

will drag us down, willy-nilly, into its maelstrom.

There is some backhanded hope in the pages of an imaginative forecast of human history for the next two billion years. Yes, two billion. It's called "Last and First Men" and it was written in 1930 by William Olaf Stapledon, an Englishman. It is a solid, rather humorless work that handles history in great chunks of years at a time.

After a series of Franco-Italian, Anglo-French, Russo-German, Euro-American, and Sino-American wars during this century and the next, the grim story goes, America imposed unity upon the world sometime towards the end of the 23rd century. The war between China and America was settled on an island in the Pacific by representatives of Big Business of both

countries and in the year 2294 world unity was achieved under the World Financial Directorate. There were World Police, fantastic ritual flights for youngsters, and uninhibited intermingling of black, brown, yellow, and white stocks that made for a nice universal color scheme.

When the Antarctic coal supplies gave out, however, this civilization perished. Yes, someone had discovered the secret of atomic power but it died with him in 21st century. Well, the world returned to "barbarism." The next civilization arose in Patagonia about 100,000 A.D. and that wrecked itself, too. In case you're still with me, Mr. Stapledon goes on to describe each of the races of man that developed on Earth, Mars, Venus, and Neptune, right down to the eighteenth race of man—a wonderful array of creatures who lived to a ripe middle age of 250,000, had five eyes, none myopic, and learned to control the movement of planets. But by 2,000,000,000 A.D. the Cosmos got pretty fed up with human nonsense and sensibly precipitated an atomic explosion in which the universe perished. No one seemed to mind. There was a general feeling that the human comedy had been playing long enough at the same house.

Bellocian Waves

THE SILENCE OF THE SEA AND OTHER ESSAYS. By Hilaire Belloc. New York: Sheed & Ward. 1940. 253 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER COWIE

"THE Silence of the Sea and Other Essays"—the very title, with its Victorian ring, tells you that Hilaire Belloc doesn't mind being a little behind the times. For, in America at least, the personal essay is being elbowed off the scene by more aggressive literary forms: up-to-the-minute informational articles and narrative novelties of the I-Fed-Birds-at-the-South-Pole variety. There is much to be said for the new trend: at least it discourages bores from attempting to imitate the inimitable Charles Lamb. Yet to report the passing scene in the most elementary idiom possible is not the whole duty of the writer, and it will be a bad day for literature, here or elsewhere, when the personal essay (or its equivalent) vanishes.

Though the author of sundry formidable works, Mr. Belloc makes a good essayist—frank, crotchety, heedful of phrase but not too fussy, humorous and serious by turns. Most of the essays in the present collection were first published periodically. Many are short, a few hasty and inconsequential. Mood and manner change frequently. Mr. Belloc can be as casual and colloquial as a cub journalist or he can fashion every facet of his sentence with the care of a medieval silversmith. The title essay is a little masterpiece of serious prose; the essay "On Statistics" is perfect comedy. As a man no longer young, the author grumbles considerably about this thing called progress. He thinks most modern verse pretty puny. He resents having his life hemmed in by columns of statistics. Advertising galls him. He despises modern pedants who are always correcting somebody's little factual errors, including Mr. Belloc's. He fumes at what he considers to be the fallacy of "majority right." He misses old institutions . . .

But there are some things that progress cannot take away: the memory of landscapes, the love of art in its various forms, the special delight of history. And, deeper still, there lies faith—religious faith and a faith in men. Mr. Belloc may grumble, but he does not whine, is more often gay, or at least genially quarrelsome, than grave. Least of all is he a preacher. He is only an essayist. Perhaps Mr. Belloc should try to be more modern. Perhaps.

SRL

readers were largely instrumental in the success of *God's Stepchildren* by Sarah Gertrude Millin. Her new novel, *THE DARK GODS*, a story of Nazi propaganda among South African tribes, will be published by Harper on Feb. 20th. Your bookseller will take your order for a first-edition copy now. \$2.50

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The University of Chicago Press

Lawyer and Lobbyist

WILLIAM E. CHANDLER, Republican. By Leon Burr Richardson. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. 1940. 758 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by JAMES TRUSLOW ADAMS

WILLIAM E. CHANDLER was distinctly a minor figure in American public life, although a typical manipulator of the wires behind the scenes, whose activities were largely local in New Hampshire though he twice served as secretary of the Republican National Committee. His appointment by Garfield as Solicitor-General was refused confirmation by the Senate. Appointed Secretary of the Navy by Arthur the following year, he served until 1885 when William C. Whitney took over, but left no impress. Appointed to serve an unexpired term of two years in the United States Senate he was re-elected for another term, but again did not become a national figure. The rest of his career is made up of being a lawyer and lobbyist in Washington and a local newspaper proprietor in New Hampshire.

Until this volume appeared there was no biography of him in book form. Professor F. L. Paxson who wrote his life, a little more than one page, for the "Dictionary of American Biography," notes in his bibliography only that there is a "good obituary in the 'New England Historical and Genealogical Register,'" and several less important sketches in some local newspapers. It is difficult to understand why he should have been awarded a volume of 758 pages at a cost of five dollars per copy in the series of "American Political Leaders" in which the life of John Hay, written by Tyler Dennett, managed to be compressed into 476 pages. It is true that the volumes of this series are all on a grand scale, and the volumes by the editor, Professor Allan Nevins, run from 800 to 1,000 pages on Grover Cleveland and Hamilton Fish.

The question may be raised as to just what want biographies in a "series" are intended to fulfill. Such series as those of the "American Statesmen" edited by Morse or the "Crisis Biographies" edited by Oberholtzer, were handy small volumes of some three hundred pages or more each of which served a purpose somewhat between a biographical dictionary and a full scale definitive life and letters. The present series of "American Political Leaders" is made up of full length and definitive biographies. As to their scholarship there is no doubt. Professor Nevins's own Cleveland in two volumes (including the Letters) and his Fish, contain a vast



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