

than the illegitimate son of Marie Brantôme and David Mannon. Orin, Brant, and Ezra are replicas in appearance. "Vinnie" is her mother over again, but soured and repressed. In this family there are two characters, one raging for love and life but held back and holding back, one freely moving toward desire (are they Abe and Marie Brantôme?), but these are mingled and blended until each individual is drawn and torn by conflicting temperaments.

And for three plays, each an act in a trilogy which is inconclusive except as a whole, O'Neill debates the question as to whether happiness is right. Christine desires it and takes Brant as her lover. Ezra desires it, and humbles himself before Christine. She poisons him, and Vinnie, taking Electra's part and already jealous because of Brant, turns Orin (her Orestes) against his mother, drives him into murdering Brant, and Christine into suicide. Orin desires happiness and will marry the gentle Hazel; but Vinnie fears that he will reveal the family secrets, and when the price of his renunciation is set at the anesthetizing guilt of an incestuous relationship with herself, she helps him to self murder. Vinnie is still determined to escape into love and life, but in the complexity of her guilt finds that she cannot marry her simple lover Peter without poisoning his nature and his happiness. She goes back into the house of Mannon, the shutters are closed, and she puts on mourning for life.

Thus O'Neill offers three solutions for a life entanglement. First, a ruthless break through into satisfaction, which here is blocked by situations arising from the Mannon character. Second, a drowning of conscience in guilt so complete that character disintegrates. This the weak Orin finds possible, and the strong Vinnie impossible. Third, a return to stoicism, either the stoicism of death, or the stoicism of renunciation, each sterile. The last curtain falls on this solution.

"Mourning Becomes Electra" is not melodrama, although two murders, two suicides, an adultery, and three incestuous relationships, might make Gorbuduc hide his head and the Duchess of Malfi shudder! It is not melodrama because, granted the Mannon character, what follows is logical though lurid. Neither is it realism. These Mannons and the village dependents who serve as chorus are written up in the low tone and speak in the familiar language of the realistic drama, but all are symbols, and the tragic figures have the shadowy greatness of romantic heroes and heroines capable of anything. The faces of Captain Peter and his sister, Hazel, who are so unfortunate as to love, and be loved, by the Mannons, are not masked because there is nothing to hide. Seth, the gardener, the family confidante, has put on a mask of drunken senility to cover what he knows and what the Mannons have made of him. He and his boozey char- teys provide a clowning in the style of King Lear. But the Mannons and the Mannon wives are Byronic figures, each like the spectral troop in Beckford's "Vathek" hiding a burning heart, and masking the character which is the fatal family gift.

And one is forced to the rather astonishing conclusion for this day and generation that to the ultra-modern Mr. O'Neill, who in "Strange Interlude" introduced the populace to Freud, the American Puritan, with his conflicts between duty and desire, is still romantic. Like Hawthorne he veils and adumbrates his characters into shadowy and terrible greatness, like Hawthorne he sees no solution to the conflict and so wrecks his characters upon it as upon the rock of fate. Is this due to some racial compulsion, which we, in our light skepticism have overlooked, or has he wearied of the trivial interludes of modern love affairs and gone back to soul-searching Puritanism for a theme, precisely as the writers of movie scenarios yearn back to a long-vanished Wild West in search of a virile story?

And indeed there are clear indications that Mr. O'Neill is riding his romance too hard in "Mourning Becomes Electra." The old rigors, the old conflicts that inspired Hawthorne are no longer enough, they have no "kick" in them for O'Neill unless

they are lifted from imagination into nightmare and lead to situations so sensational that it is horror rather than imaginative sympathy which they inspire. All, all the Mannons must be made incestuous in wish, because the last step in the suppression of desire by a code is a spiritual morbidity where the tortured soul can be satisfied only by what is forbidden in every man's taboo. All, all in their imaginations long for some "happy island" of the South Seas (and Lavinia goes to seek it) where they can lapse into primitivism with their beloveds and doff their karmas with their garments. The Puritan tradition of greed and suppression, duty and accomplishment, is driven into a baleful Purgatory with no way out but a return to savagery, or a final extinction of all that makes it human. This is the kind of alternative that Byron used to offer a shuddering Europe. It was excess then, it is excess now. The dramatist has tortured his situation until it becomes an abnormality, and his tragedy suffers from the law of diminishing returns.

