

Social History

THE DELAWARE. By Harry Emerson Wildes. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1940. 335 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by CORNELIUS WEYGANDT

THIS latest of the "Rivers of America" series, is largely a social and political history of Philadelphia's past. It is only at the very beginning in the first chapter, with its account of sapling logs, and in three chapters almost at the end, that Mr. Wildes focuses his attention on the river itself and on the ways of the average men and women of the valley. These three late chapters, "Custom is King," "Modest Self-Restraint," and "Communal Friendships" are the best of the book. For the rest it is a pageant of personalities from old times to to-day, each and everyone painted in with high lights. "Big Belly" Printz, the Swedish governor; William Penn; Tammany, the Indian chief; Pastorius; Franklin; Conrad Weiser, the middleman with the Indians; mad Anthony Wayne; William Cobbett, the English pamphleteer; Matthew Stanley Quay, the political boss; Boise Penrose, United States senator; Rudolph Blankenburg, the reform mayor, and a score of others pass before us, rigorously weighed by a scale of values strongly personal and not in every instance that which history has established.

The Delaware rises in the hinterlands of the Catskills, John Burroughs's country. It flows by the Poconos and the Blue Mountain vacation lands as surely as Maine itself. It

leaves the shores of the slate and cement districts in the "Forks of the Delaware," the country between the Delaware and its tributary the Lehigh. Down along the Lehigh came anthracite coal to Philadelphia, necessarily by canal-boat, by train and by truck. In "The Forks" are Bethlehem and Nazerelle, Moravian towns in which trombones playing Bach lead processions to the graveyard for sunrise services on Easter Sunday.

Below Easton was Durham Furnace, its site still marked by great slag heaps. To its boats for carrying iron to Philadelphia, the so-called Durham boats, Mr. Wildes gives due credit for ferrying Washington's army across the river for the surprise attack on the Hessians at Trenton. Between Durham Furnace and McKonkey's Ferry, where the Continentals crossed, are Lumberville and New Hope, villages that Redfield and many other painters have made a leading artists' community. On the great river flows, past Pennsburg, the recently restored manor-house of William Penn, and on past Burlington and the Jersey tide creeks Walt Whitman loved.

Down it sweeps by Philadelphia, which usurps too much attention for its vagaries and too little for its shipping. Salem on the Jersey shore, and Newcastle on the Western shore, are rightly praised for their picturesqueness and preservation of yesterday. The river has now broadened into Delaware Bay, with Dallas Lore Sharp's country on the left and, on the right, the swan-haunted shores where it meets the open sea.

Cornelius Weygandt is the author of "Down Jersey," recently published by Appleton Century & Co.

THE POOL OF VISHNU

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religious sanctions — transfers our wars and hates, our strivings and failures to his sixteenth century India: and thereby makes them more real, not less, because seen in perspective.

Apart from its rare hold on truth and beauty, its quiet and ardent wisdom, "The Pool of Vishnu" is a story of the highest interest. Hari, the warrior, the lover, the man for whom the visible world and its rewards exist only too vividly, provides, with his adventures, his scruples, his loveliness, and his loyalty, that firm, ordinary, flesh-and-blood interest which a philosophical novel so often lacks. He also gives Mr. Myers the chance of showing how completely free he is from that highbrow snobbery of the intellectual who professes to despise the energy and courage which he so often lacks. Mr. Myers knows that glibness of statement is not evidence of profound thinking, and that too frequently the chatterers discourage the timid and taciturn, who should be persuaded to persist in thinking.

Jali himself, still uncertain, undecided between truth and brilliance, wisdom and cleverness, is a portrait of whom any novelist could be proud. Rarely have charm, youthful eagerness, all the moods of joy and unhappiness, the painful delights of unfulfilled, adoring love been rendered with so sensitive an understanding. Mr. Myers as the fine gift of humor without mockery, he times his gentle laughter at Jali with an exquisite delicacy, only anticipating by a moment Jali's own discovery of his weakness.

