

## The Historian

The same is true of the Association's book publications which are brought out as documents by the Government Printing Office and which are distributed through the Smithsonian Institution and members of Congress. The Library of Congress, likewise, publishes many historical works such as the Bemis and Griffin *Guide to the Diplomatic History of the United States, 1775-1921* (Washington, 1935).

The celebrated annual bibliography, *Writings on American History*, has been compiled in Washington for the past five decades. The home office of the International Committee of Historical Sciences, publishing the massive annual *International Bibliography of Historical Sciences*, was located there upon that body's organization in the 1920's. The editorial office of *The Dictionary of American Biography* was maintained in Washington during the many years this monumental work was in progress. *The Catholic Historical Review*, too, is edited there, as are *Agricultural History* and *Military Affairs*, the organs, respectively, of the Agricultural History Society and the American Military Institute.

Lastly, there is no other city in the country where the student of history may enjoy the personal contacts afforded by Washington. Whatever his particular specialty, he will at all times meet others with identical interests there. Some are permanent residents, others are transients; but all will welcome him as a fellow-craftsman. The stimulating effects of these human relationships cannot be over-emphasized.

Given such factors, it is evident that the Capital City is America's research center *par excellence* for history and that the facilities it affords for work in this field as a whole are among the best in the world. It of course holds particular significance for Phi Alpha Thetans, many of whom will be drawn there by their research projects and all of whom will view its treasures with deep understanding born of their study of history.

## Book Reviews



THE ANCIENT WORLD. By Joseph Ward Swain. (New York: Harper and Brothers. 1950. 2 vols., pp. xx, 568, xiv, 645. \$4.00 per vol.)

The student undertaking a tour of the larger past now has an up-to-date Baedeker that neither surfeits with detail nor frustrates by omission. In a field that covers ten times the area of other branches of history, Professor Swain has made a valiant and successful effort to strike a balance between the intensive and the extensive view. Long experience in teaching is apparent in the author's uncompromising insistence on perfect clarity and order at all times as the one hope of salvation in a subject that is not only terrifying in its extent but utterly strange to the average student. This gives his text a certain guide book quality that is not unpleasing and should in time endear it to learners at every level. Thanks to Dr. Swain's efforts, the general student may now, with a minimum of time and effort, get a really comprehensive idea of "what is there," the budding researcher can scan the whole field with unobstructed view before making up his mind, and the specialist, ever prone to forget the world at large, can take his bearings from time to time without ransacking his library.

With admirable strength of will, Professor Swain resolutely refuses to become sidetracked even on the most tempting issues. In this he runs the risk of appearing at times a bit mechanical: each Roman emperor gets one paragraph; the scholars of the past are discussed not with an eye to their relative importance, but in such a way as "to mention as many different sorts as possible,"—alphabetically, as it were. Yet this very formality is a virtue in a work which is to serve primarily as a *Leitfaden*. By the same token, the strictly conventional arrangement and treatment of material is a boon to the student who, as we too often forget, needs first of all to be at home in conventional history before he can appreciate the significance of new departures. If his text resembles at times a catalogue, it is because the author, faced with the cruel choice of sacrificing either depth or breadth, has chosen to ring many bells in quick succession in preference to making great noise on a few. We think the choice has been a wise one, for whereas no student has a right to expect exhaustive treatment of any one theme in a general text, the charge of omitting from such a text some item that might be considered vital is not so easily answered.

It would be hard to pick a broader target for attack than any book presuming to embrace the whole scope of ancient history. Such a work

