



At John D. Rockefeller's funeral are (1 to r): his son, John D. Jr., and grandsons David, Nelson, Winthrop, Laurance, and John D. III.

—Wide World.

## Personal History

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the Rockefellers plus Mr. Manchester, it would seem, at first blush, a case of a little learning being a dangerous thing. To Mr. Manchester's credit, however, his book does not depend on *anyone's* opinion of John D. Furthermore, the book itself is only 184 pages long. But in that space the author has managed, skilfully and fairly, not only to contribute a good deal of new information on the Rockefellers (mostly by personal interviews with the present brothers) but also to synthesize, again skilfully and fairly, the host of previous books and magazine articles on his subject.

"Any man," Will Durant once said, "who sells his soul to synthesis will be a tragic target for a myriad merry darts of specialist critique." So too must Mr. Manchester. But even if he does get such darts, he is well equipped to answer them. For at least the first three-quarters of this book is as capably written as anything that has passed this writer's desk in some time. And if the latter part seems rather disorganized and to involve some repeat, this is probably due to the fact that the project was originally commissioned by *Holiday* and is, therefore, a series of magazine articles first, and a book second.

Nonetheless, here is the whole kit and kaboodle—the Foundation, the Institute, Rockefeller Center, and Williamsburg, as well as the whole family, from old "Big Bill" (father of John D.), who used to warn his sons to "never mind the crowd" down (or rather up) to the boys who, with an able assist from the late Ivy Lee (who might have been given a little more space than one sentence, it

seems) do indeed "mind the crowd"—"ascetic" John D., III, "imaginative" Nelson, "inventive" Laurance, "fun-loving" Winthrop, and "studious" David. This reviewer disagrees with certain statements—such as, "All told, John D. probably did more for more people than his son"—and this reviewer would also have preferred a bit more attention to the late Abby Aldrich (the mother of the present brothers and, in our personal opinion, one of the greatest gals who ever lived), but these critiques merely bring us back again to the "myriad merry darts."

**FLESH-AND-BLOOD LEGEND:** Like many outspoken men of genius, the late Frank Lloyd Wright, architect *extraordinaire* by any standard (by his own view, the greatest of our time), was a victim of that phenomenon of journalism that tends, in such cases, to meld the individual with the legend. Architectural studies excepted, the result has been an endless stream of magazine-cover stories, profiles, and vignettes about him, each seemingly vying with the other to record his latest *bon mot* or the most recent example of Wright's arrogant behavior.

It is now rather refreshing—though not necessarily satisfactory—to come across "Our House," by his wife, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright (*Horizon*, \$4.50), which neither crackles with his sarcasm nor erupts with tales of his irascible idiosyncrasies. For, as pictured by Mrs. Wright, Mr. Wright emerges—beneath the halo of wifely pride, to be sure—as a sort of mild, somewhat fussy, transcendental-type philosopher who delivers highly cerebrated, but not always highly original, comments to his students and guests on such topics as William Jennings Bryan ("he was defeated by

plutocratic power"), love ("love of an idea is love of God. Understanding is love."), and, somewhat paradoxically considering the legend, wit ("Never," he admonished his students, "let anybody catch you being witty for the sake of being witty.>").

Nevertheless, though pitched throughout in the same saccharine key, there are some glimpses of the familiar—and often delightful—egocentricity, most notably the story of Wright, assisted by his reluctant and horrified wife, secretly remodeling by night a bust of himself which is being worked on by day by the sculptor Stonorov. When Stonorov discovered the travesty, Wright shamelessly transferred the blame to his wife, admitting only that he had helped slightly.

While Wright, inevitably, is the focal point of "Our House," he is not the bulk of the book, which, in an episodic way, also tells about the Taliesin Fellowship, the famous school of architecture and allied arts set up by the Wrights, which is a way of life as well, drawing students from all over the world. In addition, there are Olgivanna Wright's opinions on everything from pills and psychoanalysts to pets. And this, alas, is the rub. It is the cross most wives of famous men have to bear that their personal opinions are by and large inconsequential alongside their spouses'. —IOLA HAVERSTICK.

## A Flame to Her Son

"Yes, Mrs. Williams: A Personal Record of My Mother," by William Carlos Williams (*McDowell-Obolensky*, 143 pp. \$3.50), is a brief memoir of the poet's mother, followed by a selection of notes and jottings of her conversation taken down by the poet in the last years of his mother's life. John Ciardi is, of course, the poetry editor of the *Saturday Review*.

