

Books

An Eminent American

My Thirty Years in Baseball. By John J. McGraw. Boni and Liveright. \$2.

IT is a pleasure of most agreeable smack, after groaning through such flabby, stupid biographies as that of the late Thomas Nelson Page by his brother, Rosewell, and that of Cyrus H. K. Curtis by his son-in-law, Edward W. Bok, to find the life story of a man of salient and charming personality told simply, honestly, and winningly. Such a man is John J. McGraw, A.B., the distinguished manager of the New York Giants; such a book is his present autobiography. I have heard the usual whispers that he did not write it—that its actual author is a New York sporting reporter. The fact is unimportant if true. In every chapter of it, and almost on every page of it, there is matter that no outsider, however gifted, could have dredged out of the subject without his active and intelligent assistance. He, and he alone, is the man talking, even though he may not be the scribe writing it down, and so he deserves nine-tenths of the credit for the volume's peculiar virtues. He has made, it seems to me, an autobiography that is almost a model. Every reasonable inquiry about his career that an admirer might ask is answered succinctly, and his opinion upon every question within the range of his professional interests and talents is given frankly and clearly. But there he stops: no man could avoid the irrelevant more diligently. He has met in his time, I daresay, most of the great heroes of the newspapers, from Presidents up and down; if so, he forgets it. He has his private views, no doubt, upon the League of Nations, the coal problem, the Ku Klux Klan, baptism by total immersion, the training of children; if so, he withholds them. His book is devoted to baseball, and to baseball alone. It is the best book upon the subject ever printed.

This is simply because Mr. McGraw is the most reflective and ingenious man who has ever devoted himself to baseball as a profession—because his natural talents as a player of the game have been reinforced from the start by a quite unusual capacity for analyzing its problems and devising solutions for them. When he first entered big-league company baseball was still in a relatively primitive stage, despite the high development of individual prowess. Pitching had been brought up to great perfection, catching had emerged from the era of mere human backstops, and there was a growing improvement in fielding and base-running, but there was very little effort to coordinate the skill of one player with that of his fellows, and to make the whole team play as one man. The best pitching was frequently made vain by unintelligent fielding, and even the best fielding was simple, obvious, and devoid of plan. Mr. McGraw's native intelligence made him see the weakness of this scheme of play; combined with his increasing skill and experience, it enabled him to devise a better one. The clubhouse of the old Baltimore Orioles constituted his seminary and laboratory. There he called the first councils of war ever heard of in baseball, and there he gradually developed the first mass plays in the grand manner. The Orioles, in the main, were not great stars; McGraw himself, indeed, was a player of very decided limitations. But when he and his colleagues went on the field with coherent plans in their heads, instead of the old simple trust in God's gifts and the fortunes of war, their playing instantly became five times as effective as it had ever been before, and in a few short months they had mowed down all the visiting stars, revolutionized baseball, and won the national championship.

In his book Mr. McGraw describes some of this now ancient strategy in detail, showing how it was evolved out of the earlier chaos, how it achieved its devastating victories, and how, in the end, as its victims began to penetrate and imitate it, it had

to be changed or abandoned. Most of it seems simple enough, viewed from this distance, but as one who witnessed its first trials I can bear witness that it was by no means transparent then—that it not only puzzled and flabbergasted the poor morons who fell before it, but also stumped the *illuminati* in the Baltimore stands, many of them professors in the Johns Hopkins University and at least 250 years old by the Simon-Binét test. Mr. McGraw is by no means modest about his share in this revolution; in fact, he blows more than one exultant blast upon his bugle horn. The music gives no offense; he was actually the moving force he says he was; not one of his colleagues had half his acumen. To this day, I believe, he remains without a peer. Individual players of enormously greater skill have come and gone, but none of them has ever left such brilliant marks upon the game. The lively ball is his enemy today. It makes things easy for the heavy swatter of the truck-driver or Babe Ruth type, and so tends to convert the game into a mere clown show for the mob. But even this difficulty, I am confident, will fall before the McGrawian ingenuity. One gathers that his mind is busy with the problem, and that he is not without hope. On some bright afternoon, perhaps not far distant, the Crô-Magnon batsmen who now flourish will suddenly wither and die, as the impregnable pitchers of 1893 withered and died before the scientific bunting and base-stealing of the old Orioles. McGraw used to put in his winters keeping a saloon—no low doggery, of course, but an establishment befitting a philosopher and a bachelor of arts. His own steam beer, olives, pretzels, *Blutwurst* and *Kartoffelsalat* shortened his wind and gave him a paunch, and the conversation of his clients whitened his hair. He has thus made his last slide and bitten off his last umpire's ear. But his head is still working.

H. L. MENCKEN

European Celebrities

Eminent Europeans: Studies in Continental Reality. By Eugene S. Bagger. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$2.50.

MR. BAGGER'S book gives full-length portraits of ten European rulers and statesmen: of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie of Rumania and of John Bratiano, the most powerful of Rumanian statesmen; of Eleutherios Venizelos and the late King Constantine of Greece; of Thomas G. Masaryk, President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, and Edward Benes, Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs of that country; of Count Michael Karolyi, President of the short-lived Hungarian Republic, and Nicholas Horthy, the present regent of Hungary; and of Ignace Jan Paderewski, Premier of Poland in 1918-19. Imbedded in the larger canvases are subsidiary sketches, the most notable of which are those of Count Stephen Tisza, Hungarian Premier at the outbreak of the World War, a typical Hungarian magnate of the old school, and of Prince Ludwig Windischgraetz, who was Hungarian Food Minister at the close of the war and who acquired immortality as the "potato prince," because, when the revolution came, he left the country calmly carrying away with him twelve million kronen of state funds destined for the purchase of food for the starving people. *Noblesse oblige!*

It will be noted that Mr. Bagger's list of political eminences is drawn from the second-rate states of Central and South-eastern Europe. Most of his subjects are but little known in this country; but that is no reason why they should not be made known, or pilloried, according to their deserts. It might be objected that the ridiculous Ferdinand, the complacent Bratiano, the White Terrorist, Horthy, even those perfect saints of the Czech lower middle class, Masaryk and Benes, are not representative 100 per cent Europeans. But who can tell? To compare things unknown with things known, are we quite sure that Roosevelt and Wilson, those fine political artists, are more representative of America than the clumsy Taft and the normally mediocre Harding? Is it quite certain that Messrs. Burlison

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