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should, for that very reason, be a work of genius. But how long must we wait for a Bury or a Gibbon to appear? Somebody had to do the job, and Professor Swain—brave, foolhardy man—has done it, and done it well. The drawbacks of such an undertaking are obvious, as the author is perfectly aware. Of course he must over-simplify, as in the naively materialistic comparison of Babylonian and Egyptian cultures (I, 96f). He must perforce present hundreds of still disputed points as facts—for if we are to remind the student at every turn of all the objections that can and have been raised to every statement ever made by a writer of ancient history, he will soon lose interest in the subject, as a healthy alternative to losing his mind. To follow the old evolutionary groove ("Their whole existence was brutish and precarious"—how does he know?) is a great time- and thought-saver, but it is playing with loaded dice: "Naturally the earlier kingdoms were neither large nor firmly established." (I, 65). "Naturally" anticipates research and predisposes minds that should be open. Why should early kingdoms *naturally* be smaller than later ones? By what law? By Mr. Herbert Spencer's, to be sure. Some omissions are inevitable, but one wishes the author had said more about what are possibly the two most important contributions to Ancient history in our time, namely, the discovery of changing weather conditions in antiquity and their close correlation with migration, revolution, and war, and the recent comparison and interpretation of ritual texts, calling as they do for a complete reevaluation of ancient thought and letters. It is regrettable—to none, we dare say, more than to Professor Swain himself—that our author must forego the luxury of being chatty and anecdotal; here he graciously leaves the field wide open to the lecturer, who will find not a decibel of his thunder stolen by the new text, nay, his role is splendidly augmented by the need for frequent commentary on the book and, some will feel, for correction.

What perfectly golden clues for the teaching assistant to display his erudition! Sappho was *not* "the first and only woman among the Greek poets"; in borrowing Sumerian characters the Semites did *not* "disregard the original pictographic meaning of the ideogram," but often put it to good use; it was *not* the cross but the labarum that Constantine saw in his vision. And so forth. The classroom oracle will be no less beholden to the Professor for committing himself freely on many moot points: were Catiline's followers really only a motley crew without the remotest chance of succeeding? Did the Ionian philosophers "bridge the gap between religion and philosophy," or did they not widen or even create it? Is Alexander "taking his cue from Aristotle" in his conception of divine leadership, or from some more likely source such as Pindar, who loudly proclaims what Aristotle merely hints at? Were the Greeks actually more race-minded than other people? Again, mind-reading is fair game for everyone, and student and teacher alike should derive solid pleasure from

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paunching on some of Dr. Swain's conjectures as to the motives of such publicized history-makers as Darius, Caesar, and Paul.

The most serious restriction the author has had to face has been the iron necessity of bypassing sources and omitting footnotes. One might as well teach geology without rocks or botany without plants as history without documents. But *que faire?* Is the youth of the land to be denied all knowledge of the past simply because only an expert can read the sources? Is the only alternative to exhaustive research to be total ignorance? Alas, the true answer would be the ruin of us all! We must assume that there is a usable residue of valid knowledge in the half-real, dimly-discerned, vaguely-tangible stuff that comes to us from antiquity. Professor Swain is keenly aware of these limitations. The construction of history, he tells us more than once, is an art; it is the historian's own mind, and not the infallible reading of instruments, that creates history. Such being his faith, how does he happen to give us this kind of compact and factual history? It is plainly because he has the student's interest most at heart.

Before the present-day learner invests his reluctant energies in a line of study he wants to see the whole field, and that is just what Dr. Swain shows him; hardly more than a glance at each item, it is true, but a clear glance it is, and all the items are put on the counter, even down to the latest gadgets. This is exactly what we want today. After all, for its purpose—a legitimate one—the mail-order catalogue can't be excelled.

If Professor Swain had not done it for him, every really conscientious student of history would have to make for himself a notebook very much like the text here provided. Such a notebook could not well be more inclusive than these two volumes, for our author has been thorough; nor could it well be confined to smaller scope, for the plethora of important names and dates calls for explanation and commentary at every point, and that is here offered in the neatest and most compact form that is compatible with simple and lucid explanation. Students and teachers alike owe Professor Swain a vote of thanks for his diligent and well-ordered spade-work. His text is all it claims to be—and that is much.

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THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A MIDWAY ACCOUNT OF THE WESTERN WORLD, By *Hans Kohn*. (New York: The Macmillan Company. 1949. Pp. ix, 242. \$2.00.)

This seminal but mistitled little book is composed of a series of more-or-less connected essays, some of them dealing with the subject of the twentieth century but most of them concerned, sometimes historically,