

## What Price Biography?

JULIUS CÆSAR AND THE GRANDEUR THAT WAS ROME. By VICTOR THADDEUS. New York: Brentano's. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by TENNEY FRANK

Johns Hopkins University

IT was bound to come, the new biographical flivver with the "latest features:" the Freud starter, the Watson accelerator, the Strachey shock-absorber, the Dos Passos gear-shift, the Anderson mud-collector, the Joyce lubricator, all assembled in an Erskine sport coupé. At first glance this new life of Cæsar seemed to be one of the fashionable parodies, but it proves too dull to satisfy any such hypothesis. To judge from the machinery alone one might call it a novel based upon a few passages of Plutarch. For instance, Plutarch opens his life of Cæsar by the statement that Sulla tried to force Cæsar to divorce Cornelia, and, failing in that, confiscated her property. Mr. Thaddeus expands this incident into twenty-five exciting pages of threats, ominous hints, warning glances, smart repartee, and wily strategy, details invented to create verisimilitude. So much for his method.

It is not new nor is it forbidden. Fiction like poetry may be truer than fact. But this particular fiction is utterly reckless with the facts. Cæsar's birth is placed fifty years too late; the society in which he is made to move might as well be in China or Egypt; the senate that he has to deal with is certainly not the Roman senate and the characters of the book betray no resemblance to the persons who bore their names in history. It would require twenty-five pages to record the errors. Does that matter? Perhaps not very much in Cæsar's case. If anything we have heard too much of Cæsar as it is.

But what about the principles involved? Let us bring the method nearer home. Suppose that the proverbial New Zealander some day should write a life of our President in this strain: "In 1927 Tom Billson of Chicago invaded Washington with a gang of gunmen and forced the Senate to elect Mr. Coolidge dictator of the United States." Mr. Thaddeus's fiction is as exciting and about as veracious as that.



Of course he commands all the new devices. Cæsar's "stream of consciousness" when he broods over the pros and cons of divorce runs in well-worn channels. One need not object to that. Livy used to do the same thing when he let his people think aloud—though they did not think quite so entertainingly. Cicero's "suppressed desires" when, according to Mr. Thaddeus, he refused the advances of Clodia are reminiscent of recent best sellers. The whittling down of laudable deeds to fit them into sly motives harks back beyond the "Eminent Victorians" to Suetonius. The naïve behaviorism of Cæsar at Alexandria as depicted by Mr. Thaddeus would be acceptable to any Roman hedonist. These devices, though a bit tedious just now, have respectable antecedents. But that concerns us little. What we are beginning to ask is whether they are being used legitimately. We know something about Cicero. No one before has ever suggested that Cicero was ready to sell his eloquence to Clodia for a night's debauch. If Mr. Thaddeus wrote that of a living statesman of Cicero's character he would be given the lie direct. What right has Mr. Thaddeus to say it of the dead? His suggestion that Cæsar caused Clodius to enter the chamber of his wife Pompeia in disguise so that she might be compromised and speedily divorced could not possibly have occurred to a responsible historian. And Cæsar cannot now come to court to prove how nasty the insinuation is. There is also a slippery scene between Cæsar and Cicero that will pass the comprehension of any one who knows either. The book in fact reeks with incredible suggestions. If it were put out as fiction for the morbid it might pass as fifth-rate stuff, but it is not. It incorporates a number of far-fetched passages from Roman authors to give it a tone of verisimilitude, it mentions enough names of historical personages to carry conviction to the unwary, and it bears a title which obviously claims the attention of those who are looking for honest biography.

Let us for a moment grant that it is a new form of literature to which we have become half-accustomed in the last ten years, a mixture of satiric-pejorative caricature, pseudo-historical biography, and subconscious-pronologic stercoration. Would it

be too much to ask the practitioners of this new art to get hold of the ascertainable facts in the case and to be sportsmen enough to apply it to men of recent times so that their libels might be flung back at them? And finally may we hope that publishers will adopt some simple and practical code for our protection? We do not ask for censorship, not even for the suppression of books like this. But it would not be difficult to label books "fiction," "history," and "biography" respectively; and if a book bears either of the latter labels it might be referred to a specialist in the field to say whether the contents are somewhere in the vicinity of the facts.

## Rebellion in Kansas

REBELLION. By MATEEL HOWE FARNHAM. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company. 1927. \$2.

