workers in the larger cities. A world war was really "unthinkable"—to say nothing of two of them. There was a good deal of talk that there would never be any more fighting at all, except of course on India's Northwest Frontier; even the socialists, who sometimes spoke darkly of the capitalists' going to war to save themselves, didn't really believe it.

Into this world came Hutchins Hapgood, one of three brilliant brothers, son of an unusual father. His patrimony was not large but sufficient so that he could quit work for a year whenever he wished, or could discard a disagreeable job. Having money back of you makes an enormous difference, especially on the fringes of journalism. His health while not robust was good enough. He had an enormous interest in sensory experience, particularly alcohol and sex. He married and raised a family (he now formally admits the authorship of "The Story of a Lover," a sincere effort at self-revelation and a mildly scandalous success of twenty years ago). He traveled widely, knew masses of artists and writers, most of them radicals. He was attracted by philosophic anarchism and by the labor movement when it was far more inchoate than it is now, writing books about it that performed a useful service in introducing progressive ideas gently into bourgeois minds. Europe has been as familiar to him as America, and through his story marches an extraordinary company, about equally composed of well-known writers, painters, sculptors, and of ladies of the gutter, in whom he repeatedly made the discovery of simple, homely virtues.

Mr. Hapgood's title will be misunderstood by many who associate "Victorian" with prudishness. In the author's mind, it is justified because he

York State Pioneers

IN THOSE DAYS. By Prentiss Mournian. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. 326 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CLYDE BRION DAVIS

MISS MOURNIAN'S book is not a novel. Strictly speaking, it is not a history. It is a collection of anecdotes bound loosely to a sort of historical continuity, relating events at the time of the New Hampshire land grants, at the time of the American Revolution, and the War of 1812 in northern New York State, and of frontier life in general.

The narrative is told, supposedly, in the words of Hiram Reynolds, centenarian, who died a couple of years ago in San Diego, California. He retails the stories told him by his father and by his grandparents with intimate household details. He tells of the bitterness between the Vermonters and the York Staters before the revolution, of the bitterness between the American settlers and Tories and Canadians, and the fear of varmints, Indians, and raids by Butler's Rangers. And all through the book there is such a vividness and sense of authenticity that the reader finds it difficult to come back to the twentieth century when he has closed the book on the final adventure of Hiram Reynolds's Grandpa Miers.

In a foreword Mrs. Mournian tells of her interviews with the aged Hiram Reynolds over a period of years,

gaining details and color for his own boyhood story and those of his father and grandfathers. But she confesses, also, that most of her material was gained by independent research and was placed in the mouth of her narrator as a matter of expediency. Well, she did a good job. She did a splendid job.

One obvious criticism may well be picayunish, but Mrs. Mournian writes so well and has such a superb sense of idiomatic speech, it is too bad she resorted to phonetic spelling in unquoted narrative. The reader, however, forgets this minor annoyance once he gets into this vivid story—or series of stories.

Perhaps the reader has regarded the Indian chief, Red Jacket, as a dignified statesman capable of such logic and eloquence as to move even the white

man to his way of thinking. Well, when Hiram Reynolds refers to Red Jacket as something of a drunken rascal, the buildup has been so plausible the reader is inclined to accept this new appraisal.

The book is full enough of humor and humanness and drama to make your hair curl. It includes a personal Devil who walks, followed by a coterie of witches. It is not a long book, but there's everything in it—except dirty words and love.

Clyde Brion Davis is the author of "The Anointed" and "Nebraska Coast."



From the jacket of "In Those Days"