By John Ciardi

**R**AQUEL Hélène Rose Hoheb Williams, the mother of poet and doctor William Carlos Williams, must have been a fascinating woman. Born in Puerto Rico, educated briefly in Paris, and then settled in Rutherford, New Jersey, she seems to have lived a quiet but entirely valiant life, well seasoned with the mortal wit of her French-Spanish background. It was characteristic of this remarkable woman that she had no real sense of her own date of birth, dying at an age when she was held to be vaguely

## Bruckberger

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What Bruckberger is chiefly talking about, then, is the difference between European dogmatism and American experimentalism, and his sympathies are wholly with the latter. Historians are likely to insist that his analysis of the American character ignores many relevant considerations, and this may be true, but I am inclined to think that he has nonetheless come close to the heart of the matter. At least American experimentalism made a good showing for itself in that crucial test we call the Great Depression. In the Thirties I belonged to the not inconsiderable minority who had become convinced that salvation lay in the Marxist-Leninist system. To me the evidence is now overwhelming that we were wrong, wrong not merely about Marx and Lenin but wrong about the efficacy of systems and wrong in our distrust of the American people, our lack of faith in their resourcefulness.

The book makes one proud to be an American, but it is far from encouraging smugness. Bruckberger has written a new chapter for the present edition, "A Letter to Americans." It begins on the high note on which the book proper ends: "America has given me a hope for man's future that I did not have before." But then he plunges into a statement of America's responsibilities that is a chilling antidote to self-satisfaction. "Now, Americans, your task is to extend the Declaration of Independence to the whole world, to all nations and all races. If you are to remain worthy of your heritage, you must now help solve the social problem between proletarian and capitalist nations, and the racial problem between white and colored peoples." Although he does no more than glance at the difficulties involved, he says enough to make any American wonder whether he and his fellow-countrymen are capable of doing the job.

As Peter Drucker observes in his introduction to the volume, "Image of America," which was written to help Europeans to understand America, can help us to understand both America and Europe. It is a book to give us the kind of perspective we need, and the fact that the author is a warm friend of the United States compels us to listen attentively when he speaks of our shortcomings. The book helps us to clarify our conception of the national past, and it persuades us to think soberly about the national future. It should be widely read, and I think it will be.

eightyish, only to have her poet-son discover from the records in the Cathedral in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, that she was actually 102 when she died.

A woman of invisible age! Small wonder that her great son found himself fascinated by the brilliance of her flame and was moved to set down these fragments from her conversation in an effort to record the living fact of her spirit.

That it is good and that my mother is good by virtue of these things that she had taught me, I live largely to exemplify as best I may. If I speak of the good, not a single word of truth is presumed here—nothing but the words I know and set down for what they may be worth . . . if they are worth anything it will be in how closely they are able to approach all that which she, in herself, was and lived.

The trouble is—and Williams as a master of fiction as well as of poetry certainly realizes it with that other side of himself—that simple recording will never capture that *experienceable illusion of personality* which is the essence of achieved writing. In art, the thing-itself, cannot simply be stated: it must be created into form. As it stands, this memoir consists of not much more than a series of disconnected jottings, many of them actually scribbled on the backs of envelopes. What the reader finds is this remark and that remark, and always that glimpse of a personality he hungers to know, but never the full dimension of that personality, and never the recreated scene of the happening.



Raquel Williams—fascinated her son by the brilliance of her flame.

To be sure, the process of recreating the scene of the happening would inevitably involve some minimum fictionalization, and it is exactly such fictionalization Williams insists on avoiding. But the price is a certain dullness: the reader cannot be brought to be as interested in the material as was the author.

Everything a master poet writes is important, but not all is primary. "Yes, Mrs. Williams" must go down as a secondary book, a book full of valuable clues to the true identity of a fascinating man and poet, and a book that scholars will certainly mine with necessary interest, but not a book for the general reader.

**DEVOUT AND DEVOTED.** There were more spectacular heroines of the French Revolution than Adrienne, granddaughter of the Duc Maréchal de Noailles, but none, surely, more valiant or poignant. It is high time to rescue this self-effacing wife from behind the façade of her husband's fame, and Constance Wright does it admirably in "*Madame de Lafayette*" (Holt, \$4.50). Wed at fourteen to the sixteen-year-old nobleman, Adrienne made him the center of her passionate devotion. But marriage to the open-handed, adventurous young idealist entailed loneliness of heart and soul. Still in his teens, he sailed for America to give military and financial help to the freedom-seeking colonists. France acclaimed him a hero and snared him in the gilded mesh of public honors and duties. He formed romantic attachments. And, despite his devout wife's prayers, he did not share her faith.

Then the fortunes of the Revolution made an exile and a pauper of the hero. Lafayette became the Austrians' prisoner at noisome Olmütz; his wife was imprisoned in France; her sister, mother, and grandmother were guillotined. Nevertheless, throughout her own sufferings Adrienne's one aim was to free her husband. Since the Lafayette estates had been confiscated, she was hampered by lack of money. Finally she obtained permission to live with her husband in prison. Here, at last, she had him to herself, and he returned her love. After his release she managed to regain some of his property and negotiate his return to France. A few idyllic years together, and it was time for her untimely farewell: "Then you have loved me! How happy I am!"

The scholarly Miss Wright is compassionate and restrained, but her biography reads like a suspenseful novel of the French Revolution. Best of all, she does perceptive justice to the spirit of one of history's gallant women.

—ANN F. WOLFE.