

Authors and Academicians

By GRANVILLE HICKS

ALTHOUGH the expansion of the college population in recent years may have been most strongly felt in the physical science departments, enrollment has greatly increased in all fields, including literature. Heaven knows how many millions of students are taking courses in literature and how many thousands of teachers are instructing them. These students are being offered a greater variety of courses than their fathers dreamed of, if only because the study and teaching of contemporary literature have become respectable. Whereas Ph.D. candidates were once directed to find their thesis subjects in the past, preferably the remote past, they are now permitted to write on men little older than they are. (I know of several theses on Salinger, and I'm willing to bet that someone somewhere is working on John Updike.) And these men and women go out and teach the moderns, often to large and eager classes.

This situation has had an interesting effect on the publishing business: several publishers, some connected with universities and some commercial, have undertaken ambitious series of books concerned with literary figures both from the past and from the present. I have commented on some of these books from time to time, but it may be useful to survey the entire field. After all, although the publishers have their eyes on the academic market, what they are doing may be important for the general reader.

The pioneer series was the University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, published by the University of Minnesota Press and sold for 65¢ a volume. Four new titles have been added this fall, bringing the total to twenty-three. Thirteen deal with writers of the twentieth century and six with writers of the nineteenth, while four are concerned with groups of writers, such as recent poets and recent dramatists. In the four new pamphlets we find Robert Gorham Davis on John Dos Passos, Stanley Edgar Hyman on Nathanael West, Hyatt Waggoner on Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Jack Ludwig on a group of contemporary novelists, none of whom, apparently, is judged worthy of a volume to himself. At least twenty pamphlets are to be published in the next year or so.

Although the series is uneven, as all such series are bound to be, the average is high. The editors are critics of distinction, and as a rule they have chosen contributors who carry weight. If the brevity of the pamphlets—they run to less than fifty pages—has handicapped some of the contributors, it encourages conciseness and cogency. Biographical information is reduced to essentials, and critical analyses, as a rule, are clear and pointed. For the general reader, as well as for the student, the series is a stimulus to more thoughtful reading.

A more elaborate project is Twayne's United States Authors Series, which, it has been announced, will include more than seventy volumes, thirty of which have been published. These volumes are from 150 to 200 pages in length, and cost \$3.50 each. The series, which is edited by Sylvia E. Bowman of the University of Indiana, will cover the whole range of American literature, though with considerable emphasis on the moderns. The five volumes most recently published indicate the range: Parry Stroud on Stephen Vincent Benét, Blair Rouse on Ellen Glasgow, Joseph Ridgely on William Gilmore Simons, Miriam Rossiter Small on Oliver Wendell Holmes, and R. Baird Sherman on Clifford Odets. What strange juxtapositions!

ALL OF THE contributors are teachers, and if a few of them are well known, most of them aren't (Indeed, I have never heard of the colleges in which some of them teach.) With some notable exceptions, the books tend to be excessively academic, and the series as a whole, I feel, has not been planned with sufficient care. On the other hand, it has the merit of treating at length a number of writers about whom little has been written.

The Twentieth Century Views Series, edited by Maynard Mack of Yale and published by Prentice-Hall, is made up

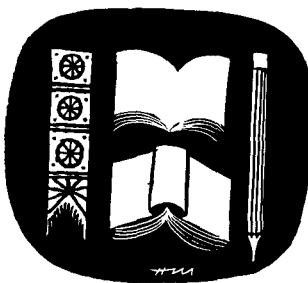
of collections of critical essays, each collection dealing with a particular literary figure. The volumes, of which there are presently twenty-one, run to about 100 pages and cost \$3.95 in cloth and \$1.50 in paperback. The writers represented in the new releases are Melville, Kafka, Homer, Emerson, Lorca, Baudelaire, Edith Wharton, Sartre, Dostoevsky, Brecht, and John Donne. Each of the editors is an authority on his man, and so far the editing has been excellent. I particularly like the inclusion of long critical essays, usually uncut.

I have mentioned (SR, June 23) the first five volumes in Crosscurrents/Modern Techniques, a series edited by Harry T. Moore and published by Southern Illinois University Press at \$4.50 a volume. The four volumes recently published are: "The Grotesque: An American Genre," by William Van O'Connor; "Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot," by Charles Shapiro; "New American Gothic," by Irving Malin; "The College Novel in America," by John O. Lyons. This series is more heterogeneous than the others I have named, but individual volumes are interesting.

Barnes and Noble's entry in the competition is American Authors and Critics Series, edited by John Mahoney. So far it is made up of six volumes—Cooper, Whittier, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, and Thomas Wolfe—each about 150 pages and selling for \$2.95 in cloth, \$1.25 in paperback. It is my impression that the series is, and is intended to be, rather more elementary and textbookish than the others.

Grove Press is publishing in this country an English series, edited by A. Norman Jeffares, with the advice of David Daiches and C. P. Snow. Each book has 120 pages and costs 95¢ in paperback. The authors discussed are mostly but not exclusively contemporaries, and come from the United States and the Continent as well as from England. Edwin Muir, Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce, and Mark Twain are the subjects of the four volumes most recently added, which bring the total to twenty.

