

BOOK REVIEW

CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY.

MEN AND RUBBER, the Story of Business, by Harry S. Firestone, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther. Doubleday Page & Co. \$3.50 net.

YEARS ago, the paper-backed books of Horatio Alger were the rage with every lad in the country; they still enjoy a certain vogue today. Millions know of the stirring struggle carried by Ben Beazley from bus boy to broker—a rise attained by sheer grit and honesty; of how New Nixon conquered the wily moves of a rascally uncle, paid the mortgage on the old homestead, saved his dear sacrificing mother from virtual starvation and, by hard work (and more honesty) built up the powerful trading corporation of Nixon, Snuffle & Co.; and who can forget the noble battles with circum-

spending their substance and more in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority that, despite all its labor, has up to now nothing to sell but itself, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly altho they have long ceased to work. Such insipid child-



—By Vose.

stances that were fought by the dozens of other Algerian characters, all of them with invariable success?

Those who gained a mawkish inspiration from this sort of tripe were, it goes without saying, quickly awakened by years of real effort in any work they undertook. The popularity of Alger waned in the exact proportion to the materialization of concrete realities.

Now the king is practically dead. But Samuel Crowther lives! And this hack Boswell for Henry Ford, John H. Patterson and others presents us with a "biography" of Harvey S. Firestone, written at so much per word, by Boswell Crowther, who politely hides his authorship behind an "in collaboration with."

Who is Harvey Firestone? How did he become a millionaire rubber magnate? Why is his name so frequently connected with Liberia and the Philippines? From reading this book you can never find out the answer to these questions. You are given the flabby story of how Firestone started out as a horse trader for his father in Ohio, struggled up thru a job as bookkeeper, then country drummer of vanilla extract and wild rose lotion, bookkeeper again, rubber tire maker in a shanty, and finally into the position of leading tire manufacturer in the world. The actual process of growth and development of the business is very vaguely sketched. Pretty tales are told of stock manipulations, of increased capitalizations (the smooth run of the story does not prevent one from hearing the gentle gurgle of watered stock being poured into the capitalization and pushing up the dividends to very satisfactory heights), of law suits for patent infringements, of "efficiency" (in cutting down the working staff and having one man do the work of three).

But you can read the book over and over again without discovering from Crowther how Firestone's tiny original capital blossomed into the millions now at his command. It may perhaps be explained as Crowther would have it, by the story that

"In times long gone by there were two sorts of people; one the diligent, intelligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals,

ishness is every day preached to us in the defense of property."

The implications of this bit of irony of Karl Marx is neatly substantiated by a slip of the Crowtherian tongue. He tells us that in 1914 some one million tires were produced, using 1.14 horsepower(!) per man. Today production is around 7,000,000 tires, using 2.2 horsepower per man, "and this will increase." So! The intensity of exploitation, thru the systematic speed-up of the workers to a high pitch, has increased 100 per cent in a decade. Wages, however, have only increased, granting even the dubious rise acknowledged by the author, from an average of \$21.17 in 1914 to \$34.96 today. And the reports of conditions in Firestone's Akron rubber works makes the \$34.96 average wage sound as veracious as a Barnum hoax.

You would be led to think from this that the workers in Firestone's works are not only harried but dissatisfied. Not so, says our Boswell. The "human relation" is nothing short of idyllic. Such a prose poem as Crowther's description of the sweet and angelic collaboration of the employes and our Mr. Firestone has not been written for a long time. The workers get free shower baths, they have a playground, they see free movies, and every time they suggest an improvement in manufacture or offer an invention to Firestone which nets him thousands of dollars he is so deeply touched that the inventor receives honorable mention in the plant and is slipped a five-dollar bill.

With such a paradise at Akron is it to be wondered that Firestone says: "We do not believe in shop committees or in any form of self-government in the shops. But we do believe in being fair, and when a dispute arises we take the position that the workman is right and proceed on that basis." Which is so much gas and gaiters, as the British say. Just as the author conveniently forgets to list the great labor turnover in the plants, so he completely omits any reference to the great Akron rubber strike in 1913, a desperate struggle for decent conditions which was brutally suppressed by the combined ruthlessness of the Goodriches, Millers, Goodyears and Firestones of the



A PEEK EACH WEEK AT MOTION PICTURES

DIRECTOR OF "POTEMKIN" INVITED TO GERMANY.

