

Reviews and Notices

Anthony Wayne: Trouble Shooter of the American Revolution.

By Harry Emerson Wildes. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1941. Pp. 514, xii. Frontis. \$3.75.)

Mr. Wildes has written, to use his own modest words, "the first [life of Wayne] to put the warrior-statesman in his proper social, economic, political, and military setting" (p. vii). In so doing, he has utilized an impressive amount of material, principally from manuscript sources, and has woven it into a narrative which affords usually interesting and sometimes absorbing reading. Although the biographer's ambitious claim concerning the completeness of the setting is scarcely borne out by the book, which is often weak on background material, yet certain aspects of the confused political and social scene of Revolutionary America as well as a number of military episodes are well and clearly described.

The greatest merit of the biography is its completely impartial attitude towards its subject. Unwarranted calumnies which have clustered about Wayne's reputation are refuted; but there is no attempt to gloss over his objectionable qualities. Gradually, as chapter succeeds chapter, Anthony Wayne emerges in clear delineation: brave, energetic, resourceful, persevering, essentially shallow, undemocratic, ambitious, vain, touchy, impatient, harsh, inconsiderate, frequently though not invariably intolerant, grasping—sometimes dishonest, not always truthful. Given the sharpness of this portrait, one can but wonder at the subtitle which Mr. Wildes has seen fit to choose: "Trouble shooter of the American Revolution." "Trouble maker" would be more apt. Of all the contentious, headstrong, morbidly proud officers of the Revolutionary Army, none but Sullivan could outdo Wayne in the picking of quarrels or the making of enemies. His military career is strewn with rivalries, with broken friendships, with recriminations. The author himself declares (p. 200): "In winter quarters Wayne was a heavy liability. Trouble always boiled about him."

But there are more serious things to quarrel with in Mr. Wildes' book than a meaningless subtitle. In view of the general soundness of the work, it is doubly deplorable that the author all too often interlards his factual material with fic-

tional incidents or descriptions. There is no way of checking on these lapses, for the book contains no footnotes and no documentation of specific statements, all references to sources being lumped together at the end by chapters. For the most part, one can recognize the inventions easily, as when the author describes in great detail a minor incident which no one would conceivably have recorded, even if it had happened (pp. 39, 104-5), or lays bare his hero's secret feelings as he watched his loved one (p. 25). Occasionally, however, this habit of imagination leads to direct falsification on matters concerning which a reader might easily be deceived. The most glaring instance of this is in the account of the Battle of Monmouth. After describing the background of the battle in a manner both incomplete and inaccurate, the author records, with no warning to the reader and with dramatic detail, a purely fictitious conversation between Lee and Wayne on the battle-field (pp. 163-4). As a matter of fact, there exists an official report from Wayne to Washington of June 30, 1778, explicitly declaring that at no time on the day of the battle did he and Lee confer personally: all their communication was by messenger.

Such a breach of historical scholarship shocks the reader. Just how much of the book can be trusted? To judge from a casual reading, the interesting and detailed story of Wayne's campaign in the Northwest Territory, for instance, is free of such falsification; but can we be sure? Mr. Wildes had better make up his mind whether he is going to write straight biography, which he can do reasonably well, or historical fiction, and stick to his choice.

One claim which the author makes is open to question. In the preface he declares: "In preparing this book, I have visited every place that Wayne touched." It is very doubtful that Mr. Wildes has done this in the case of Nova Scotia, the scene of the second chapter. Indeed, it is unlikely that he has even bothered to look at a map of it. If he had, he could scarcely have made the gross error of referring to the territory three times (pp. 17, 18, 27) as an "island." He would not have written about the "Petitcoodia River" instead of the Petitcodiac, or "St. John's River," instead of the St. John. He would not have declared that colonists along the Petitcodiac "would have access to the sea only by a long sail northward around Cape Breton" (p. 19), for he would have noted the

existence of the Bay of Fundy, or, for any settlers living on the northern shore of New Brunswick, of the Strait of Canso. Finally, he would not have shared, as he apparently does, "Wayne's amazement" (p. 19) that grants of land on the St. John and the Petitcodiac were not between Halifax and Cape Sable. This chapter, characteristic of the almost contemptuous lack of interest in things Canadian which is all too common in this country, will do nothing to help our Good Neighbor Policy so far as the people of the Maritime Provinces are concerned. The publishers are to be condemned for letting such a flagrantly sloppy piece of research, which any schoolboy could have corrected, mar a volume which has many points to recommend it.

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The Trail of Death: Letters of Benjamin Marie Petit. By Irving McKee. (Indiana Historical Society Publications, volume 14, number 1, Indianapolis, 1941. Pp. 141. \$.75.)

The removal of the Potawatomi Indians from their tribal land in Northern Indiana in 1838 is the main theme, which lends coherence to Mr. McKee's interesting collection of the letters of Father Benjamin Marie Petit, young French priest serving as a missionary to these Indians from October, 1837, through November, 1838. Petit realized the broad implications of the problem of Indian removal; he saw that the pressure of civilization was crushing the Indians—and his sympathy, naturally, was for the Indians, whom he deemed more gentle than the savage and uncouth white backwoodsmen. Petit's letters, twenty-one in number, vividly describe the forcible expulsion of the Yellow River Potawatomi from Indiana in the late summer months of 1838. The letters cover the period from April, 1837 (shortly before his departure for America) to January, 1839 (less than a month before his untimely death): eleven are to Bishop Bruté, his ecclesiastical superior, seven are to his family in France, and of those remaining, five are written to American officials concerned in the removal of this particular Potawatomi band. The Appendix contains the short daily Journal of Father Petit and the Baptismal Register kept by him.

The significance of these letters is ably summarized by Mr. McKee in this extract from his Preface: