

Book Reviews

RAY ALLEN BILLINGTON (editor), *Allan Nevins on history*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975 8vo, pp. xxvii, 420, \$15.00.

Professor Nevins (1890–1971) held the DeWitt Clinton Chair of American history at Columbia University until 1958, and thereafter was an associate at the Huntington Library. His close friend, R. A. Billington, has collected together thirty of Nevins' essays, several previously unpublished. They are divided into five groups. The first, 'The purpose of history', illustrates his great concern with the presentation of history. It should never be dull and must be presented in a lively, yet graceful, manner, as Nevins himself demonstrated superbly. The other essential ingredients are, thoroughness, objectivity and complete honesty. In the second part, 'Broadening historical horizons', articles on forms of historical exposition are presented, and in the third, 'The historian and the social sciences', Nevins deals with social history, to which he contributed so importantly. Part four, 'Tools for the historian's kitbag' is concerned with historiographical methods, and space is naturally given to oral history, the origins of which largely stem from Nevins. Finally, there is 'Great historians of the nineteenth century', all of them historians of America.

Each selection is introduced by the editor, who also provides a lengthy introduction. Of Allen Nevins' enormous contribution to American history, in particular, and to history as a discipline in general, there can be no doubt. Mr. Billington must, therefore, be congratulated and thanked for providing us with such an excellent distillate of this remarkable achievement. Historians of all varieties should keep a copy of this book near them and dip into it repeatedly.

FRED KAPLAN, *Dickens and mesmerism. The hidden springs of fiction*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1975, 8vo, pp. xv, 250, illus., £6.30.

The author is a professor of English and he presents an important addition to Dickensian studies. Little so far has been written on this topic, despite the fact that Dickens uses mesmerism in his novels, that he is known to have been friendly from 1838 with Professor John Elliotson, the notorious mesmerist of University College Hospital, London, and that he even practised the art himself on Catherine de la Rue and on others.

After dealing with Dickens's experiences with mesmerism, based on published and unpublished material, the author seeks to demonstrate that it was central to his life and imagination. Although this will be contested strongly, his book provides new and controversial insights into the novelist's life, personality, and work. At times Professor Kaplan claims influences that are difficult to accept and he tends to read too much into certain parts of the writings. The discussions on the significance of sexuality and homosexuality, for example, are of limited value and will be widely resisted.

This book will, no doubt, stir up considerable controversy, which will stimulate further research into a comparatively neglected aspect of Dickens. This in itself will add to our overall knowledge of mesmerism in the nineteenth century, a topic which is in need of much deeper study. Despite the many defects of his book, we can perhaps, therefore, be grateful to Professor Kaplan for being a gad-fly, as well as presenting a scholarly study.