

## Reviews and Notices

*The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850-1865*, By ARTHUR CHARLES COLE. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1934. Pp. xv+468, \$4.00.

This is Volume VII of *A History of American Life*, edited by Professor Arthur M. Schlesinger of Harvard, and President Dixon R. Fox of Union College. The volume is written on one of the most interesting periods of American history by an historical scholar and editor of high standing. It covers the decade and a half following 1850 and, as the "Foreword" says, "no period has been more deeply studied or more fully presented". The Civil War period is of perennial interest.

This is a social and economic history. It deals with the life and customs of the people—their health and happiness, their education and culture, their economic conditions, their work in field and farm, their institutions, their sports, and their life at home in war time. It presents, for example, a detailed study of the social system of the South with its distinctly marked classes—plantation masters, poor whites, slaves, over-seers, free negroes, the mixture of the races, the keeping out of immigration from the North, and the gradual severing of social and economic relations between the sections.

Likewise, the "Struggle for the West" is seen not to be so much political as economic. Here we read of the westward migration, the covered wagon and the "movers"; the quick growth of frontier cities, Omaha, Denver, Virginia City, Boise, Helena, and the rest; the conflict in Kansas; the wheat fields of the Dakotas, and the fish and timber of the Oregon country; the gulch prospectors in their search for gold and silver; the "roughing it" of Mark Twain; the Homestead act, the homesteaders and the never-ending search of new lands for the landless; the Indian wars caused by the pressure of the advancing tide of population — such are the topics in the author's treatment of the struggle for the west. It is so throughout the volume, all of it full of fresh material, of interest, understanding and enlightenment for the reader.

Though the volume covers the period of the civil war no military history is attempted; all battle history is omitted. General Grant's name is not mentioned, nor McClellan's, and Lee's only at the collapse of the Confederacy and because of

his views on slavery. Stonewall Jackson's camp meetings in the field are brought to notice but his famous raids and flanking movements find no place. Sheridan and Sherman are mentioned for economic reasons, because of what they did in the Shenandoah Valley and in the deep South to reduce fertile lands into an economic waste, into a liability instead of an asset for purposes of carrying on the war. Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Donelson, Shiloh, and Chickamauga, Chancellorsville, Antietam, and the Wilderness campaign—these battle lines of our history do not come within our author's view. He is dealing, rather, with life as it went on behind the lines.

Also, politics and parties, party leaders, party platforms and issues and election results, the doings and debates in Congress—these aspects of the period receive but little attention, almost none. The Dred Scott decision receives only an incidental reference and is deemed of so little importance as not to be included in the index. The Republican party is mentioned here and there in connection with certain economic topics, but there is no connected account of its origin, of the party divisions that brought it about, or of the political elements that composed it. Webster, Clay, and Calhoun were alive and in public life, when this era began, but they are passed over. Charles Sumner and Thad Stevens are mentioned only in connection with conscientious objectors in war. The party leaders Salmon P. Chase, Ben Wade, Trumbull and Collamer, Horatio Seymour and George W. Julian, Zach Chandler and Dick Oglesby, Owen Lovejoy and John M. Palmer, Vallandigham, the war Governors, Morton, Andrew, Brough, Curtin, and Fenton, none of these names are in the index and presumably not in the text. The author has written much on American politics and he would not contend that such men and the issues with which they struggled are not important factors in a "history of American life", but in this volume they do not come within his plan.

These omissions are mentioned by the reviewer not for purposes of criticism but as an indication of the character of the volume under review. The book was not written from the standpoint of Washington, Congress, and the Administration, nor to present outstanding leaders in public life, but from the point of view of "the people back home", to tell how they were living and what they were doing.

There are compensations for the omissions. We read of Bledsoe and his defense of slavery; of Lucy Stone and marriage reform; of Amelia Bloomer and dress reform; of Robert Dale Owen and easy divorce in Indiana; of Alexander Hermann and his slight of hand tricks; of Randolph Rogers and Erastus D. Palmer, the sculptors; of Asa Gray, the botanist, and of Henry Shaw and his Botanical Gardens; of ox teams and mule teams, the pony express, and railway extensions; of the rapid growth of cities, of real estate booms, swindling contractors, and the growth of fortunes (too bad the *Book of Daniel Drew* was not drawn upon more).

William H. Sylvis, a labor leader of the time, assumes as much importance as William H. Seward, whose name was a national possession in his day and who furnished the title for this volume. There is a view of social history that may reasonably make Sylvis the more important. For his limited space the author must choose his material; he cannot include it all. He evidently feels that the songs of the nation are as important as its laws and that public life is not the whole of history. He, therefore, puts lawmakers, office holders, and public men aside and tells us of such things as inventions, household life, methods of farming, war songs, Brady's war pictures, photograph albums, and the letters and diaries of the common soldier.

We learn of Amos R. Eno, a hotel proprietor with his rural tavern and eight-cent lodging, at Twenty-third street and Fifth Avenue, before the pressure of population brought on more modern hotels—a surprising revelation that such things could be so late as the fifties.

The volume tells us of the Lyceum and its lecturers, Henry Ward Beecher, John B. Gough, and Theodore Tilton; of the humorists like Petroleum V. Nasby and Artemus Ward; of writers like Herman Melville and his "Moby Dick"; of the dime novels and hair-raising tales; of the historians, Hildredth, Parkman, Bancroft, Palfrey and Motley; of Stephen C. Foster and his songs; of P. T. Barnum and Jenny Lind; of "Uncle Tom" and "Ten Nights in a Bar-room", and of many features of the stage in detail. We are reminded that in all these things the South was living apart to itself, clinging to an

economic system doomed to failure and extinction. So the historic significance of conditions and tendencies is pointed out.

In education, Horace Mann, of Antioch College, Jonathan Blanchard, of Knox College, and President J. M. Sturdevant, of Illinois College, receive their due mead of recognition and honor. Thus we see that history in past times as well as in the present is taking more note of its "forgotten men." A sidelight on the ferment of the fifties is shown by an incident in Illinois College, where a student was dismissed from college because he insisted upon his right to include in a college oration remarks deploring Northern anti-slavery agitation and rejoicing in the election of Buchanan. Such was the intolerance and such was the heated partisanship of the day, and such the anti-slavery radicalism of certain western educational leaders. In the Middle West many colleges were the hotbeds of anti-slavery feeling.

Other features of the author's work are worthy of comment, but enough has been said to show the content and the value of this volume. The foot-note citations show the scholarly character of the work and the wide use made of authorities many of them rare and unusual — journals, diaries, newspapers, magazines, rare biographies, official records, reminiscences, autobiographies, accounts of journeys, local and state histories. There is a "Critical Essay on Authorities" which is quite exhaustive. All divisions of American life are included — documentary sources, periodical literature, travel accounts, the Old South, the Expanding West, agriculture, industry, transportation, religion, humanitarian projects, science, journalism, the fine arts, army life, and other aspects of our history. The exception is that no account is taken of politics and parties nor are any references given thereto.

All these features make the book valuable to the student and fill it with interest to the lay reader. It sustains thoroughly the high standard of the series, and the editors and the author deserve our thanks and congratulations.

JAMES ALBERT WOODBURN.