I submit that by every literary and historical test this is decadence, the sensationalism of decadence, the reversals of decadence by which the recessive abnormalities of character become the main-springs of the plot. It is what Melville attempted in his violent reaction from the happy simplicities of "Typee," but lost himself in a maze of words. I offer this as a definition rather than as a criticism, for there have been masterpieces of decadent literature (such as Poe's tales of the grotesque), although their place is on the fume downward slope of Parnassus. But whence comes this tension which, when the tragic imagination of Americans reaches a certain pitch, sends our best minds taut and trembling into the depths of the macabre? Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Bierce, and in our time, Faulkner, Green, O'Neill! If it is the karma of Puritanism, why should that so deeply and so morbidly affect us now? It is a reaction to the surface optimism of a materialistic country, why should the classic Americans in America's most settled period have been driven also?

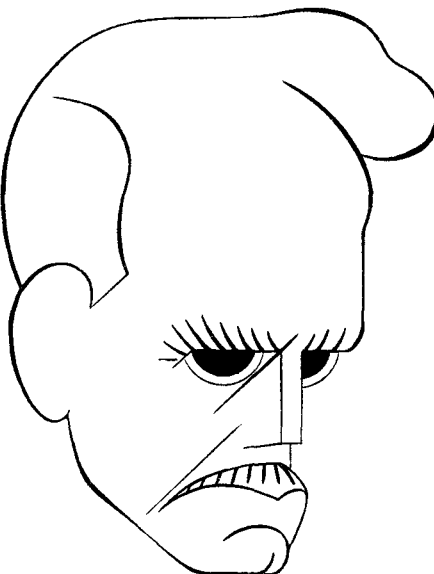
It is, I presume, the result of a triple struggle which has lasted longer than the United States:—an unexampled acquisitive energy bred of protestantism and pioneering; an unexampled idealistic optimism, the strain which Emerson and Whitman have lifted into literature; and a violence of reaction against either or both of these native impulses which carries the sensitive and dissatisfied spirit (even a Mark Twain) into a search for something horrid enough to smite this complacent country into attention—a jaw bone of a corpse, or a spectre from the Merrymount that has been sacrificed to make Chicago and New York, or the spectacle of the Puritan himself (as here) mangled between the jaws of conscience and lurid desires.

They have all taken refuge in romance, these rebels, and that has been their weakness. Hawthorne was cloudy, Poe hysterical, Melville confused; and O'Neill, with all his power of summoning figures of depth and magnitude, weakens into morbidity. Exasperated (like the others) by bourgeois complacency, and aghast at the possibilities his heated imagination discovers in the Puritan conflict, O'Neill in this play stacks his cards, adds incest to adultery, murder to mental breakdown, and flings the whole pack at his stodgy audiences, determined to make them sit up and see what he sees in their family lives. In the same fashion he underlined and interpolated in "Strange Interlude" until he had planted Freud in the dullest intelligence. It is Byron's, it is Poe's frantic longing to be understood, it is a phase, I think, of decadence, and a real limitation upon the art of one of the very few modern dramatists in English who can lay claim to the high ground of tragedy.

Mr. O'Neill is like his own Emperor Jones. The bogies of his mind pursue him. He has insight and a quite terrific power of masking and unmasking his characters. But the warped mind, the unbalanced imagination, and characters sick from their own complexities, attract him as if he were an interne in a hospital. And then

his innate romanticism clothes them in morbid terrors and gives them strange baleful worlds to play in, which are too like our own to be laughed at, yet too strained, too tense, too highly specialized, to be altogether convincing.

If our American society is truly decadent; if its energy is merely the noise of a pack on a trail leading nowhere, and its true story to be found only in its sick and defeated souls, then O'Neill is its prophet. If it is not decadent (and I for one, who have been as free as any to attack the lunacy of contemporary ideals, do not for an instant believe it to be decadent), if, like so many other societies as they approach maturity, it is working out with sweat and infinite variety the karma of Puritanism, the karma of progress, the karma of the machine, then it is O'Neill who is decadent, a fine talent wandering in a nightmare, where truth and sensational exaggeration are strangely mixed,



EUGENE O'NEIL  
FROM A CARTOON BY EVA HERMANN FOR  
"ON PARADE" (COWARD-MC CANN)

in which art becomes lurid with all the devices of melodrama, and where life is subjected to the arbitrary rules of literary psychology made compulsive by a brilliant dialogue that becomes more articulate with every turn of the screw. His skill, his sincerity, and his lift above the triviality of current drama and fiction, stir the emotions, but they are not purged; his very excess curdles them. Indeed the super-sensational, super-sentimental, super-everything feature movie, and the high-tension, romantic decadence of the O'Neill tragedies have many points of resemblance. They are both phases of the last stages of nineteenth century American romance.

