

Book Reviews

Our Landed Heritage, The Public Domain, 1776-1936. By Roy M. Robbins. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, c. 1942. Pp. xii, 450. \$5.00.)

Professor Robbins of Butler University, Indianapolis, has made an important contribution in the field of American history that should be of interest to the readers of the *Indiana Magazine of History*. It is a history of the public lands of the United States in all of its aspects from the beginning to the present. It contains much to illustrate the influence of unoccupied lands in national development. Even members of the historical profession are likely to be surprised at the ramifications of the subject as they read this volume. Such Indiana figures as William Henry Harrison, George W. Julian, and Albert J. Beveridge, are referred to in the account of the land policies under which either Indiana or the Far West were settled.

At the beginning it retells the well-known story of the creation of the public domain by the cession of the land claims of the original states and of the formation of the original national land policy. The credit system, closely connected with the labors of William Henry Harrison, was the policy of the government from 1800 to 1820. It is declared to have played an important part in causing the panic of 1819 and to have been more favorable to the speculator than to the actual settler. The futile sectional struggle over the land policy, the importance of land speculation, and its influence in causing the panic of 1837 led the author to conclude that the speculator class again benefited more than the settler, that speculation wrought great harm to the country, and that the land system offered little aid to the suffering wage-earners of the East. The successful contest of the frontier to secure preemption is described as the culmination of the democratization of the public land system. The West then pressed for the homestead policy only to be defeated for many years.

The westward movement, caused in part by the immigration of thousands of Europeans, served to attract many thousands more and to expand the national boundaries westward to the Pacific, southward to the Rio Grande, and northward to the forty-ninth parallel. Into this vast region came the mining, lumbering, and transportation corporations,

which secured land in one way or another. The canal grants and the grant to the Illinois Central Railroad became precedents for later action. The slave interests continued to block the movement for free land to the settler. In 1857 speculation again played its part in subjecting the nation to the experience of another panic.

Republican victory in 1860 was followed by the passage of the Morrill Land Grant College Act which many westerners opposed as a raid on the public domain under the guise of an aid to education but in reality as an aid to speculators. The Homestead Act was also passed, threats made to confiscate the land of southerners, and the public domain thrown wide open to railroad grants. The Homestead principle is not regarded as the greatest democratic measure of all times but as the "capstone" of a vanished era.

During and after the Civil War a considerable amount of the public domain was quickly seized in a mad scramble involving the settler, cattle and sheep barons, railroad corporations, and timber and mining kings, in which the settlers fared badly because of graft, corruption, and very imperfect legislation and administration. Numerous conflicts arose between the railroads and the homesteaders as to priority of claim and again the settler generally came off second best. After long effort Congress was persuaded to declare forfeited all railroad land grants not earned by them, although appeals to the courts sometimes defeated the efforts of the government. The lack of good agricultural lands also influenced Congress in breaking up the Indian reservations. During these later years the land laws were revised, some of the most objectionable being repealed, and some of the most glaring abuses were ended.

The final phase of the history of the public domain concerned the conservation movement. Theodore Roosevelt's tremendous enthusiasm and energy guided by Gifford Pinchot seem not to have resulted in action that was without fault. William H. Taft pursued a somewhat more judicious path, but it remained for Woodrow Wilson to rectify many of the mistakes of the early phases. The attitude of the Far West in opposing Roosevelt and Pinchot is described not as opposition to conservation but to methods which often played into the hands of the corporations. The first World War interrupted the movement for conservation as well as the efforts

to reform its various procedures in the interest of the people and particularly of the West. In the late twenties and thirties this reform was accomplished.

This volume has both virtues and defects. It is a much needed summary and it is not a rehash of previous works on the subject. It treats the political and sectional phases of the entire subject as some of the earlier works have treated brief periods. It attempts to evaluate the results of the land policies for settlers, speculators, and corporations. Historical investigation has not proceeded far enough in this field for a definitive work. More information is needed in certain parts of the field. For instance, what were the effects of the panic of 1819 and the subsequent reduction of the price of land in 1820 upon speculator and settler? What were the results of the specie circular and the panic of 1837 upon land distribution between the speculator and the settler? Is further study not needed in regard to the method of obtaining agricultural land in the central and western parts of Nebraska and Kansas? Since the climatic handicap was serious, how did farmers secure ownership if railroads, speculators, and cattle barons were so favored? The author also seems to react too much against the older viewpoint which regarded the development of the land policy as the people's triumph. Correction was needed, but Professor Robbins seems too ready to accept estimates, and they are estimates, of the greater advantage of the speculator in contrast to the settler, too ready to accept estimates of corporate stealing, official misconduct, and of the people's mistreatment. At times the reader might reasonably pause and ask: "If all this is true, how did the settlers manage to get any land?" Of course, this results from the extensive narration of the sordid aspects of the subject, and is not the author's conclusion.

There are several little errors that scarcely deserve to be noticed, such as the classification of Florida and Alabama as western states in 1856 (p. 164), and the failure to explain "wagon road corporations" (p. 378). More serious is the lack of footnote references to certain other works in related fields and the fact that the bibliography is quite selective and is confined to secondary works.

It should be said in conclusion that the good features of this very useful volume exceed its defects.

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Drivin' Woman. By Elizabeth Pickett Chevalier. (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1942. Pp. 652. \$2.75.)

On a canvas stretching from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi River, and from New York to Virginia, during the half-century following the close of the Civil War, the author of *Drivin' Woman* has sketched the broad outlines of what might have been a great story; but she has not written a great book. The beginning, a series of scenes in the South of the early reconstruction period, combines the familiar ingredients of impoverished southern aristocracy, faithful Negro servants, newly-freed blacks, renegade whites, and "damn Yankees." Had Margaret Mitchell not previously blazed the trail through this period and blazed it well, Mrs. Chevalier's account of reconstruction as it affected the Moncure family might have bulked larger in literature treating the post-war South; but as it stands, the latter adds little to a superior original.

Comparison of *Drivin' Woman* with *Gone with the Wind* is inevitable. The main characters of both novels spring from the same southern soil; they are the products of the same set of circumstances. Yet Scarlett O'Hara is a woman of flesh and blood, while America Moncure, the "Drivin' Woman" about whom the present story revolves, is a thing of paper and ink—the stuff of which Victorian heroines are made. Fant Annable, the river boat gambler with whom America falls in love, is at best a shadowy figure, a pocket-sized Rhett Butler, with none of Rhett's peculiar brand of honesty and courage to redeem him.

Touching the high points of America's career after she leaves, in 1865, the smouldering ruins of the Moncure plantation, one follows her first to the rolling plains of Kentucky, where she teaches school and eventually, as the result of a rather incredible bargain, marries Fant Annable. The birth of their son finds Fant a fugitive from justice, having killed a man in a brawl; and America mistress of Foxden, a farm in Kentucky which a member of the Annable clan willed to Fant's first-born. Through the years, America raises tobacco on the Kentucky land, shields Fant, believed to be