

A SHELF OF RECENT BOOKS

OUR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

By Dix Harwood

A CAMPAIGN year is always marked by a hurried assembly of biographies and political sketches written around the principal actors in the quadrennial circus. These works are often published frankly as campaign material; but there are usually a few which attempt to hold the mirror up to nature and to report only what the author sees, not what he wishes to see. In this latter classification comes "You Takes Your Choice" by Clinton W. Gilbert, Washington correspondent, and one of the authors of "The Mirrors of Washington", who tries very hard to be impartial, and usually succeeds. He discusses the three presidential candidates, and then concludes his book by giving brief sketches of the most conspicuous figures in the Coolidge, Davis, and La Follette camps.

Mr. Gilbert has the usual journalistic habit of trying to sum up the subjects of his articles in a sentence or a key anecdote, with a wealth of sprightly language, as if he were writing for the tired eyes of an editor who needed to be shocked into attention. Mr. Coolidge, for instance, is a singed cat, with a feeling of inferiority which he is intent upon overcoming. Richard W. Irwin of Northampton, Massachusetts, coined the phrase when the President was in the Massachusetts legislature. Senator La Follette is a fearless fighter but also a play actor who likes to dramatize himself. Mr. Davis is through and through a lawyer with "a legislative sense of the rights of the masses of mankind". General Dawes is "the darling of the herd", who thinks the ideas of the majority so enthusiastically as to make them seem his very own.

Not since the eighteenth century has the reading public been so deluged with biography, letters, and confessions as

in the last few years; and one can read what one will — trivial anecdote of the Margot Asquith sort or a really serious attempt to get beneath the surface as in "Painted Windows". Mr. Gilbert in his campaign sketches does not go very far beneath the surface — he did not have the time between the middle of July and the first of November; but his anecdotes are usually chosen judiciously with an eye to the effect and not just for the sake of repeating a trivial story. The frigidity of the Senate cloakroom to Senator La Follette brings out the loneliness of the man. Senator Wheeler's love of a fight is shown by his controversies with the copper interests in Montana. Mr. Davis's defense of Debs and Mother Jones against the fury of a mob in a West Virginia injunction proceeding illustrates the candidate's demand that every individual should receive a fair hearing before the law. And, naturally, Mr. Coolidge's taciturnity is again copiously commented on.

A book like "You Takes Your Choice", of course, has no permanent value, and its author probably had no intention of writing a political handbook for posterity. Yet it is easy to read, thoroughly interesting without the faintest hint of a log rolling desire on the part of the author, and in most cases witty without malice.

"You Takes Your Choice." By Clinton W. Gilbert. G. P. Putnam's Sons.