

Book Reviews

Indiana Authors and Their Books, 1816-1916: Biographical Sketches of Authors Who Published during the First Century of Indiana Statehood with Lists of Their Books. Compiled by R. E. Banta. (Crawfordsville, Wabash College, 1949, pp. xvii, 352.)

When a group of editors begin such a task as is represented in *Indiana Authors and Their Books*, they must, if they would persevere their sanity, decide early on the intent of the work. Is it to satisfy an immediate or a distant need? If the former, though the labor still remains stupendous, some difficulties are at once eliminated. The compilers absolve themselves of long, detailed research on individual authors, forego critical evaluation, and concentrate on identifying writers with a place, on sifting biographical materials for facts, and on selecting and putting these facts in order. The editors of *Indiana Authors* make but slight claim to originality and none to completeness. They frankly say that what they do is a start, that what they provide is but the encloser of things to be. They might claim that here in embryo are critical studies of the future. As they are aware, they have missed some names and titles which will gradually be added. I think, for instance, of Charles O. Thompson, who left in pamphlet form his inaugural address *The Modern Polytechnic School* at his induction as president of the Rose Polytechnic Institute on March 9, 1883. There are others: John P. Pettit, *Restoration of the Missouri Compromise*, a speech delivered in the national House of Representatives and published in Washington in 1856; Annie Thompson, *Simplicity Unveiled*, a book of poems, Indianapolis, 1880; Addison Coffin, a Quaker of Hendricks County, who did a work, I believe, on his visit to the Holy Land, and Ambrose Bierce, educated in the Elkhart schools and remembered for his hair-raising tales, for his services as a soldier in the Civil War, and for his sudden, mysterious disappearance. To the bibliography of Robert Dale Owen may be added *Darby and Susan: a Tale of New England*, London, 1839, and *Promisso's Experience*, 1839; to that of Daniel W. Vorhees, *The Farragut Statute*, Washington, 1881.

The values of *Indiana Authors* can hardly be estimated. The most obvious is the factual knowledge given of more than nine hundred writers who have been associated with Indiana

life and thought. This value is not to be minimized. Ask any grade or high-school teacher, any member of a literary club, any librarian. Names of authors are set out for him here in alphabetical order without regard to essential worth. Edward Danville Wright and the Bard of Alamo have their niches just as do the internationally known poet, editor, and literary historian William Vaughn Moody and the critic of Elizabethan poetry Felix Schelling. Perhaps a fault of the work is that in a few instances performers occupy space out of proportion to their achievement. With the name is information about the relationship of the author to the state—whether he is native or adopted, some account of his life, and a list of his publications.

Another value of the book lies in the sheer interest stimulated by bits of surprising information appearing in the biographies—some of it serious, some light. How many of us Hoosiers have known, for instance, that Dr. John Shaw Billings was one of our products? that the creator of Elsie Dinsmore was educated in the state? that we have sent out a dozen historians to achieve national and international reputations with their research? that we supplied some capable militant leaders to the Woman's Rights Movement? that *Hoosier Mosaics*, by Maurice Thompson, is a set of fascinating stories with settings in Kokomo, Colfax, Jamestown, and other cities and villages which we are not accustomed to think of as hubs of fictional plots? that Robert Louis Stevenson had a step-daughter who is listed as an Indiana writer? Other gems may be uncovered. John McGovern, Hoosier, appeared as a literary expert in the plagiarism case of S. E. Gross against Edmund Rostand concerning *Cyrano de Bergerac* and helped the plaintiff to win. From our borders went Charles Denby to supply a name for a one-time five-cent cigar. And one thumbing through the book pauses at the possibilities afforded by the inaugural addresses of presidents of Indiana colleges; for the fact that Joseph Tuttle, as he was taking over at Wabash in 1862, attacked Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, suggests that in these speeches live coals linger which, by some researcher, may be blown to flame.

There is bibliographical value, too, in the work. Items of all sorts attract the curious and alert eye. One is aware of the inception here of bibliographies on Hoosier journalism, schools and education, government, the state's response to

the Civil War, art, wild life, secret orders, county history, state history, state parks, rivers and other geological phenomena, and religious life. The importance of the last to Indianians of the century is attested by the number of clerical writers. Of the first 142 entries almost twenty per cent are concerned with church or creed or interpretation of the Scriptures. And the Mormons must have been aware of Hoosier literary lashings long after they had passed the state on their trek west.

Perhaps the chief value of *Indiana Authors* rests in its latent possibilities. The promise of the book begins already to be fulfilled, for James Whitcomb Riley and for George Ade excellent bibliographies have been prepared, and for the former a critical biography is announced in the series of studies which includes the names of Hawthorne and Thoreau. The book in front of us is a mine from which additional rich ore will come—perhaps, at length, a cultural history of the state. And the work so ably done by Mr. J. K. Lilly, Jr., Mr. R. E. Banta, and others will surely be a stimulus to other states to examine and publish accounts of their literary resources.

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The Vincennes Donation Lands. By Leonard Lux, O.S.B. Volume XV, Number 4, Indiana Historical Society *Publications*. (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society, 1949, pp. 421-497. Index, appendix, and pocket map. \$1.00.)

The landholdings of the French and of the early American frontiersmen in and about Vincennes were in a state of confusion for many years. Although the territorial and land-office officials brought order to the titles, an adequate study has not previously made the subject clear for students of history. This pamphlet does present an orderly account of the subject.

The French had been careless about their land titles and generous about making grants to Americans who came to live among them. Congress, however, in response to their petitions adopted an act in 1791 which promised four hundred acres of land to heads of families who were residents in 1783 and to such persons who had received grants from the various