AN AMERICAN MOVIE MADE BY WORKERS.

"THE PASSAIC TEXTILE STRIKE."

S. M. Eisenstein, the man who directed the production of the famous Soviet film "The Cruiser Potemkin," received a request from several of the best German theaters to assume directorship of dramatic productions. The theaters are willing to engage the best German artistic talent for his direction. This request was transmitted to Eisenstein thru the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with foreign countries.

In the meantime the Press reports Eisenstein engaged to direct a picture for Douglas Fairbanks for which he has secured permission and a six months leave of absence from the Soviet Films.

The Photoplay Magazine runs this interesting comment on the picture, "Potemkin":

"The photography is beautiful enough to enchant an artist and the action is vivid enough and swift enough to satisfy any box office demand for melodrama. The scene in which the Cossacks pursue the populace down a long flight of steps, shooting in the crowd, is unforgettable. When enough of our directors have seen this episode, you'll find it duplicated in home-made dramas."

As we workers are apt to put it in the vulgar: "Thanks for the buggy ride." Remember that a worker's motion picture outfit made the picture in the world's first workers' government. Wait a little while boys—there is even better stuff coming!

A DOZEN IN BRIEF.
"VARIETY"—Go! (Roosevelt)
"MOANA"—Beautiful.
"THE ROAD TO MANDALAY"—Don't waste your time.
"MARE NOSTRUM"—Abominable.
"MANTRAP"—Some good, some bad.
"SON OF THE SHEIK"—Valentine's last picture (Belmont)
"LA BOHEME"—Worth seeing.
"TIN GODS"—Rene Adores is in it (Northshore).
"THE AMATEUR GENTLEMAN"—Hokum well photographed.
"UP IN MABEL'S ROOM"—Good fun in chemise.
"THE BAT"—A lively spook picture.
"BATTLING BUTLER"—Comics in boxing gloves.
NOTE: Only Chicago theaters showing a program for one week are listed. Pictures of current week changed Monday.



Make it a weekly habit.
ONE DOLLAR A YEAR.

tire industry. When the test comes Firestone does not "take the position that the workman is right and proceed on that basis." The ideal tire industry employer, like his prototype in the tin lizzie industry, has built his reputation and his wealth on the body and mind-wracking torture of the highly ingenious and cold-blooded proposition of intensified speeding up of workers.

In almost every ointment is a fly; every preacher points a moral. The fly is the contrast of America using 75 per cent of the world's rubber and producing only a small fraction of 1 per cent under its own flag, while Great Britain controls more than 77 per cent of the world's rubber output. The moral is the exploitation of Liberian and Philippine fields, especially the latter. And the last chapter of the story is devoted to propaganda for the removal of what vestige of independence the Philippine Islands still enjoy.

"Surely," said Firestone to a committee of interstate and foreign commerce of the house of representatives, "it is practicable to recommend that our government take active steps to remove those laws in the Philippine Islands which are an effective barrier against large-scale development of rubber plantations there and to enact such laws as would encourage the investment of capital in the Philippine Islands." And the author adds that "If the Philippines are to be devel-

oped, capital must have assurance that it will be properly protected, which the present political situation does not assure."

The rubber industry is a powerful one in this country, and Firestone's camping visits with Harding and Coolidge are not in vain. In his interests bills are introduced into congress to throw the rubber plantations wide open for exploitation. To be sure, this will occur only at the expense of Philippine independence, and will be built up on virtual slave labor in the islands. Rubber will be sapped as much from Filipino laborers as from the trees planted there. But it were asking this captain of industry to turn into a St. Francis of Assizes to consider these concomitants to his expansion policy. For, after all, as he himself admits, he wants to do this only for the peepul, for all of them, from the humble worker who curses every time he rides his lizzie and gets a blowout to the kid who complains about the high price of rubber bands for his bean shooter.

It is a crying shame that the whole nation, high and humble, does not give vent to a popular demand for the election of this champion of the rights of the people to the presidency. At least the Ohio electorate should show their appreciation. Even Delaware has elected its powder king, Du Pont, to the senate. Firestone deserves a seat in that august body—at least.

—Max Shachtman.

