



Francis F. Beirne—"intimacy and fondness."

Portrait of a City

THE AMIABLE BALTIMOREANS. By Francis F. Beirne. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 400 pp. \$5.

By HOLMES ALEXANDER

BALTIMORE is a fabulous character from real life whom many a fictioneer has tried in vain to capture.

The reason for the failure could be that this good old city, like lots of picturesque and incredible individuals, simply defies reduction to any form of imaginative art.

There are too many contradictions. Baltimore was sentimental about the Confederacy but stayed in the Union and struck it rich. Baltimore is the product of great inventive and mercantile genius, but most of the men who built her railroads, libraries, art galleries, hospitals, and universities were out-of-towners. Some of the great male personalities—like H. L. Mencken and Babe Ruth—are straight off the sidewalks; yet the romantic ladies—like Betsy Patterson and Wallis Warfield—too often marry outsiders and move away. Baltimore is bawdy and puritanical; beautiful and squalid; affectionate toward her favorites but painfully snooty toward strangers who lack a proper introduction. Baltimore won't dress up for a portrait; won't sit still for a photograph; can't be typed—as Boston and Philadelphia have been—for a novel or a play. Baltimore

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can't be made to seem human or understandable except in a factual and believe-it-or-not biography.

Happily, that is exactly what Mr. Beirne has undertaken and accomplished. Although a man of wit and whimsy (Christopher Billup of the syndicated columns) he's also one of integrity and judgment. These last-mentioned qualities have served him well in "The Amiable Baltimoreans." He has done a job of shoeleather research and wise selection, resisting any temptation to be lyrical about Baltimore's charms or clever about her frailties. He has accomplished the considerable feat of writing about living people and their ancestors without making anybody angry, and he's skated gracefully on a lot of thin ice in the process. He has in sum brought forth a book which his fellow townsmen will enjoy and which will entertain and instruct the less fortunate inmates of less wonderful cities.

The story of Baltimore, of course, is that of her institutions—human, social, and otherwise. They are naturally all mixed up. There was Emanuel Chambers, doorman of the Maryland Club, who named five club members to invest his fortune of \$154,000 and disperse the proceeds to local charities "regardless of race, color, or creed." There is the Bachelors Cotillon, so-called, which is the championship affair for debutantes; and there's the Maryland Hunt Cup steeplechase, which young lawyers, bankers, and legislators would rather win than conquer an empire. There is the booming waterfront, which brings in much of the city's wealth.

Most readers, I believe, will find Mr. Beirne—a Virginian by the way—at his best when writing as a reporter rather than an historian. He takes us back to the colonial days, but he doesn't begin to sparkle until he escorts us to the dances and races, the galleries and the seafood houses of his own time. Frank Beirne is an "eligible" who has met all the notables and oddities who've walked our streets for the past forty years. Thus he brings to this work the intimacy and fondness, always touched with kindly humor, of the Boswellian art.

The book is spiced with many nifty turns of repartee and character sketches. As a devotee of Baltimore lore I think I can say that all are genuine and none is stale. Nobody can hope to understand or appreciate Baltimore without getting to know her memorable inhabitants, the quick and the dead, the nationally noted and the locally beloved. This book, a storehouse of such knowledge, is a constant delight.



George F. Willison—"the human side."

Life in a Colony

BEHOLD VIRGINIA! The Fifth Crown. By George F. Willison. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 422 pp. \$4.75.

By WESLEY FRANK CRAVEN

DR. WILLISON'S latest work is a readable and frequently instructive account of Virginia's first years. Taking his title from the hope recorded on the Virginia seal that the colony might provide a fifth crown (in addition to the crowns of England, Scotland, Ireland, and France), he retells the story of Jamestown in detail from 1607 to 1624, when the Virginia Company was dissolved and the English settlers on the James came under the direct control of the royal government. This full discussion of the colony's founding is followed by a short summary of its fortunes through the remaining years of the seventeenth century. A final chapter on Virginia's part in the movement for independence serves as epilogue to the book.

As in his earlier "Saints and Strangers," a study of the Plymouth Pilgrims, Mr. Willison is primarily concerned with the human side of history. His story, which is developed in narrative form with strict regard for chronology, is a story of the men who played the leading roles at Jamestown—of Gosnold, Wingfield, Smith, New-

Wesley Frank Craven, professor of history at Princeton University, is the author of "The Southern Colonies in the Seventeenth Century."

port, Percy, Argall, Gates, De La Warr, Dale, Rolfe, Yeardley, and Wyatt, and of Powhatan and Opechancano. Sir Thomas Smith, Sir Edwin Sandys, and others of the adventurers in England also find place in the narrative, but it is obvious that Captain John Smith is of greater interest to the author than is Sir Thomas Smith. And when the scene of action is shifted from Jamestown to London it is for the purpose chiefly of lending logic to the sequence of events in the colony.