Many people will regret the too early disappearance from this volume of old friends—Amar and his wife, Gokal, their adviser and friend; but it would be churlish to grumble at any lack in a book so rich, so varied as "The Pool of Vishnu": and in his portrait of the Guru Mr. Myers has succeeded where I doubt if any novelist has ever succeeded before. He has drawn a credible, lovable picture of a saint. I think I know who was one of his models for Bhupendra, that great saint and great man of the world, Dick Sheppard of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, of Canterbury and of St. Paul's Cathedral. For those who did not know him, however, I suggest that the Guru, in his modesty, in his hold on his beliefs, his humor, and his kindness might well be the spiritual child of Saint Theresa and St. Philip Neri. He alone, and his dealings with all kinds of people from Akbar to the starving peasants, would make "The Pool of Vishnu" a great and memorable book.



Drawing by Irwin D. Hoffman from "The Delaware." "On to Victory"

MANN'S MEASUREMENT OF GENIUS

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guilt and expiation: laboriously he turned himself into a diversely valuable member of society. At the same time, he remained a serene spokesman of Nature, confident that he was one of her favorites and that she would reveal her secrets to him. Thus, the possibility that in Goethe's own consciousness there existed the ironic, double vision of his proper being, was interestingly strong; and the fact, that the poet measured himself equally against the standards of society and of Nature and managed in the face of the clash heroically to maintain his sublime equilibrium, rendered him doubly useful to the novelist.

In Goethe's later life, there took place a meeting—remarked by few of his biographers but conspicuous and enticing to Mann's searching glance—which may well have confronted the great poet with a dramatic situation. It was a meeting with a friend whom he had hurt, and who, because she was very much the woman and torn by her attraction both to the normal and the abnormal-supernormal man, might be regarded as a representative of the Race. This individual was Lotte Buff, the gracious, immortal heroine of "Werther's Leiden." Goethe had met her in his twenty-fourth year, while he was in Wetzlar ostensibly studying law. She was nineteen at the time and engaged to his friend Kestner. Goethe first fell in love with the pair's love, then with Charlotte herself and his own emotions as poet and lover. Despite her devotion to her fiancé the girl was carried away by Goethe's passion, until the interloper finally fled from her and Wetzlar. Stirred by the suicide of one of his fellow-students, a dreamy youth named Jerusalem, he gave expression to his own unhappy experience and tortured state of mind in the magic, poem-like "Werther." The little book moved a world to sympathy, but also exposed to that world the affair at Wetzlar and in the portrait of the bridegroom caricatured the extremely decent Kestner. Forty-four years later, while Goethe was working on the "West-Oestlicher Divan"—the glorious lyrical opus partly the fruit of one of his last amours—and while the plainly ill-starred marriage of his son August to Ottilie von Pogwisch was preparing itself under his eyes, Lotte, then a widow with nine children, paid him a visit in Weimar. Only the note in which she announced to her old lover her arrival in his city, and an ambiguous note to one of her sons, have survived to record an event fraught with dramatic possibilities

and one which Mann could not but find perfectly to his purpose.

Still another motive must have recommended Goethe to Mann as material for his novel: the desire in the face of recent political events to affirm through a portrait of him, Goethe's moral leadership of Germany. The man of whom it has been said that if Germany became a mighty nation it was in no small degree due to his influence as teacher and educator and that if she is to succumb to arrogance and wantonness it will be because she has deserted him, this man detested and feared the *Vaterlaenderei* of his compatriots, the nationalism of 1813 in so many ways the forerunner of Nazidom. For his country he desired cultural and political solidarity with France and the other nations of western Europe. He admired Napoleon; he approved of the Confederation of the Rhine. If after Waterloo he wrote "Des Epimenides Erwachen" for the visit of the allied sovereigns to Berlin, it was largely to voice his prayer for the internal unity that is peace. . . . The last motive certainly is plain in the striking, extremely timely words, defining Goethe's attitude toward the national psychology, which crop up during that most audacious episode in "The Beloved Returns," the interior monologue of the great poet: barbed words such as "Wretched it is that they (the Germans) credulously abandon themselves to every fanatic scoundrel who appeals to their baser qualities and teaches them conceptions of nationalism as isolation and rawness. To

themselves they seem grand and glorious only when they have gambled away all they ever possessed which was worth owning—Germans should be—great in understanding, mediating spirits. That is their destiny, not this pigheaded craving to be a unique nation, to stultify themselves in insipid narcissism and rule the world through stupidity!"

