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**THE POETRY OF HISTORY:** *The Contribution of Literature and Literary Scholarship to the Writing of History Since Voltaire.* By Emery Neff. New York: Columbia University Press. 1947. 258 pp. \$3.50.

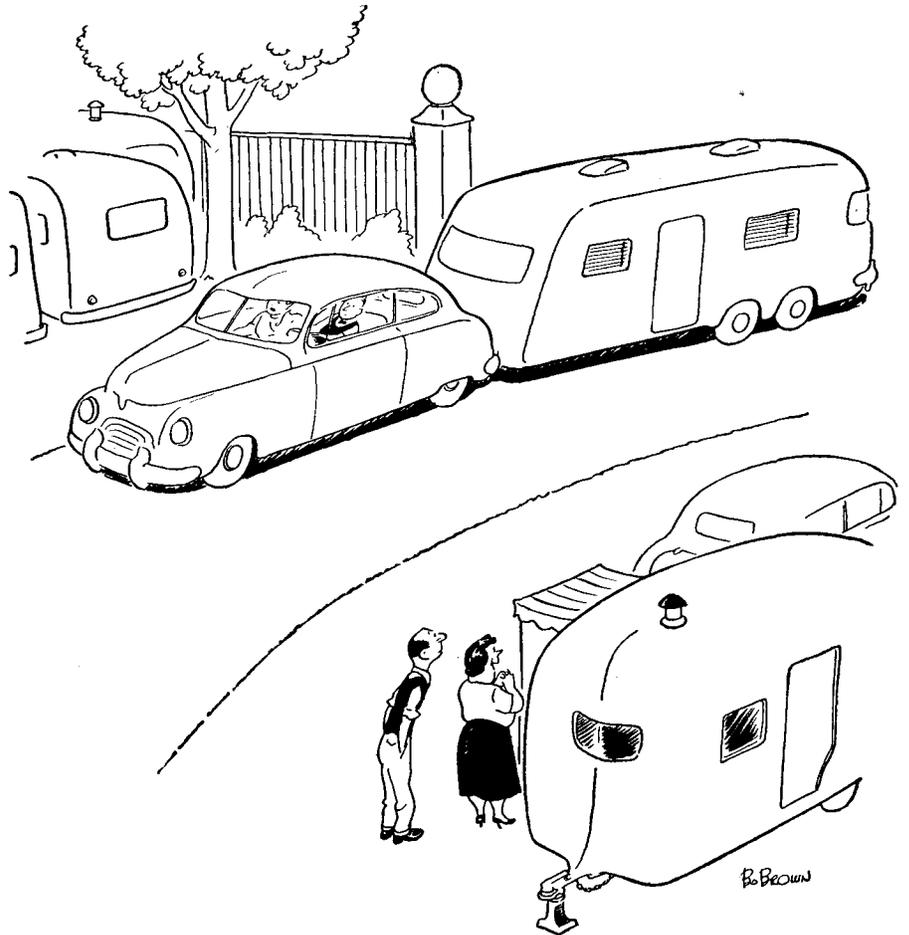
Reviewed by **ALLAN NEVINS**

**T**HIS volume (itself the fourth of a series, though it can well stand alone) falls into two unequal parts. The first and much the longer is a study of the development of historical writing in Europe from the bald partisan inadequacies and inaccuracies of Bossuet and Hume to the finished, varied, and penetrating work of the best late nineteenth-century masters. The second is a brief analysis of the attempts at a "new synthesis"; of the writings, that is, of Spengler, Toynbee, and their like. This second part invites no deep scrutiny. All efforts at a synthesis have thus far failed. The scientific groupings of Henry Adams, the dark philosophical prophecies of Spengler, the more cheerful and idealistic visions of Toynbee, all fall short of either goal—though Toynbee, at least, has much to teach us in his long journey through the past. Mr. Neff rightly dismisses these efforts to reach

some cosmic generalization; he concludes simply that "the future is ours to devise and revise endlessly." It is the first part of his volume which deserves careful attention.

No better survey of the process of enlarging the bounds of history, of giving it ever greater richness, depth, and variety by the use of seminal ideas, and of enhancing its literary quality by a wise use of the imagination, has thus far been written. Mr. Neff is necessarily eclectic. He chooses only fifteen or sixteen authors all told to illustrate the steady evolution of historical scholarship and craftsmanship. Voltaire unquestionably offers the proper starting-point, and Herder may well be placed next after him. Gibbon threw a great bridge across the chasm which had parted the ancient and modern worlds, while he helped shatter the ecclesiastical fetters which had bound inquiry. Vico looked for the plain human beings, the masses, the populace, behind the records of kings and generals. Then came the American and French Revolutions; and after that the masses could not possibly be excluded.