This criticism was written after reading but before seeing "Mourning Becomes Electra." Since writing it, I have seen the play, and have been deeply impressed by its relentless flow of action, its brilliant and imaginative dialogue, and the beautiful simplicity with which the mills of circumstance grind down the Mannon soul to the fine dust of passive resistance. After five hours at "Mourning Becomes Electra" one feels that there is no more skilful playwright at work today than Eugene O'Neill. The subtlety with which his tragic relationships change and renew, son taking the rôle of father, daughter assuming the soul as well as the visible shape of mother, is worthy of the highest praise. It is a notable play, if not a great tragedy. And powers of drama not fully grasped by the reader appear in the actual playing. The duel of women, first mother against daughter, then daughter against brother's sweetheart, makes a curve of tenacity through the three plays which lifts and holds the imagination of the audience until one can conceive of an auditor entirely insensitive to intellectual subtlety who would be stirred by this drama as the groundlings were stirred by "Hamlet."

And yet to sit through a performance of "Mourning Becomes Electra" is to realize, in spite of an attention never for a moment relaxed, how purely intellectual are the materials of the play.

All watchers are tense and excited: none of them seems to be moved in an emotional sense except by the broadly human Captain Brant. There are no thrills of sympathy, none of that spiritual exaltation that waits upon tragedy. And the reason is to be found, I think, in what I have said above. The great characters are all selfish. Nothing outside of their own will stirs them. The high-tension hate which makes the drama move is sprung not from fate or inevitable human circumstance but of those complexities of incestuous desire which make the Mannon family a thing apart. Without those special passions the family could never have brought about such catastrophes. The Greeks who wrote the Electra tragedies would have drawn back, I think, from such a dependence upon special circumstance. They would have known as well as we, although without our psychological terms to describe them, the perversions of love in every strong family, but they would not have rested a tragic development upon an abnormal instance. They were sounder dramatists than Eugene O'Neill. No one can question his consummate skill as a playwright.

### What Would You Do?

THE BOOK OF DILEMMAS. By LEONARD HATCH. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1931. \$1.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT KEITH LEAVITT

MR. HATCH'S amusing volume is another in the procession of participating exercise books which have been so significant a factor in the publishing business ever since the "Cross Word Puzzle" and "Ask Me Another" books. It is, however, rather more on the party amusement side than most of its predecessors.

"The Book of Dilemmas" presents a series of situations briefly outlined, in which the reader is asked to place himself and decide upon a course of action. You assume yourself to be, for example, a young and promising clergyman, returning from Europe aboard a ship which carries not only some of your most strait-laced parishioners, but an angel-faced young lady with whom you have become acquainted. As you are going below one day, this delectable creature asks you to leave in her stateroom a small briefcase. On the way you stumble, the briefcase crashes asunder and cascades into the very laps of your parishioners a choice collection of pornographic postcards.

Before you can explain, the young lady appears, and by a look implores your silence.

Should you accept the situation, involving the notoriety of being classed as a whited sepulchre disgracing your clerical garb, and also involving sure trouble with your parishioners? Or should you make the attempt to pin the blame where it belongs—on the seemingly nice young lady who has so reprehensible a taste in art?

Your task as a reader is to decide upon the proper course of action in this and some twenty-seven other cases. Perhaps a quarter of them are titillatingly improper, for the volume is intended to be used either by the solo player, by a two-some, or by a large party. The astute publishers cannily furnish you with blank pages in which to inscribe the results of wrestling with your own conscience and the dicta of your friends. Further, the book follows the formula for successful works of its type in giving you the nearest thing possible to a rating scale with which to compare your own performance. After every dilemma there are printed the solutions of four acknowledged authorities in manners of genteel conduct, Messrs. Franklin P. Adams, Bruce Barton, Heywood Broun, and Christopher Morley. Their judgments are not the least entertaining feature of the book, especially in the not infrequent cases where one or another of them is forced to perform a masterpiece of equivocation.

On the whole, the book is well adapted to its primary purpose, which is catering to the entertainment of people who like, not reading, but doing things with books.

