

## These Were Their Lives

By Ruth A. Sonneborn, *director of the Bank Street College Bookstore and consultant on children's books to school and parent groups.*

**F**ASHIONS in writing biography have changed over the years. As children we read through innumerable stories of incredibly unblemished men and women. To a certain extent the hero-worshipping attitude still exists; and indeed, as Donald Cox pointed out in *SR* July 19, 1960, the success of today's highly skilled women biographers probably stems somewhat from the fact that "they have all literally fallen in love with their subjects." But in the interval between contemporary writers and those of the early years of the century there was the cruelly debunking period of the 1920s. Now, although our adult biographers once again love their subjects, they love with the hearts and eyes of sympathetic critics.

Juvenile biographers never passed through the debunking stage. How could they when so often their aim was to inspire young people to "read this and do likewise"? To a certain extent this purpose may still exist. Even today too many juvenile biographers describe an intensely deprived child rising with Horatio Alger swiftness from intellectual and worldly rags to intellectual and worldly riches. The emotional cost of the journey is not described; our hero just soars sweetly. However, more and more juvenile biographies, good realistic life stories, show a respect for the young reader, and credit him with the ability to accept and evaluate the weaknesses as well as the strengths of human beings.

Virginia Woolf, in the old *New York Herald* October 30, 1927, quoted the prolific biographer Sir Sydney Lee: "The aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality." To which she added, "No single sentence could more neatly split up into two parts the whole problem of the biographer."

The problem is particularly troublesome for the writer of juvenile biography, who must steer a course between the too scholarly and the too "hopped up," between the too psychological and the too superficial interpretation, between the too lurid and the too protectively censored. It is difficult, but first-rate biographers are doing it.

However, many writers for young people still take liberties that would justifiably be condemned in an adult study and should be equally denounced in juvenile biography. In fictionalizing the story they too often neglect to tell the reader which facts are documented and which have been invented. At the very least there should be an introduction or a note at the end to indicate to the scholarly young reader (and there are many such) the extent of the license taken. It is also amazing how many books appear without the maps and photographs needed for clarity and visualization. The fashion of using illustrations for purely decorative purposes seems deplorable in biographies. Moreover, a bibliography for further reading would immeasurably strengthen most of these books.

Talking down to children is universally condemned; thinking down and writing down should be as well. Boys and girls of fourteen are well on their way to emotional and intellectual maturity; it is around this age that the greatest interest in biography develops.

With some of these points in mind it is interesting to compare two recent books about Heinrich Schliemann that appeared recently. "*The Unlikely Hero*," by Alan Honour (Whittlesey House, \$3), and "*The Walls of Windy Troy*," by Marjorie Braymer (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.50), are both well written and contain fascinating material. Both authors



—From "*The Unlikely Hero*."

have wisely played down the immoralities of Schliemann's father but painted in enough details for young readers to judge and understand that father-son relationship. But in general Mr. Honour achieves a "more truthful transmission of personality" than Miss Braymer. The former has escaped the trap that snares many writers for children: the temptation to explain every incident in the life of the biographee as leading straight to the ultimate goal. Schliemann, as Mr. Honour truly portrays him, lost his way for many years. His dream, born in his childhood, of discovering Homer's Troy was not the explanation for his drive to acquire wealth. It was only after long years of unhappiness as a millionaire with a cold and an unsympathetic wife that Schliemann fled, and on his travels realized his ambition.

In "*Charles Steinmetz*," by Henry Thomas (Putnam, Live to Remember Series, \$2.50), we read about this deformed little man with the brain of a giant and the emotions of a child. The author relates with admiration the rude practical jokes he played on his guests. It will be the rare young reader who will understand that this behavior was not an expression of humor, but sprang from the man's deep loneliness and his inability to make contact with people of his age. Is Mr. Thomas perhaps trying to amuse his readers rather than portray a full personality?

A recent series aims to establish reader identification by confining narration to the early years of their subjects. "*The Young Dickens*," by Patrick Pringle, and "*The Young Shakespeare*," by Rosemary Anne Sisson (both Roy, \$3), are lively and suspenseful. Miss Sisson is to be commended for adding a note at the end of the second book admitting the invention of a period in Shakespeare's life, although this is a questionable practice.

Another series launched last year attempts to interest the six-to-eight-year-old in biography. However, "*A Man Named Lincoln*," "*A Man Named Washington*," and "*A Man Named*



—From "*The Golden Hind*."

**Columbus,"** all by Gertrude Norman (Putnam, \$2, \$2, \$2.50), are history rather than true biography. They will perhaps serve as an introduction to these great men and stimulate interest in them when these young readers reach an age capable of understanding the complexities of personality.