Reviewed by ALLAN NEVINS

MRS. FARNHAM, the author of the prize novel in the second competition held jointly by the *Pictorial Review* and Dodd, Mead & Company, is the daughter of E. W. Howe of Atchison. But her literary ancestry is not what we should expect of one whose father wrote "The Story of a Country Town." That piece of stern realism, that picture of repellent lives, finds no counterpart here. Mrs. Farnham's affinities are with the milder, sweeter writers of American fiction—with the early Booth Tarkington, the early Mrs. Deland, the early Zona Gale. She has given us a novel scented of lavender and tea-roses and 1905. Women's magazines have certain peculiar requirements as to fiction, and there seems not the slightest doubt that the *Pictorial Review* thought of these special demands when it helped award the prize. It is such a book as will appeal to the great mass of American women who pick up a magazine for diversion. It will not appeal to those who admire "The Story of a Country Town" and its like.

In a phrase, Mrs. Farnham has written a wholesome but undistinguished novel. Its atmosphere and spirit are thoroughly sound; its technique is old-fashioned; it lays a pleasant emphasis upon fundamental virtues, including the virtue of independence. In the sea of cheap and dirty sex fiction such a little islet as this has its refreshing aspects. Under a title which leads us to expect something daring and up-to-the-minute, we find a simple tale which at times verges upon the saccharine. The rebellion which it relates is the mildest kind of social complication. It is merely the rebellion of a Kansas girl of pioneer stock against an overbearing father. The heroine, Jacqueline, is left motherless; she fails to get on well with her father; she falls in love with a young man of humble birth, a carpenter who is making himself an architect; and when her father forbids the banns, she defies and outwits him. Practically speaking, there are only three characters, and the action is nearly as open and obvious as the Kansas landscape.



Unfortunately, the novel has few virtues except wholesomeness and a vivacious readability. The impression of thinness which the book leaves is not derived from the simplicity of the plot. W. D. Howells could take much the same theme—the rebellion of a daughter bent on marrying her own young man against her father's wishes—and give us something as wonderful as the first third of "A Modern Instance." The chief weakness of the book lies in the stereotyped, lifeless nature of the characterization. The daughter is an entirely perfect young thing—blithe, high-spirited, full of fine ideals, unselfish; the young man she loves is a Kansas Galahad—ambitious, pure, loyal, industrious, talented, and so on. As a foil against these two paragons we have a father who is simply a hopeless curmudgeon, blind, bigoted, and selfishly tyrannical. It is impossible not to feel that these people are all a bit unreal. It is impossible not to feel that the situation is highly artificial. In real life fathers do sometimes object to the matches their daughters propose; but small-town fathers in Kansas do not object to such perfect flowers of the human race as Jacqueline's suitor Kent, with his record as one of the only three men below age to be commissioned in the A. E. F., his genius in transforming barns into beautiful houses, his plucky and successful fight to get into the École des Beaux Arts, and so on. If they do, they have some better reason to assign for it.

We do not believe, in short, in the conflict upon which Mrs. Farnham bases her story. We do not

believe that she has really illustrated the fine virtue of rebellion. What credit, what heroism, is there in rebelling against the kind of fatuous tyranny which Jacqueline's father represents? When Mrs. Farnham has written more books, she will present life, its divided loyalties, its allegiances and rebellions, as a good deal more complicated than in this tale of a girl abandoning Old Scrooge to run away to Italy with Prince Charming. The rebellion which really stirs our emotions and sets us thinking is the kind of rebellion which Willa Cather, for example, described in her story of the unhappy young wife in "O Pioneers!"—a book founded upon exact observation and delicate characterization of prairie people. Compared with such a work this story, with its obvious plot (complicated a little at the end by a kind of detective-story hunt for lost family papers) and its unconvincing characters, seems almost banal. Yet out of 1,500 manuscripts it bore away the prize and has been printed with a flourish of trumpets as the sort of thing a woman's magazine considers highly brilliant.

## Robust Fiction

KITTY. By WARWICK DEEPING. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1927. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

WITH "Sorrell and Son" and "Doomsday" still on the best selling and most-called-for-at-libraries lists, Warwick Deeping launches "Kitty" to join in the popularity contest. The novels of Warwick Deeping all have a robust quality which apparently appeals strongly to Anglo-American fiction readers. His books are optimistic and they are positive. Whatever questions Mr. Deeping has asked of life he has found answers for, and he has not found these answers dusty. The world he writes of is a universe, not a chaos; his characters are rational and articulate; his stories have a beginning and an end. Cross sections of life undeleted and streams of consciousness unexpurgated have no charm for Mr. Deeping: his work is definitely selective.

