

## Horizons of Building

CHANGING THE SKYLINE. By Paul Starrett. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by EDWIN R. EMBREE

IT is recorded in holy writ that the first skyscraper in the first great city—the tower of Babel—brought confusion of tongues and scattering of the people. From that time forward the unity and solidarity of rural cultures have always been shattered when they grew into city civilizations. Country people speak a common language not only in their tongues but in their beliefs and ceremonies and customs. The unity of this rural culture gives way in cities to diversity of habits, disregard of religious traditions, individualism, a babbling confusion of tongues. Cities have reached their apogee in modern skyscrapers, great towers of steel and concrete rising into the clouds, housing thousands of people on a few square rods of ground space. The architects and builders of these modern babels are moulders of our modern civilization.

One of the men who for half a century as architect and contractor has been in the very thick of modern sky building is Paul Starrett, who has now written an autobiography. Born in Kansas and reared in Chicago, he served with the historic Chicago architects, Burnham and Root, and then moved over into contracting with the George A. Fuller Company, of which he was president during the boom days, and finally headed his own company, Starrett Brothers. As a young draftsman he worked on plans for the buildings of the Chicago Fair of 1893. As contractor he erected buildings that made American history during the surging decades just past: the Flatiron Building in New York, first of the modern steel skyscrapers, Macy's efficient department store in Herald Square, the beautiful Lincoln Memorial in Washington, the Pennsylvania Station and the Pennsylvania Hotel, the National City Bank (interestingly enough built on a platform over quicksands), the McGraw-Hill Building of steel and glass, and finally the Empire State Building.

But one looks in vain in this autobiography for any discussion of modern architecture, any incisive treatment of the fascinating problems of engineering and materials, any understanding of the social background that has given rise to our city sky lines. Instead there is salesman's talk of getting contracts, losing commissions, making friendships to insure future business. In reporting the Empire State Building, a glimpse or two appears of the great drama of structural steel: The problems of shrinkage of steel columns of such tremendous height, allowances that had to be made for swaying in the wind of the tall needle (arranged in this case by cross joints of

corrugated lead in the stonework), the problems of getting the workers up and down the great heights, arranging temporary restaurants for them on higher and higher floors as they climbed upward toward the sky. But even in this greatest of skyscrapers, Starrett gives the bulk of the record to landing the contract, quarrels with Al Smith over commissions, labor disputes that broke out on other contracts his firm had at the time in Cincinnati and Newark.

Giants of the business world walk through the pages but they do not speak. They babble only of prices, jobs, mergers, deals. If one judged by this book, one would be forced to believe that big business men in America were absorbed in the trivia of commercialism while all unknown to themselves they were developing startlingly fresh materials and forms, setting the mould of a new civilization.

## Facts for Facts' Sake

THE BIRTH OF THE OIL INDUSTRY. By Paul H. Giddens. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1938. \$3.

Reviewed by E. D. KENNEDY

THERE is a great deal of information in this story of the first ten years of the American oil industry, but from the standpoint of the general reader documentation has had too much the better of selection. The book deals largely with the wild-cat period following Colonel Drake's initial oil-well at Titusville, Pa., in 1859, but breaks off in 1870 with the industry still uncentralized and the Rockefeller period not even foreshadowed. The trouble is that Professor Giddens not only stays within ten years of Titusville but also stays within ten miles of it. The reader is given a detailed description of well after well—who drilled it, how much oil came out of it, how long it continued to produce. On almost every page one meets a new group of characters who are never seen again, but though the names are different the actions are repetitious.

It should be added that the limitations of the book were set by the author, who set out to describe the early days of the oil-rush largely through the medium of contemporary records. A professor of history at Allegheny College, he finds in the early days of the Pennsylvania oil-fields a subject of special interest. The general reader, however, is likely to find the succession of names, dates, dimensions, and distances a little wearying, and the romantic aspects of the pioneer period hardly emerge from Professor Giddens's recital. The scope of the study also precludes any treatment of the subject from an economic point of view.

A long introduction by Ida Tarbell is unfortunate in that it summarizes, in considerable detail, almost precisely the events which Professor Giddens then relates in excessive detail.

## The AMEN CORNER

"Oh Wellington! (or 'Villainton'—for Fame  
Sounds the heroic syllables both ways:  
France could not even conquer your great  
name,

But punn'd it down to this facetious  
phrase—

Beating or beaten, she will laugh the  
same),

You have obtain'd great pensions and  
much praise:

Glory like yours should any dare gainsay,  
Humanity would rise, and thunder 'Nay!'"