Nevertheless this is but a secondary motive of the novel. What animates it principally is its dramatic conception of genius as it might have been demonstrated to Lotte Kestner in the course of her stay in Weimar; the vision of the price society and the genius himself must pay for his gifts; the effect of this vision upon her ancient wound. We see that old lady descending at a hotel door in the Thuringian capital in the company of her dull youngest daughter "whom she is eager to present to Goethe." Lotte's identity is recognized by the concierge; he spreads the news of her arrival. A crowd gathers beneath her windows: we perceive her sense of the worthlessness of the "fame" "Werther" has brought to her, and the helplessness with which her thoughts revolve in the part and seek to probe the motives of Goethe in the Wetzlar days. She writes him of her arrival. An eccentric Englishwoman, a portraitist of celebrities, makes her way into her room. She is followed by Dr. Riemer, one of Goethe's secretaries, who has been attracted by the opportunity to pour out his ambivalent feeling about his master. Lotte hears this representative of all the little men who live in emotional dependence upon great ones say that the essence of Goethe's genius is elfish irony and destructive equanimity: excited, she

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From the drawing in the N. Y. Public Library
"Goethe Dictating to His Secretary."

Building as an Art

ARCHITECTURE THROUGH THE AGES. By Talbot Hamlin. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1940. 680 pp., with index. \$6.

Reviewed by SHELDON CHENEY

TALBOT HAMLIN has here written the best record we have of the art of building. It is the first comprehensive history written from a point of view established after the discrediting of nineteenth century eclecticism. It is sanely modern. It is complete in the sense that it covers developments from the primitive to the contemporary, in the Orient as well as the Occident. There are 450 excellently chosen illustrations (unfortunately a little small, but clear). The author has done a first-class job with this vast review. Except in one respect, it is very near an ideal history of a major art.

The book is at every turn the work of a man who knows his subject both practically and theoretically, as the architect knows it and as the scholar understands it. No one in America, probably, has had richer opportunity to become familiar with the literary documents of the art, which sometimes explain movements and tendencies more clearly than the brick and mortar evidence. (Talbot Hamlin is librarian of the architectural and the fine art libraries at Columbia University.) The result still might not have been so happy if page after page were not illuminated by an unusual sort of social wisdom, shrewd and kindly but by no means a blind humanitarianism.

The author avowedly set out to write a history differing from existing ones in its emphasis upon the social and human values. He stresses again and again that architecture is social and human expression, a reflection of ways of life. He gives exceptional space to houses and housing, and he consistently avoids cataloguing "masterpieces." In his Foreword, in a list of source books, one immediately meets evidence of this special bent, for the list begins not with titles suggesting architecture but with Spengler's "Decline of the West" and Friedell's "A Cultural History of the Modern Age, the Crisis of the European Soul from the Black Death to the World War." Indeed one may read fifteen titles before coming to one that includes the word "architecture." Every professor of the history of architecture who specifies Mr. Hamlin's book as a text should—one may believe—persuade his students to submit themselves to the liberal education in social backgrounds sketched in Talbot Hamlin's source-book list.

In general the text is readable, even ingratiating for this sort of book. It is least so where academic books are usually most satisfactory, in dealing with the architecture of the great historic periods. There is an occasional suggestion that the author's classroom notes may there have been expanded, with too little contemplation, into chapters. At least once, in dealing with the Persians, he adopts an old, stereotyped, and no longer adequate view.