It is partially this sense of a directing force, this captaincy of the soul, that has given the author of "Kitty" his enormous following. There is a large class of intelligent readers who temperamentally dislike what is known as realism yet who demand something better than the mild and amorous exploits of the young morons who lurk between the brilliant covers of "popular" novels. For this class Mr. Deeping has successfully written. His publishers say that the appeal of the Deeping novels is rooted in the fact that they treat of broad elemental themes in which the trivial and the transient have no place. This is to some extent true, but any number of novels go down into oblivion every year which have treated of exactly the same themes. They have lacked Mr. Deeping's optimistic sense of life, they have not had the advantage of Mr. Deeping's style. He is sonorous in a staccato day, and for that reason his sentences fall soothingly on many ears. Warwick Deeping has found an old-fashioned medium beautifully suited to his expression, and he has made excellent use of it.

"Kitty" is thinner than the two novels preceding it. The characters all fall into the class recently designated by E. M. Forster as "flat characters." Such characters can be expressed in one sentence, they are constructed around a single idea or quality, and they are easily recognized whenever they appear by the reader's emotional eye. The phrase is not, as it sounds, an entirely derogatory one, since flat characters have many virtues in secondary parts—Mr. Forster cites Dickens as being full of such—but when they usurp the leading rôles in a novel the latter tends to become formalistic rather than creative. In Mr. Deeping's latest novel it is hard to see how his typical post-war English girl fighting the typical possessive mother for the typical shell-shocked son can arouse any great degree of enthusiasm; yet this is what is already beginning to happen to "Kitty."

Sotheby's has been offering for sale a hitherto unpublished letter by Robert Burns, containing his immortal song, "My Love is like a Red, Red Rose." The letter, which is undated, is addressed to Alexander Cunningham and refers to Burns's meeting with the Italian musician, Pietro Urbani, who had the idea of setting and publishing various Scots songs. The poet and musician, however appear to have quarreled, and Burns's comments on Signor Urbani are exceedingly pungent.

## A Fundamentalist

MY LIFE IN ADVERTISING. By CLAUDE C. HOPKINS. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by EARNEST ELMO CALKINS

THERE is in Claude Hopkins's "My Life in Advertising" the interest that inheres in any unvarnished tale plainly told. To the ordinary reader with no more knowledge of advertising than he gains from looking at it in the public prints, there is the feeling of being taken behind the scenes and seeing how these wonderful results are accomplished, and they are certainly wonderful results when Claude Hopkins accomplishes them. He tells in his forthright way how he put such products as Puffed Rice, Pepsodent, Palmolive, and Goodyear Tires on the business map, and there is no reason to believe that his account is not the true one. But the advertising man is annoyed by the cocksureness of his attitude and his intolerance of all methods but his own. There are other ways, he says, but they are slow and uncertain. Nor were his clients immune from these other ways. With the same frankness with which he records his amazing successes for various advertisers he relates how they one after another grew weary of well-doing, yearned after the flesh pots of Egypt, such as colored pictures or institutional advertising, and turned away from the one true God. "Nearly every client quit me," he observes pensively, "when he got into smooth waters."

In advertising Mr. Hopkins is a Fundamentalist instead of a Modernist. He believes old ways are best and always will be. Advertising can be reduced to a standardized formula and he has found the formula. He has no use for art or brilliant writing and he lives up to his belief on every page. The curious effect of writing mail order copy has left its impress on his style. Mail order advertising, you should know, is addressed to simple, single-track minds and its chief virtue is a monotonous repetition of some simple command. "Cut out the coupon," "Fill in the coupon and send it today," "Don't fail to mail the coupon at once." The many advertising apothegms and theorems with which the book teems and bristles are reiterated like the chorus of an anthem. The author has no conception of any methods outside his own experience, no vision, no imagination, and no belief in intangibles. His definition of advertising is like Mr. Gradgrind's definition of a horse.

But this is no place to discuss the work as a technical handbook. It is much better as a history than as a guide book, a history of Mr. Hopkins's own adventure with business. He thinks he is telling us what he did to advertising, but actually he reveals what advertising has done to him. As such he is an interesting human study.

For many years he was heralded as the highest paid copy writer in the world. His salary was reported to be a thousand dollars a week. He confirms this report, but naively adds that his employer, A. D. Lasker, President of Lord & Thomas, and formerly head of the Shipping Board, was worried at the smallness of his compensation and insisted on paying him in proportion to the results of his work, whereby he earned or at least received in one year \$185,000. What it all added up to he does not state, but the title of his book was originally "How I Made Five Million Dollars in Advertising." At any rate, the flower garden of his estate on the shores of Lake Michigan is half a mile long, and mass production of breakfasts in his summer home amounts to 3,500 a season. To these breakfasts come wealthy captains of industry, and though he mildly deplors having frittered away his life making other men rich, gaining for himself nothing but a modicum of fame, he insists he envies none of them. Money means nothing to him. His consuming passion is work. While his business life has comprised only thirty-five years, he insists it should be reckoned as seventy, because he always worked twice as long and twice as hard as anybody else. He has no recreations. He never played baseball, tennis, golf or bridge, and never learned to dance. Business is his only game. Even his book is not a diversion. It has the serious purpose of handing down to an unregenerate and skeptical generation of advertising men the mighty truths of the orthodox business religion. "The principles set down in this book," he says, "are as enduring as the Alps."



## Notes on Rosy

DR. ROSENBACH is one of the world's greatest hunters—and finders—of manuscript; yet there will be no manuscript (in any exact sense) of his own very interesting "Books and Bidders." It was dictated, and a remarkable job of dictation it was. Avery Strakosch, who was at the notebook end of the collaboration, must possess in high degree the great gift of translucency, for the Doctor's own easy colloquy and lively humor come through with every symptom of identity. It is a book packed full of Dr. Rosenbach's learning, but also rich in merry anecdote. One remembers the great day when an editor of the *World*, wishing to pay high tribute to Miss Amy Lowell's *Life of Keats*, avouched in print that he "had read nothing so nugatory in a long time." It was his idea, evidently, that "nugatory" meant "full of nuggets." And if that were the meaning, "Books and Bidders" would also be nugatory, delightfully so.

The gift of jocundity seems to be a characteristic of the great bibliophiles. Here again, popular tradition is wrong as usual. The general notion of book collectors as prosy ancients, shiny at elbows, soupy on the vest, shrivelled and stooped by years among fungus-smelling pages, is certainly false in my observation. So far as I have seen them they are pink and plump, connoisseurs of vivacity, tellers of phosphorescent adventure, frolic amateurs of all life's more generous pastime. They seem to get more fun out of this planet than any other class of human beings. They extra-illuminate the book of life with fore-edge painting.

Book Collecting, like horse racing, has always been the supreme sport of the Rich and Powerful. But it now stands on a peculiar apex of joy in America, for it has seriously entered the ranks of Big Business. Dr. Rosenbach often shows the specially amused and quiet smile of the scholar who has outwitted so many great merchants at their own game—as indeed the scholar so often can, if he cares to. Not without humor he tells of the hard-headed investors who tuck away Conrad MSS and Whitman items in safe deposit boxes as negotiables more stable in time of crisis than many an engraved certificate. Dealers themselves confess their amazement at the soar of prices. The old bookseller, once the symbol of musty eccentricity, is now often a power in finance. Ernest Dressel North, in the preface to his 25th anniversary catalogue, points out that the price of a single book offered in that catalogue (a 1667 *Paradise Lost*, priced at \$5500) exceeds the total of the prices of the 401 items listed in his first catalogue in 1902. And he adds, remarking on the prices lately paid for Shakespeare folios and Gutenberg Bibles, that perhaps in another twenty-five years only Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., will be able to afford such books. Dr. Rosenbach himself, who is slow to make predictions, suggests that \$250,000 will be a modest price for a Gutenberg Bible ten years hence. None of us have forgotten how Mitchell Kennerley, two or three years ago, brought home the Melk copy of the Gutenberg from England in two suit-cases—one volume in each case—and kept them in his cabin under his berth. It was the wisest thing to do. He would not even entrust them to the purser's safe, for he wanted to be able to grab them instantly in case of any sudden taking to the boats. So also did Colonel Isham, generously carrying some of the incredible richness of his Boswell MSS to show to a sanhedrim of the Three Hours for Lunch Club, entrust them to a gruesome old wicker valise that looked only likely to contain a week-end wash. No one, in any horrid emergency, would have suspected such luggage of secreting anything notorious.—It was that copy of the Gutenberg Bible, incidentally, that Dr. Rosenbach bought for \$106,000, and which is now at Yale University.

