

Makers of Our Times

"Through These Men," by John Mason Brown (Harper, 302 pp. \$4), is a collection of sketches of American public men who helped shape our era, many of which originally appeared in SR. Philip Hamburger of The New Yorker editorial staff reviews it here.

By Philip Hamburger

IN "Through These Men" John Mason Brown sets sail upon the turbulent, dangerous waters of contemporary domestic affairs. He could not have contemplated his journey with complacency. He posed for himself the difficult task of telling something of our life and times here in the United States through the medium of outstanding personalities of our current era, rather than through straight exposition or narrative history. To discuss history through the eyes of people who make it is a hazardous undertaking. For one thing, a whole group of readers, right at the start, and with nothing better to do, may complain about the cast of characters.

"Did I hear you mention Harry S. Truman, Felix Frankfurter, and J. Robert Oppenheimer?" I can imagine one group of readers saying. "You did, eh? Well, they have nothing whatsoever to do with our affairs except in a rather poor sort of way, and we will thank you for our hats and coats!"

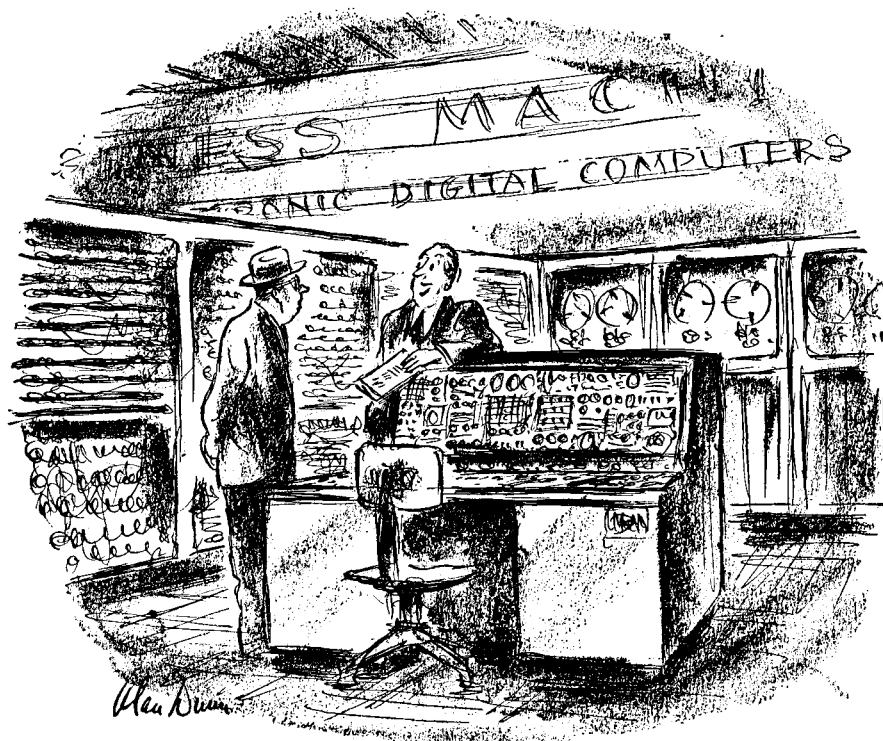
Similarly, one can imagine another group of readers remarking, with equal shrillness, "What was that about Dwight Eisenhower, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Walter Lippmann? Impressive contributors to twentieth-century America, eh? *Our hats and coats please!*" In other words, to labor the obvious, you can't please everybody, especially when dealing with persons who have been involved in huge movements and events. To his vast credit, Mr. Brown charted his course, picked his crew, weighed his anchor, stayed on the bridge, and, 302 pages later, brought his ship into port, shipshape and triumphant.

There are several reasons for Mr. Brown's success, but most of them, I suspect, come right back to Mr. Brown and his antiquated attitudes toward

life. This type of man is almost as obsolete as the dodo. In a cynical time, he is without despair. In a time of violent partisanship, he is able to see the other fellow's side of the story. In a time of rancor and high voices, he maintains his innate graciousness and his even-toned felicity of approach. He is that dreadful old bird, a liberal, tolerant of everything except intolerance.

MR. BROWN tell his story well. He has aptly subtitled it "Some Aspects of Our Passing History," and at the outset he disclaims any of the attributes of the political pundit. "As a critic of books and the theatre," he writes, "I approach the field of government and politics nervous in the knowledge that I am trespassing on the property of experts. I trust they will forgive me and not think that I mistake my interest for authority." Mr. Brown takes us on a long and exciting journey—through the two conventions of 1952, through the campaigns (with studies of Eisenhower and Stevenson as campaigners), through the last days of President Truman in the White House (a remarkable picture of a calm, genial, busy man, dedicated to the orderly transition of government). Mr. Brown has skipped few of the highlights of these past few strange years: Nixon's television defense of Nixon during the campaign, the McCarthy hearings, President Eisenhower and press conferences, Stevenson's continuing, questing, round-the-world education of Stevenson, to name a few. For the most part Mr. Brown has relied upon generally available sources, but he has marshalled his events and his cast of characters in an orderly and beguiling manner. From time to time he goes into asides, such as his penetrating sketches of Justice Frankfurter, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Walter Lippmann. It is in these that he demonstrates most forcefully his cast-iron fair-mindedness. (Incidentally, the one on Lodge has a wealth of new material, or at least new to me.)

Mr. Brown's final chapter, "In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer," is a masterly job—lucid, compassionate, angry, sorrowful, and ashamed. It is a *tour de force* of comprehension and compression. "Few ever believed Oppenheimer guilty of disloyalty," he concludes, "but more and more Americans have come to feel guilty themselves because of what he was forced to endure. Our shame for the injustice done him in our name and allegedly in our interest in part explains the wide esteem in which he is now held. In his presence it is not his mind alone which makes us uneasy. It is our consciences."