One of the most recent biographies in the historically minded World Landmark Books (Random House, \$1.95) will be of particular interest to girls, since there seems to be a scarcity of heroines in juvenile biographical literature. "**Florence Nightingale,"** by Ruth Fox Hume, is a fast-moving, stirring account of a remarkable woman, but one cannot help wishing that the author had given us more of an insight into the powerful emotional and intellectual motives that lay behind her achievements.

In the final analysis, we must try to understand what there is about another person's life that most interests young readers and what they get out of it besides information and fleeting enjoyment. Pre-teenagers and teenagers, for whom most of the biographies are written, are struggling to understand themselves. Through identification with an honest portrayal of personality they can and do gain self-knowledge. And all of us, young and old, can make this identification only if the human being we are reading about shares some of our frailties. Young people in particular need an opportunity to share the dreams and hopes of the men and women who have made outstanding contributions to the world. And in so doing they may go on to shape dreams and hopes of their own.

torical material based on firsthand journal accounts. Ages 10-14.

**GREEK GODS AND HEROES.** By Robert Graves. Illustrated by Dimitris Davis. Doubleday. 160 pp. \$2.95. A jolting book, in which the gods speak a terse, colloquial language and show themselves to be members of a spiteful family. Only in a minimal way do they emerge as heroes or even as the symbolic figures that usually populate the myths. A doubtful approach for younger children, but possibly a stimulating one for teen-agers. Ages 12-15.

**ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT.** By M. Z. Thomas. Illustrated by Elizabeth Brommer. Pantheon. 192 pp. \$3.50. A book about the fascinating scientist of the eighteenth century is to be welcomed. Yet one might wish for a more supple style. This text is curiously wooden, and all of the characters speak in the same rhythm and the same complex sentences. This is probably due to the book's having been translated from German. However, Humboldt's explorations and adventures are interesting and convincing. Ages 12-16.

**MORE HANDS FOR MAN.** By Cornelia Spencer. Illustrated with prints and photographs. John Day. 192 pp. \$3.50. A history of the industrial revolution is a praiseworthy idea, but this author's attempt to view that amazing period through the eyes of an English working-class family weakens the book. Her characters never become real, but the dramatic facts make this a useful reference. Ages 12-16.

**THE AMERICAN INDIAN.** By Oliver La Farge. Golden. 213 pp. \$5.95. An adaptation of the author's "A Pictorial History of the American Indian," this volume offers a comprehensive view of the Indians: where they came from, how they spread, what cultures they developed, and how they met the white man. Told in clear, compact text, amplified by a magnificent collection of paintings, photographs, and prints, it is a book for young people who have considerable background in American history and geography. Ages 12 up.

Reviewers for this issue are Irma S. Black, Claudia Lewis, Betty Miles, and Joan Winsor Bloss, of Bank Street College.



— From "Alexander von Humboldt."

**BOYHOODS OF GREAT COMPOSERS.** By Catherine Gough. Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone. Walck. 53 pp. \$2.50. Mr. Ardizzone's illustrations are incredibly appropriate to this introduction to the lives of Handel, Mozart, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Grieg, and Elgar, each brief chapter of which is concluded with a few paragraphs on the adult musician. A satisfactory book for children familiar with these composers. Ages 7-11.

**MOZART.** By Reba Paeff Mirsky. Illustrated by W. T. Mars. Follett. 144 pp. \$3.50. A thorough and affectionate biography, with emphasis on the composer's early years. Letters from Mozart to his family add authenticity—and verve, for the letters are charming. But only one small tune appears in notation; the book should certainly be supplemented by piano music or records for the child interested enough in the composer to seek his biography. Ages 8-12.

**SIR ISAAC NEWTON.** By W. Robert Houston and M. Vere DeVault. Illustrated by Betty Cobb. Steck. 48 pp. \$1.75. The explanations of the physical laws discovered by the great mathematician are in simple, understandable terms, and experiments are lucidly described. Though this elementary biography offers little understanding of the man as a human being, it is valuable as an introduction to Sir Isaac as a thinker. Charts are informative. Ages 8-12.

**ZACHARY, THE GOVERNOR'S PIG.** By Bruce Grant. Illustrated by Robert Frankenburg. World. 139 pp. \$2.95. A stubborn and resourceful razorback hog who has been raised as a pet trails his young master and the Kentucky volunteers during the War of 1812. Zachary's owner is a likable and believable boy though most of the human characters remain a bit shadowy. Ages 9-12.