In dealing with historical writing in the nineteenth century, Mr. Neff's



"Here comes the kind of place I've always wanted!"

method is not quite so felicitous as in treating the earlier periods. His eclecticism betrays its disadvantages. At times we find him writing of men—say Carlyle, or Chateaubriand—when he might better be writing of broad schools and sweeping tendencies. At times we question his selection of representative figures. Ought Carlyle really to be called a “romantic” historian? That is not the term most readers would apply to that stern moralist. Michelet is a good example of the “resurrection of the past”; indeed, he said that history ought to be resurrection. But Parkman would in some respects be a better. In the chapter on “History as Art” we find the odd collocation of Renan, Burckhardt, and J. R. Green. That Burckhardt belongs in this chapter none can question; but art is not the main chord of Renan’s historical works (some of them are indeed rather inartistic); and while Green is a master of narrative and of portraiture, he is less an artist than Macaulay. The account of the nineteenth century, treated through these somewhat arbitrarily chosen figures, leaves wide gaps. Some tendencies, especially toward the close of the era, are left untouched.

Taken as a whole, however, this study of the unfolding and flowering of history, a noble plant whose roots have been fed by many streams, whose leaves and petals have caught many winds and imprisoned many sunbeams, is admirable. It is itself both a work of scholarship and a work of art. Into two hundred pages (excluding the last section) Mr. Neff has distilled a wealth of reading and reflection. It is refreshing, too, to find how emphatically he throws the weight of his conclusions in favor of history as living literary art as against the demand that history content itself with a mere statement of “scientific” results.

#### LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Gilbert: “The Mikado.” 2. Johnson: “On Shakespeare.” 3. Herrick: “Hesperides.” 4. Young: “Night Thoughts.” 5. Berkeley: “On America.” 6. Gray: “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.” 7. W. R. Spencer: “To Lady Hamilton.” 8. Byron: “Childe Harold” 9. Keats: “Ode to a Grecian Urn.” 10. Bailey: “Festus.” 11. Holmes: “The Boys.” 12. Tennyson: “The Princess.” 13. Lowell: “The Present Crisis.” 14. Carroll: “The Walrus and the Carpenter.” 15. Swinburne: “The Garden of Proserpine.” 16. Shakespeare: “Hamlet.” 17. Marvell: “To His Coy Mistress.” 18. Scott: “The Lady of the Lake.” 19. Milton: “On His Having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three.” 20. The Bible: Ecclesiastes.

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**Education.** Since their inception, American university presses have faithfully informed educators and the general public alike about the intellectual winds blowing across the campuses. The position religion at present occupies in the curriculum and the lives of undergraduates is assessed in "College Reading and Religion," reviewed below. Papers read at the inauguration of Illinois's President George D. Stoddard have been gathered into a stimulating volume, "Ferment in Education." In it are disclosed the fears many educators entertain about the means recently proposed for "democratizing" higher education. Background for another question it discusses—a curriculum appropriate for the contemporary world—is provided by a book also reviewed in this issue: a biography of A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard, whose impact on the college education of the generation now in control of the nation's life was unsurpassed.

*Significant Area of Experience*

COLLEGE READING AND RELIGION: A Survey of College Reading Materials. Sponsored by the Edward W. Hazen Foundation and the Committee on Religion and Education of the American Council on Education. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1948. 345 pp. \$5.

Reviewed by ORDWAY TEAD

A VARIETY of influences have converged to place the problem of the role of religion in higher education well up at the top of the issues now being searchingly probed on many a campus. A swing away from excessive secularity, positivistic assumptions, scientism, and ethical nihilism in college instruction is clearly gaining momentum. This study of the required reading material in American colleges by fourteen scholars of acknowledged eminence will unquestionably offer evidence and lend aid and comfort to those pressing for alterations of emphasis and content in the conduct of higher education.

This is no indirect attempt to break down the barriers which separate church and state or which keep sectarian indoctrination dissociated from liberal education. The inquiry does not center on the need for direct efforts to make students more "religious." Rather it works from the premise that religion, religions, and individual religious interests, are a continuing fact in human experience and that any proper study of man has therefore to examine this whole significant area dispassionately but thoroughly. It further assumes that because religious influence is so pervasive in many organized fields of knowledge and human effort, it is impossible to understand these if religious factors are ignored.

Hence, the problem posed here is

the extent of reading material used in the major area which directly or indirectly takes account of these religious factors. The conclusion is overwhelming that "religion is a neglected field of reading and study on the part of college students." There is found to be "lightness of touch and even ignorance" as to when and where intellectual issues have a "religious bearing or import." Some textbooks reveal a "hostility to religion," implied or suggested through the aggressive development of a positivistic attitude.

Such findings will not surprise those who are close to the academic battlegrounds. This volume in a sense corroborates and confirms suspicions or knowledge already in the minds of many. It prompts to searching of soul for the needed correctives. The authors themselves suggest "the usefulness of this volume not only as individual reading for faculty members but as basic text material for faculty curriculum committees and boards where planning or the total development of the college program may be in process." To which I would add, "Amen."

Two points at least emerge from an examination of this evidence. One is the need for reorienting required readings to bring awareness in all rational candor of the facts and the penumbræ of the religious preoccupations of mankind, and this not merely in existential terms but in terms of value judgments, as William James pointed out in "The Varieties of Religious Experience."

The second point for all to realize is that to expose college students honestly to all the strands of human influence, including the religious, will not of itself necessarily win practitioners to a reverent, humble, loving, devout, and ethically responsible way of life.