There will always be many to deplore so much discussion of these great memorabilia of human life in terms of price and trading; yet that sentimentality may easily become only an empty snobbery. Money after all is the only esperanto we have, the sole universal measure of our possessive passion for things that (for reasons of our own) are precious. And in the case of the perfect amorist, the paramour of

print, he only thinks of the thing in terms of price before he has got it. Once acquired, the money phase is oddly irrelevant. It was only a few years ago that Dr. Rosenbach with characteristic humor gave tranquil Walnut Street in Philadelphia a considerable shock. He put a collection of Shakespeare folios and quartos in his show window with a small card stating that the price of the lot was \$985,000. I cannot resist the feeling that (except for the amusement it would have caused him) he would have been very unhappy if anyone had walked in, paid the price, and taken away the books. It would have been a sound investment, too, for anyone who could afford to tie up a million cash for a few years.

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Perhaps it was because Dr. Rosenbach was born in Philadelphia in its great romantic year, the year of its famous Centennial in '76, that he was endowed with his miracle of book instinct. For, though the metaphor is not appropriate to his solid form, he is a willow-wand for the hidden springs of book lore. He is the Pied Piper of rare editions. He blows an airy wheedling note, and the old vellums and calfskins come trotting after him. They disappear into his twin Venusbergs—on Walnut Street or on Madison Avenue—and if he happens to take a fancy to keep them himself they are never heard of again. There is no one in the world rich enough to buy from Rosy anything that he thinks belongs on his own private shelves. There is no man more generous with his treasures, and no man who gets a finer sentimental pleasure out of the things he values for associations of their own. When he was only eighteen, still an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, he spotted the fact that a group of old pamphlets bound up together included the long-lost first edition of Dr. Johnson's famous *Drury Lane Prologue*. These, with beating heart, he bought for \$3.60 in Stan Henkels' old auction-room in Philadelphia. And I think the most significant comment on Rosy's career is that a few years later, when he needed money very badly, he refused an offer of \$5000 for his treasure. The panting customer toiled after him in vain. He still has it.

And, as one might expect from one who has risen so high in his own line, Dr. Rosenbach's book is full of good wisdom for the beginning collector, pointing out the very necessary fact that one does not have to begin with high-priced books. He is shrewd enough to know, though too modest to point out, that the great prizes in the collecting game will always go to those who have that queer specific instinct for which there is no counterfeit and no substitute. But the real fun, if you are a beginner in the collecting field, is to stake your own judgment. To choose something in which you yourself believe—perhaps the work of some still unknown author. The "wild vicissitudes of taste" in this matter are part of the sport. I see, for instance, in a current catalogue, that H. M. Tomlinson's "The Sea and the Jungle," which I bought for \$1 in 1920, is now listed at \$90. I haven't the faintest intention of selling my copy; but it is a pleasant confirmation of one's own judgment. Can any zigzagging of the stock market give one better fun than that? The kind of collecting that appeals to me is not chasing after things that everyone knows are great, but trying to hunt out the things that are going to be great ten or twenty years later. And this means, as Dr. Rosenbach points out, a lot of brooding over catalogues. He himself has a special marsupial overcoat, with a specially large pouch built in, to carry his brood of catalogues which he studies diligently as he rides to and fro between Philadelphia and New York.

"Books and Bidders" is so full of nourishing anecdote that I have made no attempt to cull any of its plums. Those who are interested in the comfortable folly of book-collecting will find them for themselves. But one thing should be said: that Dr. Rosenbach has an unerring instinct for knowing how a story should be told. He always begins with a vivid little 'lead,' as reporters say, that lures you into the narrative unawares. Like this—

"The *First Folio* had lain idly at anchor for two long, sultry days . . ."

"The gas lamps in Stan Henkels' auction rooms were being extinguished . . ."

"It was a cold winter in my uncle Moses Pollock's shop in Philadelphia . . ."

I'm sorry there's no manuscript of this book. If there were, I think I should go after it for my own collection.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.