**THE GOLDEN HIND.** By Edith Thacher Hurd. Illustrated by Leonard Everett Fisher. Crowell. 118 pp. \$2.50. Sir Francis

Drake is the key figure in this story about the Age of Exploration. Although the voyage with which the book is concerned is described in rather routine fashion, the honesty with which the author records Drake's piratical treatment of the Spaniards and hints at the complicated morality of the times makes this an unusual book for schoolchildren. Ages 9-12.

**HENRY CLAY.** By Regina Z. Kelly. Illustrated by Charles Walker. Houghton Mifflin. 191 pp. \$1.95. A rather appealing story about an eager little boy, ready to recite at the slightest hint of interest, who became a candidate who would rather be right than President. It is somewhat frightening, however, to see the ladies' magazine trick of putting thoughts into italics being foisted upon helpless youth. *Let us hope this trend does not spread,* thought this reviewer. Ages 9-12.

**THE BOY THEY MADE KING.** By David Scott Daniell. Illustrated by William Stobbs. Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 151 pp. \$3. In 1487 conspiring nobles plotted against the new Tudor king, a poor man's son was crowned, and 6,000 men died in the Battle of Stokes Field. In this skilful book facts and background details are meaningfully deployed and there emerges a psychologically valid picture of a boy who, for a brief dramatic time, was coached to play the role of Edward Plantagenet, youthful Earl of Warwick. The author concludes with a two-page note meticulously identifying the true and the fictional elements of this outstanding historical novel. Ages 10-14.

**VOYAGE OF THE COLUMBIA: Around the World with John Boit, 1790-1793.** Edited by Dorothy O. Johansen. With Comments on the Art of Navigation by Dana Small. **MARCH OF THE VOLUNTEERS: Soldiering with Lewis and Clark.** By Constance Bordwell. Both Champoege Press. 92 pp., 111 pp. Both \$1.95. These first paperbacks in the new series of Reed College Beaver Books offer absorbing his-

## What's Behind the Gold Problem?

*Continued from page 43*

Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund, I indicated that countries had allowed their policies to be determined predominantly by domestic considerations, and that they should, up to a point, try to take an outflow of short-term funds in their stride. But I added that "predominantly" must clearly be taken to mean that other considerations have not to be forgotten. It would indeed be shortsighted to neglect them, even in relation to the main domestic purpose of sustained expansion. If, in an attempt to raise activity by credit and fiscal policies, inflationary pressures are set up, the resulting cost and price increases and weakness in the external balance may soon create conditions under which economic expansion could not be maintained.

**I**F we now try to apply these general principles to the present American situation, I would say, for my part, that the easing of credit conditions recently undertaken by the Federal Reserve system has been the proper policy. . . . In view of the sharp increase in the surplus of exports over imports of merchandise, it seems to me that balance of payments considerations ought not to stand in the way of the proper measures that should be taken for internal reasons, especially since the transition from an inflationary psychology to the expectation of more stable prices will insure greater attention to costs. This latter consideration is certainly of crucial importance. The avoidance of cost and price increases is a vital consideration in the formation of U. S. policy, now and in the near future. . . .

I think particular attention must be paid to the fact that on the world markets generally prices have ceased to increase, and indeed that the prices of some raw materials have even declined. Supplies have caught up with demand for fuels (both oil and coal), raw materials generally, and even for most manufactured products. It is my personal belief that the world price level is determined largely by factors outside the United States, even if for some products U. S. demand is of great importance. . . .

That being the case, it is evident that an increase in costs and prices here will involve the risk that American industries could price themselves out of world markets. It would obviously be wrong to say that this has already happened, after the very impressive increase in U. S. exports over the last twelve months. Fortunately for the United States—and the world in general—there are many materials and manufactured products, including complicated types of machinery, that the outside world has to purchase in this country, and will continue to purchase here in the future. Productivity is high in the United States, but wages are also high. All this means—briefly—that from a balance of payments point of view cost increases should be avoided. . . .

If we examine past experiences we generally find that those countries that have combined cost adjustments with credit expansion have fared better than those that have not, certainly as far as recovery in business activity is concerned. Costs can, of course, be reduced in many ways, even without reducing money wages. The more attention that is paid to cost and price adjustments, the less need there will be to rely on massive credit expansion as a means of mitigating a business recession, and only in that way can a more lasting remedy be found. For a policy of cost adjustments through rationalization should make the economy more efficient, and should thus be the policy most likely to improve real wages over a period of time.

I have come to the conclusion that the proper policy on costs to be followed here in the United States ought to be very much the same whether internal or external considera-

tions are given more weight. Indeed, in this country it is almost more important for industrialists to avoid pricing themselves out of the home market, which is so much larger than the markets provided by the export trades. . . .