This focus on Jamestown, though offering certain advantages, imposes definite limitations on the value of the study. During the very years that are of primary interest to Mr. Willison the ultimate control of the Virginia venture was located in London rather than in Jamestown, and the men who in Virginia assumed responsibility for the execution of policy were agents, not principals. It is not intended to suggest that Mr. Willison is unaware of this fact. His text is enlightened throughout by scrupulous regard for the findings of other historians, including those who have felt the need for emphasis no less on the actions of the adventurers than on the experiences of the colonists. But it can be fairly said that he has studied one side of the story more closely than the other, and that this choice of interest is reflected at times in a failure to recognize the full weight of the adventurers' influence on developments in the colony.

A case in point is provided by the treatment of Captain Christopher Newport, who through several years served to bring from England the recruits and supplies which helped sustain the colony. A more sympathetic view of Newport's special status as an agent, as one who usually had come only recently from London with freshly given instructions and who soon must return to London, might have softened the author's judgment of the man.

Closer study might also have given Mr. Willison more sympathy for the objectives set by the adventurers, a better understanding of the limitations under which they worked, and a fuller appreciation of their extraordinary

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Poetry. *More than any other form of literature verse defies the ministrations of the translator. Thus it is that Paul Eluard, Raymond Queneau, and Henri Michaux—in the opinion of Justin O'Brien perhaps the "most considerable French poets of the present"—are little-known in this country. Thanks to "scrupulous and intuitive translators," some of Michaux's work is now available to English-speaking readers: his "The Barbarian in Asia," published several years ago, and his "Selected Writings," which Professor O'Brien reviews on page 11. On the other hand, the name and works of Wallace Stevens, the Hartford insurance executive who has been regularly publishing notable verse over the past thirty-five years, are well known to everyone who has followed contemporary American poetry. It is good to have his essays, published in various places during the last decade, gathered into a single volume, "The Necessary Angel," which Gerard Previn Meyer reviews on page 11.*

Inner Echoes of Word Sounds

THE SORROWS OF COLD STONE:
Poems 1940-1950. By John Malcolm Brinnin. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. \$3.

By RAYMOND HOLDEN

JOHAN MALCOLM BRINNIN's fourth volume of poems is a collection, presumably chosen by the poet himself, from his work of the last ten years, including a considerable number of pieces not heretofore published in book form. It would be reasonable, therefore, to suppose that the reader may draw from this volume a fair picture of what Mr. Brinnin conceives his work and himself as a poet to be.

What are the ingredients of the picture? Like the decorative illustrations which Theodoros Stamos has done to accompany the poems, these ingredients are subject to numerous interpretations. To this reviewer there seem to be among them, first, a very remarkable talent; second, a background of understanding of the best in English poetry; and third, an ability to achieve a successful fusion between imaginative mood and the form of a poem. This should add up to something very fine and, in a sense, it does.

Mr. Brinnin has used his talent with great elegance and distinction

to make some very fine poems, yet there are moments when it seems his enormous technical knowledge and his intricate proficiency have been used to build a glittering and highly ornamented cathedral for the worship of a not entirely clean skeleton. This, it must be said, is a reviewer's impression and is, perhaps, beside the point. Mr. Brinnin is obviously interested in the semantics and phonetics of language rather than in its recognized declarative potentialities.

His longish poem, "The Worm in the Whirling Cross," is as interesting as a crossword puzzle, though not much more so, yet the reader cannot help admiring the author's virtuosity and the brilliance with which he delivers volley after volley of pun and paronomasia, as if his mind were playing tennis with the sound it utters and the sound were winning a love¹ set.

Although it seems to me that Mr. Brinnin overdoes this poetic punning and leans a little heavily on the seventeenth century, there are surely few American poets writing today who are more keenly aware of the great importance to poetry—and it is an importance far greater than many poets and most readers of poetry believe—of those inner echoes which bound back and forth among the walls of words.

There are many beautiful poems in this book, both grave and light, which make it plain that Mr. Brinnin, whatever he wishes or does not wish to say, has an ear and a voice which rank him high among American poets.

Raymond Holden is the author of "Arrow at the Heel," "Believe the Heart," and other volumes of verse.



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