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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

MATERIALS OF LITERATURE

A new type of biography has come into vogue. Gamaliel Bradford began it with his psychographies; Lytton Strachey revived the times of Queen Victoria in illuminating anecdotes; and André Maurois made biographical portraiture a work of art in *Ariel*. Now Claude G. Bowers, Mary Newton Stanard, Cameron Rogers, Carl Sandburg, and a host of others are converting biography into literature. By applying the technique of the novelist they turn a man's life into a story. The failures and successes, attitudes and whims of the hero are presented in a series of vivid incidents which proceed and merge with all the skill of a motion picture until out of the vital facts of life comes the cumulative impression of flesh and blood reality. From a wealth of truthful episodes arrayed in proper perspective and touched with creative imagination emerges the actual human personality that once had being. The story biographer essays to portray the essence of his subject.

Enduring literature, whether it be fiction, biography, poetry, essay, or drama, is founded upon the verities of human life. Style, diction, and form are important, but truthful interpretation is abso-

lutely essential. Pure fancy, unrelated to experience, produces a shallow, empty vessel, pretty and sounding perhaps, but devoid of purpose or value. The materials of literature are the facts of history. Literature consists of glimpses of reality — significant yet typical characters figuring in probable events and displaying the natural traits of their kind — transformed and embellished by the hand of the artist.

With the facts of canine nature which Jack London gleaned from Egerton R. Young's *My Dogs in the Northland*, he wove on the background of his own arctic experience the story of Buck in *The Call of the Wild*. The Bushyagers in Herbert Quick's Iowa trilogy are the Rainsbargers of reality; and *The Invisible Woman* begins appropriately with the Pomeroy cyclone. Aside from the fact that wind is characteristic of the prairies and might be expected to blow through the literature of this country, perhaps the graphic description of that tornado was intended to be symbolical also of the whirl and confusion and desolation of State politics — a sort of topic chapter of the book. Local history, in all its omnifarious detail, is the soil from which the literature of a nation springs.

SAD ENDINGS

Realism is not necessarily tedious or morbid or futile, because life itself is not entirely dull or unwholesome or useless. The evils of the world are

seldom unmitigated; success and failure are not mutually exclusive; and everything does come out all right as often as wrong. Joy is as prevalent as sorrow. Sad endings are sometimes inevitable, but the triumph of sin or misfortune is not an object to be sought for itself alone.

The death of Rantchewaime was a tragedy, but the memory of her beauty and goodness survived. Through the gruesome afflictions of the Pomeroy cyclone shine the charity and generosity of the people who hastened to aid the stricken town. And though three of the Campbell family departed from the way of righteousness, the conversion of the others may not have been in vain. The literary biographers are true realists, for they accept a man and his life as they find them; and out of his achievements and shortcomings, his idiosyncrasies and emotions they reconstruct his personality.

J. E. B.