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Fabulous Frisco

"Bay Window Bohemia," by Oscar Lewis (Doubleday. 248 pp. \$3.95), is a popularly written account of San Francisco's literary life before the Great Fire of 1906. William Hogan, literary editor of The San Francisco Chronicle, reviews it below.

By William Hogan

ON April 18 San Francisco observed the fiftieth anniversary of its great earthquake and fire, heralded in story and song since Charles K. Field observed a distillery standing amidst the devastation and noted:

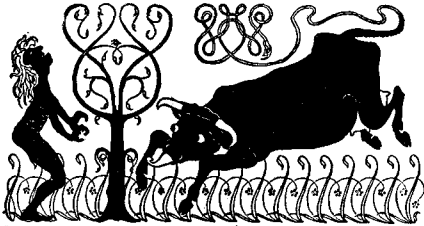
If, as they say, God spanked the town
For being over-frisky—
Why did He burn the churches down
And spare Hotaling's whiskey?

Oscar Lewis, a native son, has used the anniversary of the fire, as they like to call it there (not the quake), as a peg to set down another portrait of late nineteenth-century San Francisco. This one concentrates on the literary, theatrical, journalistic, and gourmet society of the decade and a half that preceded the 1906 disaster.

Will Irwin described the city of that time as "the gayest, lightest-hearted, most pleasure-loving city on the Western continent." It seemed to range between Sodom and Gomorrah, as Herbert Asbury pictured it in "Barbary Coast," and high-toned flamboyance, as Lewis pictured it in his own account of the Palace Hotel, "Bonanza Inn." A platoon of other local litterateurs has left little more to say of the era of Jack London, George Sterling, Ambrose Bierce, Frank Norris, and other bohemians of varying degrees of talent and eccentricity. Yet Lewis has come up with a lighthearted variation on the San Francisco theme; his anecdotage is abundant and for the most part fresh.

Happily, Lewis dotes on restaurants in this epicure's Elysium, as he calls it,

I NEVER SAW A PURPLE COW. I NEVER HOPE TO SEE ONE



BUT I CAN TELL YOU ANYHOW I'D RATHER SEE THAN BE ONE

—Illustrations from "Bay Window Bohemia."

Gelett Burgess's famous "Purple Cow" poem.



George Sterling, Stewart Edward White, Jack London—"talent and eccentricity."

where down-at-the-pockets writers could dine well for fifteen cents on weekdays, two-bits on Sundays, and when in funds moved on to such four-bit houses as Pop Coppa's, the Fly-trap, or Poulet d'Or, which its non-Gallic patrons corrupted verbally into the Poodle Dog of today. Lewis's accounts of dishes such as Coppa's chicken portola, baked in a sawed-off cocoonut, may be murder on the latter-day calorie-counter, but it makes for extremely pleasant reading.

San Francisco of that time supported the theatre avidly; looked up to Jim Corbett as something of a folk hero; and recognized young Mr. Hearst's flare for popular journalism when he hired Ambrose Bierce to produce a vitriolic, circulation-getting daily column. Free-lance writers and artists had local outlets on the wildly-competing, uninhibited newspapers and a variety of home-grown magazines.

As the sand dunes filled with an architecture typified by the sun-catching bay window, bohemia spilled to Oakland's hills, where a group spearheaded by the "poet of the Sierra," Joaquin Miller, set up headquarters; then to Carmel, where a sect led by Mary Austin introduced a veritable local soviet in an effort to protect the hamlet's primitive charms.

"A little of Paris, a little of Peking," San Francisco of the era was a community of non-conformists, and Lewis writes of it affectionately. April 18, 1906, in effect ended San Francisco's nineteenth century. It was "the violent close of one phase of the city's evolution and the opening of a new."

Island Envoys

"Yankees in Paradise," by Bradford Smith (J. B. Lippincott. 379 pp. \$5), is an informal social history of the first three decades of the Hawaiian Kingdom, with a final summing up to the present day. Darwin Teilhet, our reviewer, has written several novels with a Hawaiian background.

By Darwin Teilhet

EXPECTING to be devoured by the heathen savages, Lucy Thurston first sighted the island of Hawaii one March morning in 1820. She was aboard the brig *Thaddeus*, with her newly ordained husband and a small band of missionaries sent out by the American Board from Boston to convert the heathens. That morning men went ashore, to return later with the news which thankfully Lucy wrote down that evening in her journal: "Kamehameha is dead;—his son Liholiho is King;—the *kapus* are abolished;—the temples are destroyed. There has been war. Now there is peace."

More than forty years before the brig *Thaddeus* anchored in the bay of Kailua, as a young chief Kamehameha had welcomed Captain Cook here, at this same bay, and for all Lucy knew he might have been one of the savages who had killed poor Captain Cook. Now, she learned, Kamehameha had been dead for more than a year after all those years of fighting and conquering and unifying seven of the chain of eight islands. His son, Liholiho, fat and slothful, was King. Influenced by his women, young Liholiho had overthrown the islands' idols and broken all the *kapus*, even to abolishing the humiliating *ai kapu* that punished women by death for eating with their men.

In that March month of 1820 Lucy Thurston came to Hawaii at the precise moment in Hawaiian history when a thousand-year-old Polynesian matriarchal system of religion and government was in its death convulsions; and in his "Yankees in Paradise" Bradford Smith appropriately picks this dramatic moment as his starting point for his literate and lively account of the first decades of the precariously established Hawaiian Kingdom.

Fifty-two years after landing at Kailua Bay Lucy Thurston finished her journals, "The Life and Times of Mrs. Lucy G. Thurston." Of the hundreds of early journals by the early

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