Given the proper fiscal and credit and cost policies, there are a number of supplementary steps that could be taken in the United States and abroad that would help to improve the position, and I would mention the following:

It is good that individual firms in the United States should be made more aware of the possibilities of the export trade, and should try energetically to develop that part of their business. . . .

The U.S. Government and the International Monetary Fund, and of course the GATT, have for years pressed for the elimination of trade and payments discrimination against dollar goods. Great progress has been made, but continued efforts are required.

The U. S. Government has also favored a general lowering of tariffs. It is faced with a very tough problem in its relations with the new trading areas, especially in Europe, where it must seek to insure that U. S. interests are not ignored.

Then there is the whole problem of U. S. Government expenditure abroad, whether for military purposes or for assistance for the less developed countries. . . . Other countries which have regained their strength during the postwar years may well be expected to assume a larger share of such expenditure.

In the field of international capital transactions, the recent reductions in short-term interest rates in France, Great Britain, and Germany should also be helpful. . . .

Perhaps I should mention certain steps which are sometimes hinted at but which, in my opinion, should not be taken. Although European countries will, I hope, increase their share of foreign assistance, I do not believe that the U. S. contribution can be substantially curtailed. It seems to me that the many statements made on this subject during the election campaign pointed to continued U. S. concern about further progress in the underdeveloped countries and the importance of continued assistance for that purpose. A greater danger, which should be avoided in any circumstances, would be to increase tariffs. . . .

**I**N particular it is essential that there should be close contact between the financial authorities on the two sides of the Atlantic—a relationship we failed to establish in the period between the two wars. The International Monetary Fund has been useful in this context, and it is now proposed that the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, in which the United States and Canada were associate partners, be transformed into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in which the United States and Canada would be full members. . . .

Fortunately today the leading industrial countries have nearly all accumulated sufficient, or almost sufficient, reserves, especially taking into account the secondary reserves available to them through the International Monetary Fund. In the next few years I hope we shall be able to consolidate the present exchange structure, and on this basis be able to create the conditions for sustained economic growth. . . .

Assuming that we may prevent both inflation and deflation, we shall have to adjust our practices to the requirements of a more stable price level, which I am fairly confident we shall be able to achieve. For my own part, I have no fear that a period of stagnation will result. It is my opinion that the attainment of a satisfactory rate of growth and higher employment and the preservation of a relatively stable price level are fully consistent goals. In view of the great technological developments, and for other reasons, demand for capital all over the world may be expected to be large, and there should be no accumulation of idle savings.



# EDUCATION IN AMERICA



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## Johnny Goes to College

### SR/EDUCATION

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THE SPOTLIGHT on the schools has moved upward through the grades with the birth-rate bulge. Six years ago the widely heard question "Why can't Johnny read?" implied that Johnny was a small boy in the elementary school—one of the 24,000,000 American children born since World War II.

After the launching of Sputnik the question changed to: "Why doesn't Johnny show more enthusiasm for the 'hard' subjects: mathematics, science, and foreign languages?" Johnny was now in high school but still having a bad time because the focus of attention had turned to the secondary level where schools were beginning to be swamped with the post-war babies.

Today Johnny is almost ready for college but it becomes increasingly clear that the colleges aren't ready for him. The result is that higher education is coming in for its share of critical attention. In this there is an ironic justice because the presidents, deans, and professors of colleges and universities have been among the most vocal critics of the lower schools and when the attention turns to them they will probably be just as hurt, indignant, and defensive as were those responsible for elementary and secondary education. They will insist that the critics are unfair and uninformed, but this won't stop the criticism or keep it from bringing about some dramatic changes in the colleges just as it has in the elementary and secondary schools.

Fortunately, some college leaders are willing to subject their own institutions to critical examination. Dr. Seymour Harris of Harvard says that "the proliferation of courses is a scandal from the viewpoint of both economics and education." President Grayson Kirk of Columbia University says, "Too many colleges have become travesties on seats of learning by glorifying sports, social organizations, and recreational activities to the point of absurdity. There are schools that actually give credit toward degrees for courses in square dancing, fly casting . . . and beating the bass drum in the band."

Earl McGrath, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, says, "In many colleges and professional schools instruction often is concerned with the trivial and transient rather than the significant and the permanent." Philip Coombs of the Ford Foundation reports that colleges "use their available classrooms at only 46 per cent of capacity and their laboratories at only 38 per cent of capacity" at a time when they are rightly alarmed about the shortage of space. Moreover, many colleges, particularly in the East, remain closed for a third of the weeks in the year.

While foreign language is being newly stressed in the elementary school there are still several hundred colleges in the United States that require no foreign language either for admission or for graduation. Some have a rigid requirement that every graduate must be able to swim the length of the pool but are much more flexible and lenient about their require-