A three-act play by Signor Mussolini, entitled "Napoleon," is to be produced in Paris in November. It deals with Napoleon's return from Elba.

**Pax Mundi**

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH OUR LIVES? By H. G. WELLS. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1931.

Reviewed by HENRY TRACY

HERE is something which has to be read. A review will not dismiss it. To make reading possible and prompt and widespread, we have it in a paper binding. It is safe to say that this expresses the wish of the author. He writes under a vivid sense of world stresses. More so than is common with this ardent and prolific propagandist? I think so. At least more completely in focus.

Condensed and directed at a particular point in time—the exact present—the logic of the book is coercive. This is no inspirational treatise on what to do with our personal lives in order to escape boredom. A number of pertinent facts are cited, calling attention to the way our world impinges on its individuals—not merely one class or type, but all persons of all ranks and persuasions—and constrains them, variously dwarfing, obstructing, defeating them, so that their lives miscarry. They are obvious facts. Who denies them? But the peculiar genius of Mr. Wells consists in his ability to take commonplace, indisputable and therefore universally tolerated facts, and make them into a pretty cogent chain of reasoning. This he did (so we say) in middle life, for a diversion. Respectable Edwardians were annoyed by certain implications they found in his books, but the cure was easy: not read him! Strangely enough their cure did not work. The disease called H. G. Wells persisted. And now, just when this dubious and perhaps contagious case should have been passing, with gout and cane, into harmless desuetude, comes this disturbing little book, in cheerfullest yellow paper cover and a very selling title.

Only a fool would attempt an academic review of it. If anything can blast the mental inertia of the common man, here is the dynamite. *Homo sapiens europæus*, the common or garden variety of man, with H. G. Wells as self-confessed incarnation of him—this man, tired of waiting for somebody with genius or higher intellectual gifts to come along and provide it for him, decides to form a new ideology of things, and one that will work. And he does it. There is the gist of this slim but compact manifesto. As for its point and purpose, it is that of "The Open Conspiracy" brought down to date and stripped for action.

Those who thought that Herbert George Wells had done his bit and retired, were mistaken. "The Outline of History," "The Science of Life," "Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind" merely lay in his path. So we find, early in this new work, where he recapitulates the crucial nodes in the evolution of his doctrine. This present volume is its cap and condensation. What makes it so (quite apart from his own admissions) is the fact that it contains dynamics. It incites to intelligent action; is no manual of political non-resistance; proposes to revise the conduct of world affairs by revising our conduct of the world mind. Here is a manual of moral self-education, and one infinitely more to the point than if its drift were scattered through the pages of "Joan and Peter." The author of one hundred and eight books or pamphlets should know, by now, what he has to say, and should be able to condense it. He should and he does. Here is the proof. And what has the man to say? Nothing new, really. He has to say that we are due for the beginnings of an alignment among intelligent people the world over, for a world civilization "that will enable us to realize the promises and avoid the dangers of this new time." And he has to show that such a notion is not Utopian. His ground is, belief in the power of an intelligent minority; this power gradually spreading, through reforms in education. He looks to the "Atlantic States" of Scandinavian, German, Dutch, French, English and other European peoples to unite with an American minority (not yet in power) for con-

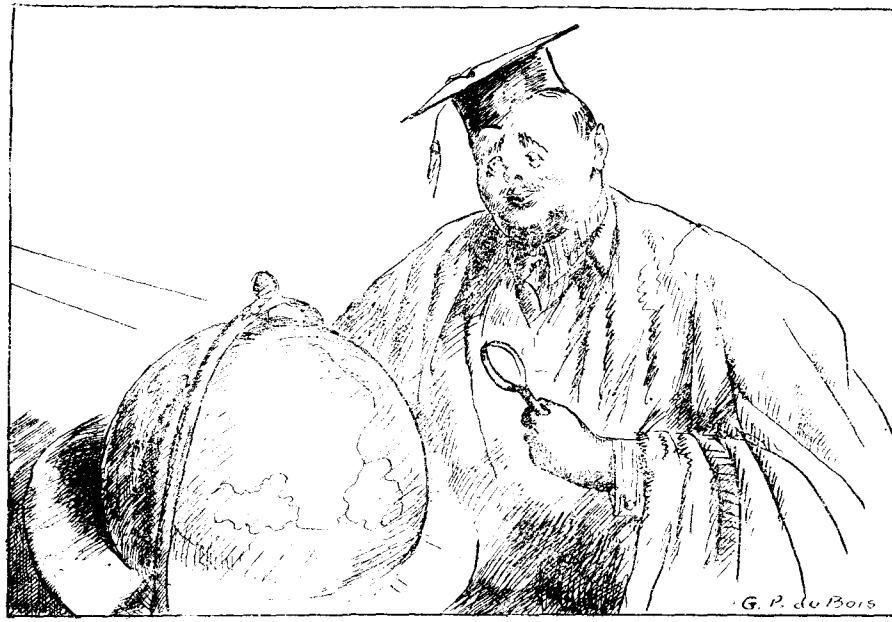
structive research, foreshadowing a gradual taking over economic and political control when the world is ripe for it.