We have always sympathized with Byron's rather savage views, of which the above is the mild prelude, on the Iron Duke. (You will find them in "Don Juan,"<sup>1</sup> or more conveniently in *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*,<sup>2</sup> chosen by W. H. Auden.) Nevertheless we are delighted to hear the Duke speaking for himself in *Notes of Conversations with the Duke of Wellington, 1831-1851*, by Philip Henry, 5th Earl Stanhope, which the Oxford University Press has just published in the *World's Classics*.<sup>3</sup> Philip Guedalla writes the Introduction, and he says of Lord Stanhope that "in a high degree he performed for Wellington what James Boswell's notebooks performed for Samuel Johnson." Here is first-hand information on European affairs a century ago, in a time very like our own.

It is also, in the little blue volume, a pocket footnote to the latest volume in the *Oxford History of England—The Age of Reform, 1815-1870*, by E. L. Woodward.<sup>4</sup> Each volume in this series by various authors is written and published as a separate book. Mr. Woodward's is one of the best. It is one of the most lively periods, and he is a writer who holds your interest from beginning to end, as you know if you read his *French Revolutions*.<sup>5</sup>

The pattern for revolutions seems to have been set in the seventeenth century. *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions*,<sup>6</sup> by R. B. Merriman of Harvard shows how even then agitations occurred throughout Europe at approximately the same time.

But before we wander too far from Wellington, we are still excited about *England's Years of Danger, 1792-1815*,<sup>7</sup> in which Paul Frischauer dramatizes the struggle with Napoleon in a series of excerpts from letters, despatches, diaries, reports of conversations, cabinet minutes, memoirs, giving a kind of first-hand March of Time, or as a lady bookseller said to us "Crime File on Napoleon."

*Conversations with Wellington* was published on the same day as a new title in the Trollope section of the *World's Classics*, *Can You Forgive Her?* in two volumes.<sup>8</sup>

Another *World's Classics* favourite of ours, Constance Holme, is also appearing now in ordinary library size volumes in the *Oxford Book Shelf* series. *The Things Which Belong*, popular in the *World's Classics*, has just appeared in the larger format.

THE OXONIAN.

(<sup>1</sup>) *Byron's Poems*. In the *Oxford Standard Authors*. \$1.50. Write for complete list, 114 Fifth Avenue. (<sup>2</sup>) \$3.00. (<sup>3</sup>) 80c each. Write for list of nearly 500 titles. (<sup>4</sup>) \$6.00. (<sup>5</sup>) \$3.00. (<sup>6</sup>) \$2.50. (<sup>7</sup>) \$2.75. (<sup>8</sup>) \$1.50.

## Indian Leader

*TECUMSEH AND HIS TIMES.* By John M. Oskison. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

THE story of Hannibal against Rome, wrapped in an Indian blanket. The great movement into the Northwest Territory has grown to heroic proportions in our history as the winning of the West; but the actual record was in some respects so discreditable that it moved Jefferson to "tremble for my country when I remember that God is just." It is quite easy for any writer who takes even a half-way view of the proceedings of the pioneers to enlist his readers' sympathies on the side of the Indians. Mr. Oskison takes slightly more than a half-way view—the only white man in the book who emerges with a shred of reputation is Anthony Wayne—but he is not beyond his rights, for he is producing the biography of one of the leading actors, and it is incumbent upon him to justify, or at least to explain, what his man did.

And he did plenty—formed a great Indian confederacy that reached from the Lakes to the Gulf, rooted it in a basis of combined religious fanaticism and hope of present material gain, held at bay for a long space the young republic which could bring to bear many times his resources in man-power and overwhelmingly more than his resources in mechanical skill, changed the living habits of a race. With a few more years of peace Tecumseh might have won his game but his prophet brother had made the fatal

promise that the faithful should be immune to bullets, and when William Henry Harrison produced a premature clash of arms, the new religion which was the pivot of the whole combination died with those of its followers who fell at Tippecanoe.

At this point the defect of an otherwise excellent book appears. Things are a little too simple. Mr. Oskison presents the last years of the great chief's life as a kind of duel with Harrison in diplomacy and war. This is no more accurate than to call the last years of the Second Punic War a duel between Hannibal and Scipio; rather, both Harrison and Africanus were special organisms called forth from an amorphous body by external stimuli, unable to function without the pressure of that mass behind them. Captain Croghan and Richard Mentor Johnson, whose roles were as important as that of Harrison himself in bringing Tecumseh down, barely walk across the stage; Daniel Dobbins, who was very important, is not mentioned; and the comment on the Prophet is offhand. The personal and political interrelations of all these persons were in the last degree complex and interesting, but there is not much about them here.

