

Reviews and Notices

Life and Labor in the Old South. By ULRICH BONNELL PHILLIPS. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1929. Pp. xix + 373. Illustrated, \$4.50.

The author of this volume has a more extensive acquaintance with the sources of southern history than any other living historical student. He knows his field, yet he is modest because he is deeply impressed with the difficulty of drawing exact conclusions. A sentence from his preface reveals his clear understanding of the problem confronting the writer of history: "Every line which a qualified student writes is written with a consciousness that his impressions are imperfect and his conclusions open to challenge."

The book properly opens with a chapter on "The Land of Dixie." This brief discussion of the phisiographic and climatic factors in southern history is good in view of the fact that justice could not be done to these influences in less than an entire volume. Outstanding chapters are those on "The Cotton Belt," "Staple Economy," "Traffic," "The Peculiar Institution," "The Costs of Labor," and "Life in Thraldom." There are other chapters, more fascinating and easier to read, that deal with "The Plain People" and "The Gentry." There is much matter in the book pertaining to the colonial era, when the plantation system originated, and the westward movement is not slighted. The chapters headed, "Some Virginia Masters," "Southeastern Plantations," and "Planters of the Southwest," give to Doctor Phillips a splendid chance to make his readers acquainted with rare material extracted from sources both manuscript and printed. He has made the most of his opportunity, and without flourish or exaggeration, setting forth the seamy side as well as the more imposing features, he has drawn vivid and convincing pictures of the plantation régime from Virginia to Texas.

The author was born in Georgia in the year that Hayes became President. He received the doctor's degree from Columbia University and has given most of his service as a university teacher to Wisconsin and Michigan. Nevertheless, his years in the lower South, his search for documents and

his first hand study of geography, people, and economic conditions in both the upper and the lower South have enabled him to base portions of his story on personal observation. Quite frequently, he writes in the first person and relates his own experiences.

Without becoming dogmatic or tiresome, Doctor Phillips intersperses many interpretative comments regarding the problems of slavery and the plantation régime. Having discussed the slave-traffic, he says of the men engaged in this business: "The dealers were not full of the milk of human kindness or they would not have entered upon their calling. On the other hand they cannot have been fiends in human form, for such would have gone speedily bankrupt" (p. 158). In regard to the much discussed problem of whether planters bred slaves for sale, the general truth arrived at is thus expressed: "Slave children were a by-product whose value could hardly be controlled and whose cost had no relation to market price" (p. 174). After studying for many years the documents of various kinds left behind by planters and overseers, this summary is presented: "Neither planters, nor slaves, nor overseers . . . were cast in one mold—traditions, romances, diatribes and imaginative histories to the contrary notwithstanding. Plantation life and industry had in last analysis as many facets as there were periods, places, and persons involved. The régime nevertheless had unity palpable always; and the essence of this lay not so much in the nature of the crops as in the matter-of-course habituation of all personnel to responsible and responsive adjustments between masters and men of the two races" (p. 204). The few passages here quoted will serve as examples of many sane conclusions of similar nature to be found by a reader pursuing the pages of this unusually sound and helpful book.

That the author is not lacking in the power to paint pictures in clear, simple, attractive English, the reviewer will demonstrate by quoting more at length from the chapter on "Homesteads" (pp. 336-337):

Whether at the roadside or at the farther end of its "avenue," a visitor encountering a gate would do well to halloo the house and await the coming of some inmate, or the hounds were likely to demonstrate a hostile alertness. Inside the inclosure, with the dogs quieted and greetings exchanged, life resumed its normal sway with minimum diversion by reason of the guest's presence, for Southern visits were

of hours' if not of days' duration. The hens cackled, with cocks ejaculating indorsement, the guineas quacked, the martens chattered in their suspended gourds, and a mocker imitated every bird that came to mind and added improvisations of his own. A cowbell tinkled in the distance. Conversation rose and fell on the piazza as palmetto fans stirred the quiet air of midsummer noon.

The strokes of a tall clock in the hall were of little more concern than the silent shadow on the sundial outdoors. It was twelve o'clock until it was one, and one until it was two. Dinner was ready when the cook gave word for the bell to be rung. Through the hall and across the back porch to the dining room went the adults, and thither the children thronged after a hasty scrubbing, unless they were crowded out and scheduled for a "second table". Above the viands a negro girl waved a long brush languidly to keep the flies at a distance. All the meats and vegetables, and there were likely to be several of each, were on the table from the first, according to "country style." Ham was almost as constant as the cloth; sweet potatoes, except in the summer months before the new crop came in; rice, or perhaps either grits or lye hominy as alternatives, the year round. Hot biscuit and cornbread came from the kitchen often enough to keep supplies always capable of melting butter. The master of the house, though perhaps not loquacious before, would press upon each person a second helping of string beans or fried chicken, as if his aim in life were to produce a surfeit. The dessert might be a deep, rich, peach pie or a blackberry dumpling, with syllabub as a frothy companion.

After dinner came a stroll to the orchards, the melon patch, the fish pond and perhaps the brandy still beside a rill where crushed peaches were fermenting in open vats. In mid-afternoon old and young were summoned to attack an array of watermelons, cooled in the springhouse, half a surgary sphere to each participant. At dusk, whatever its hour, came a more moderate supper. Then the children were made to wash their feet for bed; and ere long older folk turned in, to be sung to sleep by the katydids and the mocking birds, while in the distance a hound on his haunches persistently bayed the moon.

WM. O. LYNCH

Indiana Battle Flags is the title of a volume recently published by the Indiana Battle Flag Commission of Indianapolis. The Commission consists of Frank E. Strayer, Willard S. Boyle, and David I. McCormick. Compiled by the last named member of the Commission, the Superintendent, the work was edited by Mrs. Mindwell Crampton Wilson. The subtitle of the book furnishes a correct idea of the nature of the contents. Besides speeches made when battle flags of the Mexican War and Civil War were presented to the State of Indiana, there is "A Record of Indiana Organizations in the Mexican, Civil and Spanish-American Wars." This includes