

# Contemporary History and Biography

**MAN'S JUDGMENT OF DEATH.** By Lewis E. Lawes, Warden of Sing Sing Prison and former President of the American Prison Association. 146 pp. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

This contribution by Warden Lawes to the literature on capital punishment contains conclusions that are both new and valuable; basing his opinions on actual experience as a prison executive, he writes:

\* \* \* Our theory of capital punishment is both illogical and inconsistent. In this theory it is the severity upon which emphasis is laid. We stress the fact that no other punishment is severe enough to deter. But many punishments have been devised in the past that were more severe. To be strictly logical, therefore, those who advocate a punishment because of its severity should abolish capital punishment because it is grossly inadequate.

Disclaiming sentimentality and applying the test of statistical results, Warden Lawes decides the death penalty to be wholly unsatisfactory:

The death penalty rests upon wrong basic principles. It conforms to none of our ideas of modern criminology. It is impossible of scientific application. As a punishment it lacks celerity and certainty of execution. It falls as a deterrent measure.

**ALFRED E. SMITH: AN AMERICAN CAREER.** By Henry Moskowitz. 312 pp. New York: Thomas Seitzer. \$3.50.

In this biography of the Governor of the State of New York, Mr. Moskowitz has made an interesting contribution to American history. The rise of Alfred E. Smith is but another tribute to America as "the land of opportunity." The book was born of the obvious political inspiration, but its significance is mainly social, the figure that emerges is attractive, but the underlying story of triumph over lowly origin, over educational handicaps and unpromising environment, brings us something far more vital than the personality of an individual. Mr. Moskowitz has carefully avoided superlatives, a discretion which adds much to the value of his book.

**LETTRES A UN AMI: SOUVENIRS DE MA VIE POLITIQUE.** By Alexandre Ribot. 354 pp. Paris: Brossard.

M. Ribot writes frankly of epochal events; his rich career, which spans forty years and includes four terms as Premier of France, gives the touch of authority to the observations in these pages. Though his letters are a valuable addition to contemporary political literature, they are yet more interesting as war documents. Perhaps M. Ribot's greatest service was his tenure as Premier in 1917; of this grim period he writes candidly, ex-

ploding many historical fallacies and enlivening the record with pertinent observations. His intimate sketches of great personalities of the time are skillfully executed and illuminating.

**THE GENIUS OF AMERICAN BUSINESS.** By Julius H. Barnes. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. \$1.

Mr. Barnes sees deeper elements involved in national success than the physical fact of commercial supremacy; in this little volume of business philosophy the President of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States outlines his ideals as follows:

An industrial ideal that the gifts of nature should be converted to human use as rapidly as possible, not by drudgery of bent backs, but by the mastery of mind over the forces of nature and the service of invention, thus enlarging the product of every pair of worker's hands.

A social ideal that would close no gate because of accident of birth or station, but would maintain the open road for character, ability and energy to attain recognized leadership.

A political ideal that national progress and accomplishment are the aggregate of individual effort, and that the prime function of government is to maintain fair play and equal opportunity for each individual to work out his own field and accomplishment in a fair field.

Mr. Barnes believes, however, that the attainment even of these lofty purposes would not mean completion; he adds:

If the ultimate goal of America's material progress is invested with the idealism which robs it of any sordid and selfish aspect; if it is attainable, largely, because the political philosophy incorporated in our Constitution is itself the guarantor of accomplishment, then there devolves upon all citizens a new and solemn responsibility. There must be preserved in America the conditions under which this splendid material progress has been created.

**THE POLITICAL CAREER OF LORD BYRON.** By Dora Neill Raymond. 363 pp. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$3.

A new Lord Byron emerges from these pages; Miss Raymond deals only with the political activities, at home and in Greece, of the English poet. She tells of his war exploits, analyzes their significance in relation to Byron's political philosophy and reveals a side of the poet which has been but little considered by his biographers.

**WAGE SLAVERY.** By J. K. Heydon. 215 pp. London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, Ltd. 5s.

Mr. Heydon asks for a more humane consideration of the questions at issue between capital and labor; repudiating the theory that labor is a commodity, he insists that this view is responsible for much of the present discontent.