Now if such ideas are distressful to any reader he may do as did the Edwardians, and turn his eyes another way. But it may surprise a few to know that this treatise is expressly anti-Marxian. It disposes effectively of such shibboleths as "proletarian," denies the validity of "class war," and punctures the notion of a discreet and immiscible interest called "Labor." It holds out hope for the discovery of social intelligence among bankers. It describes the Russian Five Year Plan as an autocratic and capitalistic measure.

Apart from its serious intent, it would be a pity to miss the many pungent and pithy phrasings one finds scattered all through these pages; or the good satire. But, after all, there is one thing in it I should count it criminal to neglect, and that is, a priceless parable (I have it red-lettered in my notes, and the page is 126). It is called the story of the pig on Provinder Island. It is a "parable," in God's truth, but the lines laid down in the

tight corners, dragging bad men out of trouble by the ears, tracking road-agents patiently through waterless desert, afoot and hungry and dogged by faithless deputies in league with the very men he was after. We meet gamblers, Fairy Belles, Texas cow-outfits hell-bent to hurrah the Jayhawk cow-towns at the end of steel, and most thrilling of all, we follow the long sanguinary duel between organized, protected crime in league with Arizona sheriffs and the fighting Earps, which ended in the cowardly killing of "Morg" Earp, and Wyatt's revenge. It is the old American racket all over again.

In this book a thousand disputed facts are cleared up, and the facts convincingly presented. So far as one may judge a book which brings so much that is fresh and unexpected, the author has made a rare contribution to authentic Western history, and has presented a thoroughly interesting, gripping, clear, and credible story. The book is eminently readable, without the usual attempts to excite the reader with rhetorical tricks and sensational handling. So well has the author caught the spirit of his subject that the



MR. WELLS LOOKS AT THE WORLD.  
Drawn for the SATURDAY REVIEW by Guy Pene du Bois

Gospels are changed; the thing is hilariously funny. This reviewer had begun reading "What Are We to Do With Our Lives?" at twelve, midnight. It was two-thirty when he came to the parable of the pig. It released him—and since release for humanity is the keynote of the book, he was right to call it a day, and a good one.

Henry Tracy is a biologist and author of many books in belles lettres, among them "English as Experience."

**The American Racket**

WYATT EARP, Frontier Marshal. By STUART N. LAKE. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1931. \$4.

Reviewed by STANLEY VESTAL

EXCEPTING only Billy the Kid and Sitting Bull, there is no name of any frontiersman with-in living memory around which so many legends and myths have been piled as the name Earp. The exploits of that famous family of gun-fighters, and especially the exploits of Wyatt, most celebrated of the brothers, have provided no end of themes for discussion, have whiled away the tedium of countless readers of Western stuff, and have made the fortunes of whole flocks and sects of writers who dealt in more or less fictionalized versions of those thrilling encounters. So thick was the veil of legend, so dim the mountain of fact, that readers had a hard time making sure whether the Earp boys were murderous desperadoes or heroic officers of the law. But now the clouds are swept away, the facts stand clear. Wyatt Earp has spoken.

His career as hunter, pioneer, buffalo-hunter, gambler, cowman, and marshal carries the reader into many of the most celebrated cow-camps and mining-camps of the old West—Dodge and Wichita, Deadwood, and Elsworth, and the rest—all the way from Tombstone, Arizona to Nome, Alaska, and back. We see him in constant action, facing mobs and drunken killers, shooting his way out of

frequent passages taken verbatim from the man of action, Wyatt Earp, cause no interruption or distraction from the main narrative style. Mr. Lake writes as straight as Wyatt Earp shot. A sound performance, which will please all those readers of Western books who are now as exacting in matters of style as they have always been in matters of fact and detail.