There is more to come: Crowell-Collier is preparing an extensive series of critical biographies under the editorship of Louis Kronenberger, and I hear that Columbia University Press plans a series of pamphlets similar to Minnesota's. The question that has to be asked is whether we aren't in danger of having too much of a good thing. Already there are duplications, and there are bound to be more. The market, however much it may grow, is not unlimited, and the saturation point may not be far ahead. One hopes that when the axe falls it lands on the necks that deserve it.



Which Way the Going Concern?

"The Pyramid Climbers," by Vance Packard (McGraw-Hill. 339 pp. \$5), explores the Everest of big-corporation life and its demands on those who would ascend its rarefied heights. D. W. Brogan, professor of political science at Cambridge University in England, is at present a senior research fellow at Yale Law School. He is the author of *"The American Character," "America in the Modern World," "Politics in America,"* and other books.

By D. W. BROGAN

THIS, it seems to me, is Vance Packard's best book, and an intrinsically good and useful one. I have enjoyed the author's previous works more than I have believed in them. But in *"The Pyramid Climbers"* he uses the stiletto rather than the club, eschews scatter-gun techniques, writes demurely but effectively, and displays an impressive desire to be fair, to see the problems from the actor's point of view and not merely from the spectator's. It is only after reading a hundred pages or so that one comes to realize how adroitly the criticisms are planted. This is not an exposé of the methods of executive training, promotion, and utilization. It is a description which, to me, is friendly, well-informed, but in the best sense critical.

To begin with, Mr. Packard accepts the fact that the billion-dollar corporation has come to stay. The great companies, notably General Motors, are getting better, and one of the problems of the contemporary executive class arises from such size. A small and even a middle-sized firm can judge the man on the job. It can tolerate eccentricity; it may, indeed, be headed by an eccentric. But the billion-dollar corporation with its thousands of "executives," from which the real executives (or *the* executive) must be chosen, has a problem on its hands. Mr. Packard has a good many doubts as to the success with which the problem is being met.

In the first place, there is a deliberate exclusion of a great deal of promising managerial material. There is a strong and in some businesses a dominating preoccupation with



Vance Packard—"a good many doubts."

recruiting exclusively from college-trained—preferably Ivy League college-trained—"Wasps" ("white Anglo-Saxon Protestants").

The pool from which top management is drawn comprises, Mr. Packard estimates, 3 per cent of the population. Even if we push the figure up to 10 per cent, the conclusion is equally depressing. From my own observation, and from the reading of books like Anthony Sampson's *"Anatomy of Britain,"* I believe that in my caste-ridden country we do better. In England there is much less of the childish and odious social anti-Semitism that disfigures the United States, and there is less bias against women.

The ways in which executives are picked young and "brought along" involve a mixture of "science" and magic. It pays, we learn, to be well over six feet tall. Only General de Gaulle would qualify among today's political leaders; Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln would have made it, but not Hamilton, Adams, Wellington, Napoleon—or Andrew Carnegie, James J. Hill, or John D. Rockefeller. It also pays to be lean. The Cassius type is favored, which may account for the amount of skilled knifing that goes on.

Once in, the rising executive is molded and disciplined to a degree that would startle a Protestant admirer or fearer of the Jesuits. His clothes,

his manners, his visiting cards, his clubs, his friends, his recreations are all tailored to the corporation image. No wonder the executive who is a ball of fire in the boardroom is so often a bust in bed. He is married to the corporation; so the nominal wife often takes to the bottle or to Reno.

The slow ascent up the pyramid is painful and dangerous. The man ahead may "accidentally" stamp on your hand; the man below may withdraw his supporting push at a critical moment. But somebody has to get to the top. It may be luck. The tide in the affairs of men may be running with the corporation; it may carry the executive of no real merit over all the shallows and miseries. Or it may run the other way and wreck the life and the family of a capable executive who is unlucky.

One asks why this perilous ascent should be made. There is mere ambition: the summit is there, like Everest. There is the craving for power and recognition, the desire to say, "I made it" (as well as the more dangerous "I've got it made"). And there is money. In a burst of un-American frankness Mr. Packard stresses this old-fashioned motive. He does not accept the view that Americans, unlike Europeans, are unmaterialistic, anxious to give service. They may and often do want to give service, but they put a high price tag on their efforts, one that the executives of the great corporations, owning less than 5 per cent of the stock, can often determine free of any control by the majority stockholders. Then there are the fringe benefits, the executive suites (there is one that has a carved marble toilet), the swivel chairs with headrests, the company planes. (Corporations tend to keep their names off the executive planes, as stockholders waiting in airports for regular transportation have been known to be narrow-minded about such legitimate perquisites.) There is company booze; and, as guests of another company, there may be company call girls. It is the life of Reilly—or is it?

Not quite. There is the Golden Bough aspect: every top executive must watch out for the aspirant. There seems to be least danger in banking, and most in the "barracuda pool" of advertising, where there are ulcers and coronaries, gloom and tension. Since only a few can get to the top, there is bound to be a mass of the thwarted whose ambitions have been excited above their talents or luck (and luck is a talent). But to serve, and rise, in a great corporation is the ambition of a high proportion of the ablest 2 per cent of American males.

What general conclusions does Mr.