But too much can hardly be said in

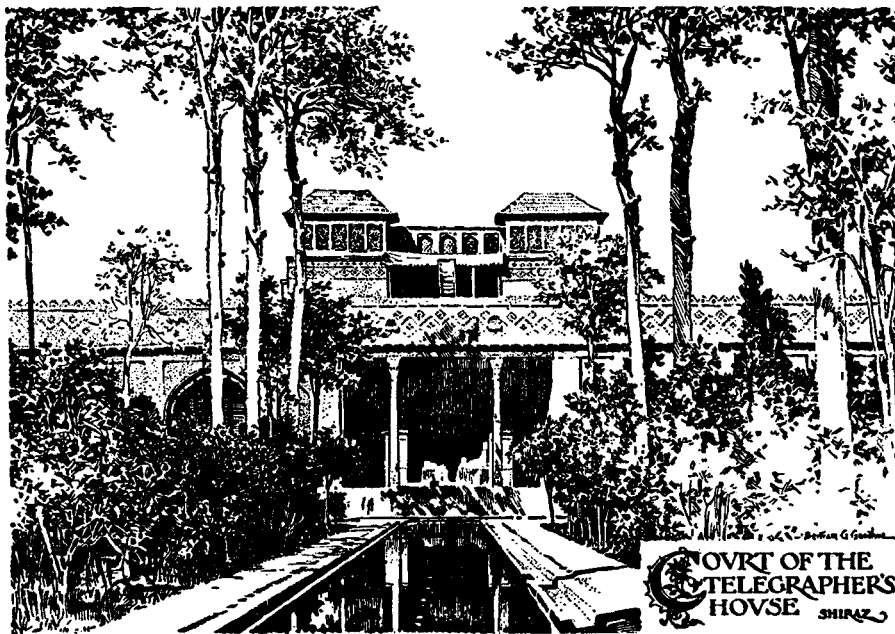
praise of the later chapters. They explain early recent architecture as the inevitable result of social confusion, and later recent architecture as the outcome of imperishable architectural vision and creativeness reappearing at the moment when, at last, perspective is gained upon the place of the machine in human civilization. The whole study of nineteenth century and of modern building is presented with reference to an unflinching social idealism.

The one virtue lacking in this book is an infectious enthusiasm for architecture as a pleasure-giving art. Mr. Hamlin practically never pauses to convey the sense of beauty of a great historic building, as a created evocative entity. Buildings can and do bring one up with surprised delight, and one may believe that half the usefulness of architectural art is in its power to evoke that response. But Mr. Hamlin, who must have lost himself in the sheer loveliness or utter majesty of St. Mark's or Amiens, who must often have found himself wandering in a mood of quiet delight on the streets of Nuremberg or in a New England village square, has elected to speak of other things than his inner experience. Perhaps, without being emotional, without overemploying word-painting, he might have stirred the reader to a sharing of his delight. He was not, it is true, writing a book of "appreciation"—but even students who are setting out to be practical designers could profit by direct enjoyment of, along with information about, building art.

This is not to say that Talbot Hamlin overlooks the esthetic obligation of the architect, that he has marched off with the "pure functionalists," or anything like that. He is the soundest sort of modernist, and sees plainly the dangers of a puritanic devotion to mechanization. He even remarks upon the necessity of accepting "the reality of esthetic discrimination" (having in mind, no doubt, the ultra schools that began their manifestoes, "Down with esthetics").

Thus he does give "the way of beauty" its due, in direct statement, along with "the way of utility" and the way of honest construction. He is broad in his own unemotional way. Altogether his is an admirably sane, wise, and useful book. It should, without delay, displace, as textbook at architectural schools and on the shelves of popular libraries, those incomplete or unmodern books which have up to now been considered the standard histories of the art.

Sheldon Cheney is the author of "The New World Architecture," "Expressionism in Art," and other books on related subjects.



The Telegrapher's House at Shiraz, Persia.

From the book.