Still, this is admittedly a somewhat carping criticism which is practically a request for a book twice as long. The difficulty of all Indian history is the lack of information on which to base it; and if Mr. Oskison has not altogether overcome this difficulty, he has gone farther than most in producing an excellent piece of biography from what must have been the most exiguous and disappointing materials.

## The Romantic Soldier, but Not the Dictator

*NAPOLEON, SOLDIER AND EMPEROR.* By Octave Aubry. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1938. \$3.75.

Reviewed by CHARLES DAVID ABBOTT

TWO years ago American readers were provided with a translation of Octave Aubry's "St. Helena," a study of Napoleon's last years. It was an impeccable narrative, smooth, graceful, justly informative. It divulged no new evidence, it suggested no fresh interpretation of the tragic and anti-climactic six years that closed the Emperor's life; it was simply a vivid and honest retelling of the familiar story in an idiom attuned to the ears and minds of the 1930's. Its popularity has had the inevitable effect of inducing its author to capitalize on his former success with a complete biography of the man whose decline he had so adroitly chronicled. The result is a book which reproduces the merits of its predecessor—a succinct and accurate account of Napoleon's career, nicely modulated to contemporary taste. It is neither so brief as to exasperate the glutton for detail, nor so long as to frighten the mentally indolent. It is well planned and well written; it misses no opportunity for dramatic effect, and it includes not a single tedious paragraph. It is, in fact, a painlessly readable life of Bonaparte, but so are several others which have by no means been outmoded.

So much for the book's merits. On the surface they are considerable. To make already overworked materials into an exciting narrative, as M. Aubry has done, is a feat not to be too lightly condemned. But anyone, other than the most undemanding of readers, is likely to ask for something a little more solid than narrative dexterity, if he is to read for the *n*th time the saga of Napoleon's victories. Some current of interpretive thought is needed to give vitality to such a book, some concept of history which does not relegate Clio to the company of mere reporters, no matter how brilliant they may be.

Napoleon was a dictator, one of the most extravagantly successful of all dictators. We are today forced to be interested in dictators. Whether we admire them or hate them, we cannot possibly refuse to consider the political theories of which they are the manifestations. We cannot fail to be anxiously curious about the conditions which beget them and about the ends towards which they direct their energies. Much that is psychologically pertinent to such thought resides in the story of Napoleon, but from M. Aubry's treatment we should never know it. For Napoleon the dictator he has neither approval nor disapproval. Napoleon the dictator simply does not exist. He is replaced by a romantic soldier and benevolent ruler around whom a mawkish sympathy has thrown a mantle of undiluted glory.

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## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
SOME BURIED CAESAR Rex Stout (Farrar & Rinehart: \$2.)	Orchid show gets Nero Wolfe to upstate N. Y. town, murder—involving taurine champion—holds him there.	Ingenious plot, Nero's eccentricities. Archie Goodwin's wise-cracks keep story on Stout's best level.	Unbeatable
ANTIDOTE TO VENOM Freeman Wills Croft (Dodd, Mead: \$2.)	Elderly British pathologist found dead from apparently accidental snake-bite. Slight discrepancy piques Insp. French, and hunt is up.	Run-with-the-hare and hunt-with-the-hounds affair, beautifully constructed, well characterized, and dexterously elucidated.	Peerless
THE CHAMELEON Harry Stephen Keeler (Dutton: \$2.)	Mysterious gentleman with different moniker on almost every page indulges in fantastic semi-criminal high-jinks in Mid-West.	You know what it's all about—maybe on last page, and the rest is sheer—but, dammit, interesting—lunacy.	Delirious
THE GREAT GAME H. C. Bailey (Crime Club: \$2.)	Dead bat in belfry where untimely bells tolled for skull-cracking sets R. Fortune on grim trail of triple murder.	Evil doings in English hamlet keep rubicund Reggie busy plumbing mixture of motives and bringing megaloccephalic killer to book.	Enthralling
DEATH BOARDS THE LAZY LADY Ruth Darby (Crime Club: \$2.)	Pleasure cruise of gay theater-movie group to Virgin Islands marred by murders which test skill of insular detective.	Scandinavian serenity of sleuth Christensen blessed relief after hysterical emoting of other characters. Solution has questionable moments.	Passable