As to these, the merits of the book are legion. We have Wyatt Earp's long explanation and discussion of the fine points and technique of gun-play, illustrated by examples from the practice of the most proficient masters of the art; we have a detailed account of the methods of hide-hunters on the buffalo range, more complete than any I know; we have shown to us the inside politics of cattle-rustling and gambling and territorial politics in Arizona as they affected the work of peace officers. John Charles Fremont comes in for some very adverse criticism; and more than one mythical gunman, such as "Doc" Holliday, is brought to life, photograph and all.

If one has any regret, it is that the profanity throughout the book should have been so uniformly washed out and euphemized. Of course, that is all in the tradition of the frontier, an absurdity of our culture which tolerated murder and manslaughter as necessary, but boggled at a naughty word in print. But perhaps even the language of Long John Silver would prove uninspiring, if we were permitted to listen in for long. Yet some spicy speech seems demanded for a book that would present the daring deeds of Western heroes at a time "when there was no law west of Kansas City, and west of Fort Scott, no God."

Stanley Vestal (Walter Stanley Campbell), professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, has carried on extensive research into the history of the West and the Indians of the region. He is the author among other books of "Kit Carson, the Happy Warrior of the Old West."

**Six Worthies**

NATIVE STOCK. THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT SEEN IN SIX LIVES. By ARTHUR POUND. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1931. \$2.50. Reviewed by WILLIAM MACDONALD

OF the six personages whom Mr. Pound chooses as illustrations of the rise of the American spirit, none, in any reasonable likelihood, would be selected to grace any American Hall of Fame, yet all of them, in widely diverse ways, won in their time something more than ordinary distinction. Of the William Pepperrells whose careers Mr. Pound recounts, Sir William is remembered as the leader of the colonial forces that contributed heavily to the capture of Louisburg from the French; but Pepperrell, although properly honored with a baronetcy and lightly compared by some to Marlborough, was, as Mr. Pound says, "no hero, but merely the commander of an extraordinarily courageous and lucky little army which had achieved the next to impossible, and in so doing had weighted the scales of empire." John Bradstreet deserved well of the colonies for his services in the last French and Indian war, and through his capture of Fort Frontenac paved the way for the fall of New France two years later. Ephraim Williams, killed in the "bloody morning scout" near Lake George, left his estate for a school which shortly became Williams College; but Robert Rogers, scout, frontiersman, and heartless Indian fighter, long celebrated in story for his mythical feat of sliding on snowshoes down the five-hundred-foot face of Roger's Rock, on Lake George, fell into devious ways later as Indian agent and political schemer at Machinac, went over to the British in 1776, and died in poverty in London in 1795.

It was the fate of James Clinton, another of Mr. Pound's worthies, to be overshadowed by his younger brother George, twice Vice-President of the United States, and by his son De Witt, governor of New York and official builder of the Erie Canal. James had a more than creditable record in the Revolutionary War, however, commanded the advance part of the American army on its march to Yorktown peninsula in 1781, and was honored by the selection of his brigade to receive the colors which Cornwallis surrendered.

The most spectacular of Mr. Pound's six was Elkanah Watson. Watson's estimate in 1790 that the population of the United States would reach 133,000,000 in 1930 has often been recalled as a clever piece of calculation, but his romantic career included extraordinarily extensive travel in the United States both before and after the Revolution, a successful business venture in France which the French Revolution blasted, the intimate friendship of Franklin, and a disillusioning encounter with Thomas Paine, whom he found at Nantes "unmistakably foul, loaned him a shirt, and browbeat him into taking a bath by denying" him "a packet of English newspapers until he smelled less like brimstone." On his return to America Watson preached enthusiastically the gospel of canals for New York, of which Governor Clinton was to become the successful apostle, was served with tea by Washington in person while suffering an attack of bronchitis at Mount Vernon, went in for gentleman farming in Berkshire county, Massachusetts, launched the first county fair, and died in peace as late as 1842.

Mr. Pound does not claim that these six lives are exceptional illustrations of stages of national development, but he nevertheless thinks that the attentive reader will discover in them "some of the details of a wide and deep evolution of thought and feeling." The reader will have to be very attentive indeed to make the discovery, or, for that matter, to see in the book anything except what it really is—a well-written, carefully worked, and extremely entertaining collection of biographical sketches of six early Americans who were of some importance in their day.